

TRIBAL RELIGION OF TRIPURA

A Socio-Religious Analysis

DR. DWIJENDRA LAL BHOWMIK



TRIBAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
GOVERNMENT OF TRIPURA
AGARTALA

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FOREWORD

Religion, rites and rituals, ceremonial pujas, religious festivals in every human society are characterised by age old belief on supernatural forces which can't be controlled by the human beings. In all tribal communities those practices differ according to their traditional mythological beliefs and experience gathered from the natural environment.

In this book namely "Tribal Religion of Tripura" Dr. Dwijendra Lal Bhowmik attempted to explore the colourful religious culture of Tripura tribes and their socio-economic profile.

I hope the researchers, interested readers of different fields will be benefitted in different ways through this book.

Dated, Agartala
The 2nd April, 2003

J. D. TRIPURA
Director,
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Preface

The present thesis has been prepared on the basis of data collected from available literature on the subject and a good deal of field work among the tribal population of Tripura despite of difficult situation prevailing there.

Tripura is a newly rising state, and it has many an unexplored field in almost all spheres including tribal religion. Therefore, one has to work with scanty materials that are available so far. Despite this paucity of data at hand, this work has been completed as a sacred undertaking with the co-operation of various friends, scholars and the tribal society. I have sought and received timely and illuminating help and suggestions at all stages from my respected supervisors, Dr. Sunil Kr. Das, M. A., Ph. D., D. Lit., Tarkatirtha, Ex-Reader and Head of the Department of Philosophy, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta and Dr. Dhyanesh Narayan Chakraborty, M. A., Ph. D. Shastri, Vachaspati, Ex-Head of the Department of Sanskrit, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, for which I am greatly indebted to them.

I am grateful to my revered teacher late Satya Ranjan Bhattacharjee, Ex-Reader, Deptt. of History, M. B. B. College, Agartala, for the inspiration and encouragement I received from him. I am also grateful to a number of other Scholars, officials, institutions and Govt. Departments for various help received from them in course of this research work. Some of them may be mentioned : Maharaja Bir Bikram College, Agartala, Tripura ; Tribal Research Deptt. Agartala ; Deptt. of Census operations, Tripura ; Shri N. C. Deb Barma, Station Director,—AIR. Agartala. Shri Amarendra Deb Barma and so on.

It was intended to add some photographs connected with the matters dealt with here. But owing to peculiar situations prevailing in the hill areas of Tripura at present that idea had to be dropped. No pain has been spared to collect information on every point to the fullest extent.

I must also thank my wife Dr. (Mrs.) Krishna Nath (Bhowmik) M.A., Ph.D. Assistant Teacher, Maharani Tulsibati Girls' H. S. School, Agartala for her constant help and inspiration in course of this work and my only son Durjoy Bhowmik for his small scale services as far as in him lies.

A map of Tripura is added showing important sites and hill areas of the state as a visual aid.

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**TRADITIONAL RELIGION OF THE
TRIBES OF TRIPURA**

1. Introduction :

E.S. Waterhouse¹ says, "No definition of religion has ever been framed which touches its every aspect in life, and none has found even a considerable measure of general acceptance. The reason is that religion is so amazingly complex. It touches life on every side It intertwines at the lower stage with magic, at the higher with morality and yet is identical with neither. It embraces belief and conduct, reason and emotion. It is enshrined in creed and custom and yet lives independently of either in the heart. Its meaning to a man is not dependent upon what it is, so much as upon what he is".

According to a definition² "Religion is the recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny and as being entitled to obedience, reverence and worship".

In brief, religion is human belief in some supernatural power as well as the worship of this power. But a vagueness always attaches to religion. So it has been observed that "Religion in history has had such diverse and even contradictory meanings that any attempt to express its essential character seems foredoomed to failure".³

This is proved by the fact that religious beliefs in different times and places widely differ, and every people claims that they belong to a good religion. The power worshipped by different peoples is of diverse nature—small gods and god-

1. E. S. Waterhouse— The philosophical Approach to Religion, P—20.
The EP Worth Press, London, 1993.

2. Oxford Dictionary.

3. D. M. Edwards - The Philosophy of Religion, P-137

desses, fetishes, animals, trees, stones and an Almighty God of the great religions of the world. Every people claims that their religion is the true one, and all other religions are questionable. Hinduism has been the worst victim of criticism by the so-called monotheistic religions. The idea of religion has changed in course of time and no-body can say where it will all end. Some people have totally discarded the idea of religion as futile. But they are few in number. The great majority of the World's Population believe in some sort of religion—with a God under different names and affiliations. The Buddhists admit no God but worship the Buddha in his place.

In consonance with the various beliefs about religion, there are different types or forms of religion prevailing among various groups of mankind. In primitive religions, we find worship of spirits or ghosts, animals, trees and stones. These go by the names of fetishism, animism, spiritism, totemism etc. The belief of the ancient Indians, the ancient Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans and other peoples in many gods and goddesses is known as polytheism. The modern religions with belief in one highest or supreme Deity is called monotheism, and the general examples are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Hinduism is also really a monotheistic creed, but owing to different names of the Deity in different sects of the Hindus, the monotheism is questioned by outside critics. But we may still say that Hinduism remains the most complex and artistic religion of a monotheistic nature for it surpasses even monotheism by its conception of monism. Max Muller, the celebrated German Scholar, has characterized the Vedic Hinduism as a kind of Henotheism, as in it polytheism has gradually made room for monotheism.

Now-a-days with the spread of education every people is growing super-conscious and staunch supporter of its own religion, of whatever nature it may be. So one can not but revere all forms of religions as equal at the present day.

Tribal Religion is one of the many aboriginal form of Religion. Tribe⁴ means any aggregate of people united by ties of descent from a common ancestor, community of customs and traditions, adherence to the same leaders or "a local division of an aboriginal people". Tribes are exceedingly small and limited social groups of hill people and their original religion is tribal religion. Indian tribes are mostly Hindus and some are Buddhists. A small percentage has embraced christianity owing to western Missionary work. The Hindoo tribals besides being Hindoos also have a set of beliefs and practices of their own. This is their original tribal religion. They believe in small gods and goddesses unknown in Hinduism. They worship those gods and goddesses on special occasions with peculiar rites. Sacrifice of swine is a must in almost all their religious ceremonies. Indian tribal religion is more noticeable in remote interior areas. Tribals living in urban areas, especially the educated sections usually avoid many tribal practices and try to be one with the general Hindus as far as possible. Thus pure tribalism is disappearing. The educated families of tribals avoid all tribalism in urban areas.

It is generally supposed that in lower levels of human life including the tribal life, religion is confined to animism, animatism, spiritism, fetishism, polydaemonism etc. and nothing above it, for "the savage does not rise much above material wants and his religion remains on the same low plane".⁵

But hardly any people now-a-days will admit themselves as savage or low, thanks to the spread of education, and any form of religion - belief in diverse spirits or a great god is to be admitted as a good religion. As Sujata Miri of NEHU,

4. Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language.

Portland House, New York - 1989, P-1511.

5. D. M. Edwards - *ibid* PP - 95-96

Shillong writes,⁶ "No one theory is superior to another each culture has its own vision, its own creative force, its own God. However, to insist on one god for all cultures and all times is doing injustice to the God-creating force of a particular culture what is the use of creating a new God when the old God is there ? Now what about conversion ? if it is accepted that no religion is superior or inferior to another, then there is no need for being converted from one religion to another. However, if conversion is taken to mean fellowship, then there can be no objection to the conversion".

The last statement shows that the tribal religion has got some deficiency for which the tribal people want to be converted to an outside religion.

Animism, animatism, spiritism, ghost worship, totemism, etc. are the various forms of primitive religion or tribal religion. But it is to be noted that old theories no longer hold good cent percent among the tribal peoples for modern tribals have greatly changed from their older forms owing to education. Actually what we notice among the tribals is a mixture of old and new ideas so that it is not an easy task to determine the exact type of tribalism in a given tribe in the present day. Sujata Miri's book ' Religion and Society in North-East India' contains numerous thought - provoking dialogues about the religion in the hill people of North-East India.

Now-a-days almost all religious ideas and practices as found in the general Hindu Society all around are also present in the tribal people. Here we are mainly concerned with the tribes of Tripura, and these tribes have imbibed the religious concepts of surrounding peoples besides their own. Worship of deities, sacrifice of animals, prayer for health and wealth, progeny, bumper crop etc. rites for the deceased, marriage

6. S. Miri (ed) The Religion and Society of North East India P-33

rites etc. are there among the tribes of Tripura. They perform these rites with the help of a tribal priest called 'Ochāi'. Now-a-days sometimes a Bengalee Brahmin priest is engaged by the educated tribals. But in most cases they engage the 'Ochāi', the tribal priest. Sacrifice of swine and fowl is a notable feature of the tribal ritual⁷. A boar must be sacrificed in all important ceremonies. There is a proverb that when a marriage is settled, the domestic boar is in deep concern (at the thought of its imminent death at the marriage festival).

The tribal rites⁸ and customs⁹ are actually very old practices which may be called lok ā c ā ra (folk rituals) or desa c ā r (local practices). These are based on their strange beliefs and wild life.

The tribal religion of Tripura has a pronounced difference from that of other hill areas such as North-East hill areas inhabited by **Mishmi, khumti, miri, Abor** and other hill tribes, who live in inaccessible hill terrains cut off from the rest of the Indian Society. Living an isolated life they have retained their primitive tribalism almost intact, however the tribals of Tripura in close contact with non-tribal population (Bengalees). As a result the tribals here are a step ahead of

-
7. Ritual is "an established or prescribed procedure for a religious or other rite "or" a system of religious or other rites and observance of set forms in public worship."
Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language.
Portland House, New York - 1989.
 8. Rite is "a formal or ceremonial act or procedure prescribed or customary in religious or other solemn use : rites or baptism, sacrificial rites".—Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language. Portland House, New York - 1989, P - 1237
 9. Custom is "social, a group pattern of habitual activity usually transmitted from one generation to another".—
Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language.
Portland House, New York - 1989, P-1357.

other tribals in respect of assimilation with the main religious stream (Hinduism) of the country. They have changed many of their primitive habits of food, dress, demeanour etc. Yet they have retained some of these old rites and customs, beliefs and reverences. Also they have acquired a new set of beliefs and thoughts from their long contact with the Hindu Bengalees and the Bengalee religious preachers.

A small percentage of the tribals profess Buddhism and a still smaller number have switched over to Christianity in the present century. The large majority remains within the Hindu fold.

There is no ancient text on tribal religion of Tripura barring the historical work 'Rājmañalā' in which there are some incidental discussions on the ancient religion of the tribes of Tripura. In recent years some short publications are brought out on the life of the various tribes of the state, in which a little bit of discussion is noted on the tribal religion. Some Inscriptions of the old kings of Tripura also provide some scanty materials in this regard. On the basis of all these facts and personal visits and talk, the present writing is prepared on the tribal religions of Tripura.

The **Tripurī** tribe is mentioned in the **Mahābhārātā** by the term "Traipur", and this shows the great antiquity of this tribe here. Their religion therefore dates from that age, if not earlier. As to the religion of these people there are hints in the **Bhagavadgītā** which is a part of the **Mahābhārātā**. A passage of the **Gītā** says :

**Yajante Sāttvika devān
Yakṣa rakṣāmsi rajasāh /**

**Pretān bhūtajanāṁ sa Cānye
Yajante tāmasa Janāh¹⁰ //**

i.e. The people of the **Sāttvika** (virtuous) class worship gods ; those of the **Rājasika** (powerful) class worship various

10. Bhagvadgītā. 17/4.

demons called Yakṣa - and Rākṣasa ; and the remaining people (who are of the **Tāmasiki** (dark) disposition) worship the departed souls and ghosts on spirits of various sorts.

By this the author admits that there were various tribes worshipping demons, ghosts and spirits. They are called **Rājasa** and **Tāmasa** people. Obviously these terms refer to the undeveloped and fierce tribal people of the day. Their religion was worship of various spirits. This is called spiritism of fetishism in modern religious terminology. These people were not aware of the Supreme Being.

Another line of the same text also deserves attention in this context. It says :

**Sabdād in Visayān anye
Indriyāgnisu Juhvati.¹¹**

i.e., some people make offerings, of the sense-objects rūpa (beauty), **sābda** (sweet, words of lover) etc. into the five of their senses (i.e., they perform no other sacrifice or worship except gratification of senses).

It is not made clear who these people are. But obviously they are the most undeveloped class of people who have no high thinking and a religio-philosophical ideas. The tribal people may be included in the class.

In another passage of the **Gītā**, the population of the country is divided into two classes **daiva** (divine) and **asura** (descended from **Āsuras** or demons) -

**dvan bhūtasargam lokesmin
daiva āsura eva ca¹².**

i.e., in this world there are two types of creation (of human beings) - one of divine origin and another descended from demons.

Obviously the **aboriginal people** or the tribes are referred to by the **āsura** creation. Usually the word "āsura" refers to

11. *ibid.* 4/26.

12. *ibid.* 16/6.

the (non-Aryan) aboriginal people of ancient India outside the Vedic religion. The people of Āsura thoughts are found in the civilised society also. So, this term should not be used only for the aboriginal people.

The author of the Bhagavadgītā then gives a short account of their philosophy and ethics. They have no idea of God. They think this world is not founded any where but is self-existent. They are non-believers or **nāstikas**. They profess also hedonism. (Kamopabhogaparamah)¹³. Some of them think 'I am the lord of all' (Is'varo'ham)¹⁴.

These people are fierce by nature. They are always engaged in head-hunting.

**asau may ā hatah satruh
hani sye c āpar ānapi.**¹⁵

i.e., that foe is slain by me. I will strike down others too. This obviously refers of the fierce tribes people of the society.

From the above account of the Bhagavad-gītā we gather that there were fierce people who worshipped ghosts and spirits, but did not believe in God Almighty. This seems to be the religion and philosophy of the ancient tribals including those of Tripura.

A tribal religion has its limitations for obvious reasons. They are **indigent** people struggling for life every now and then. They have to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, and yet there is no certainty about it. The land at their disposal is less productive and inhospitable. Further, their life is at stake at every step, wild beasts prowling in thicket and head-hunting and plundering hostile gangs launching surprise attacks. In this situation the tribals can not have an opportunity for profound philosophy about the origin of things - the ultimate Reality, Brahman, creator or God as we may

13. *ibid.* 16/11.

14. *ibid.* 16/14. of Dillis'varova Jagadis'varo (I am the ruler of Delhi or the whole World).

15. *ibid.* 16/14.

call it. So they have to content themselves with whatever they can catch at easily - their diverse spirits and spirit-worship. They have to assume these spirits at every danger-spot as a saviour from these dangers - wild beasts, human enemies and diseases. To keep the spirits in control they have to appease or propitiate them by making offerings, especially animal sacrifice. This is their worship. Thus the tribals remain confined to spirit-worship and their philosophy can not delve deep enough to discover the Supreme God. This is actually a philosophy of the depreed class. The modern philosophy of the poor class, too, is marked by the absence of God and God-worship, though it has grown among the civilized class. In a song of this class, we see that God is called '**O dhanir Bhagavān**' (Oh, God of the rich). This indicates that it is not possible for the poor people (including the poor tribals) to have any thought on God or feel any necessity for God worship, for they are more interested in collecting their food and other necessaries of life than in propitiating and spending food etc. for unknown invisible beings.

Thus tribal religion could not go beyond spiritism at the initial stage. In course of time, it could not develop by adopting ideas and practices from other sources. The tribal religion of Tripura is an instance. It was all spiritism-in its earlier stages, and with the passage of time it has developed, to a material extent, by deriving much from the neighbouring Hindu sects. Though some of them have abandoned their original religion and adopted other religions-Buddhism and Christianity.

Despite this remarkable development, their original spiritism still lingers to some extent. But this is not a novel feature of this religion of these tribal people though it is often claimed that developed religions are free from such crude faiths (spiritism, totemism etc.) and those isms are left far behind.¹⁶ For belief in spirits (other than God) marks the so-

16. D. M. Edwards - The Philosophy of Religion, Page - 135

called fully monotheistic religions of the world-judaism, Christianity and Islam, though this is not generally taken note of. It is clear that spiritism preceeds and actually preceeded in Judaism etc.¹⁷ monotheism which is the culmination of philosophical thoughts in these religions. So there is no point in saying that this or that religion is purely monotheistic, and tribal religions are pure spiritism.

Inspite of this original spiritism-belief in and worship of various spirits of undefined character, the tribals may have the conception of a great God, as "Andrew Lang" says in his 'Making of Religion', "while the savage peoples the universe with spirits in accordance with his general animistic outlook, by another channel, through a kind of intuition, be placed an All - Father or Maker of all in the supreme place far above the World of Spirits, and not himself envisaged as Spirit at all certain low savages are as monotheistic as some christians, they have a Supreme Being¹⁸".

However, it is a matter of time and gradual evolution. From belief in diverse Spirits a Poly Spiritism or Poly-daemonism as some call it, belief in one great God ultimately evolves or has to evelve if not automatically, under the influence of other developed religions. In tripura, the idea of a great God has evolved among some tribals, mainly the Tripuris, who call the Great Being **Matāi Katar**¹⁹, But they also admit a consort to this God, who is called **Matāi Katar Mā** (The Great Mother God). This is obviously due to the influence of Hindu, mythology where divine couples **siva-sakti**, **Laxmi-Nār āyana**, **Rādh ā-Krishna** etc. are admitted.

But it is a curious finding that though **Matāi Katar** and his consort are admitted as Supreme God and Goddess, scarcely any-one is found to give any special importance or

17. = The Semitic Religion.

18. D. M. Edwards - Op cit, P - 101.

19. **Matāi** = God ; **Katar** = Great.

honour to them - so that they also remain like other Smaller Spirits. We may say - "Matai-Katar as a name of the Supreme Being has not made any impression on the people and it is destined to go.

The same fate befell many of the Vedic Gods - Indra, Varuna etc. who were at one time regarded as Supreme, but ultimately the names did not succeed in that capacity, and were relegated to the status of rank and file, as ordinary gods like other gods.

Other divine names came up in subsequent periods, **Brāhman** and **Ātman** being Chief among them. These two names lasted for a long time, and are still in use in Philosophical discussions.

But in common use as names of God these names are no longer uttered by any-other words have taken their place, such as **Bhagavān**, **Thākur** etc. So it is no wonder that the Tripurī Matai Katar has not succeeded as a name of one God. The important thing to note here is that they have atleast a name of God. Other names might come up, but in the present situation that may not happen, for the tribals of Tripura have a ready made stock of divine names in Hindu religious vocabulary with which they are acquainted because of their close association with various Hindu Sects, especially the Vaishnavā Sect. Many of them have turned Vaisnavas.

The idea of one God, however, is not noted in any tribe other than the Tripurīs, for none except the Tripuris have a name for the Supreme God in their own tribal Pantheon.

Another thing, the tribals of Tripura say that the Supernatural beings of their belief are mostly deities or Gods and Goddess, not spirits as some think.

There are also minor spirits in their supernatural world, but they have no name. The deities have names,²⁰ and these

20. Matai Katar, Gorīā, Ker, Mamitā etc.

deities are worshipped. But there is hardly any difference between the deities and the spirits, so that it is possible to look upon all as spirits only,

For their so-called deities are not clearly defined and are as vague as the spirits. "The spirits can not yet be called gods, for their personality is dim and undefined. They are shadowy and characterless though powerful beings, in marked contrast to the developed Gods of Polytheism."²¹

The Tribes of Tripura through the Ages and Their Religion : Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity.

Tripura is inhabited by a large number of tribes from time immemorial as per old and modern records. The Rājmaḷā (R. M.)²² which records the annals and antiquities of Tripura in Medieval Bengali verse mentions a number of tribes, such as Tripur or Tripura²³, cākṃā, Kāifeng, Khulang, Langai,²⁴ Gunaichā, Chakāceb, Chākāraughal, Khama-ceb²⁵ etc. of these the Tripur or Tripuri tribe is the largest single community and is supposed to be descended from the ancient royal family of Tripura.

21. D. M. Edwards = Op Cit P - 102.

22. The Work was started by Poets Bānes'vara and Sukes'vara and completed by some later chroniclers. The royal high Priest Durlabhendra cantāi also collaborated in the first volume. The second volume was by Gen. Rana Cātūrā Nārāyana, Third volume by Pt., Gangādhara Siddhānta Vāgisa and the fourth volume by Joydev Uzir. Two more volumes are reported out - they are now lost. Vol. I may be dated mid 15th Century and each succeeding volume about a century later than the earlier one.

23. R. M. - I, P - 25. This tribe is also called Tripurī, Tipra (Colloquially), Rājvaṃsa and Purātān Tripurī. Their common surname is Deb Barmā, a rarely Deb Barman, Persons of the royal family use the latter surname. They are also called Thākūr (e.g.) Jagannath Thākūr, Bhagavān Thākūr etc.) which title dates from the days of Mahārāj Gobinda Manikya.

24. Ibid, P - 32.

25. R. M. - II, P - 20.

Many of the tribes mentioned in the R. M. are, however, missing at Present, such as Gunaicha, Khrchung etc. Either newer names are adopted by them, or they have merged into other tribes or perhaps disappear from Tripura for some reason or other including the law of survival of the fittest.

The word 'tribe' was expressed by the term 'dafā' in earlier days and we hear of tribes like likā - dafā, Luci - dafa, Khucudafā, Dariya dafā etc.

"aranyer Purva Bhāge
likā nāme chada :
Yate ache chade - Kūle
Likā - dafā Pā dā²⁶

To the eastern side of the forest, there was a stream named likā. The likā tribe (dafā) lived in villages on the bank of this stream.

The likā tribe is unknown now. Luci-dafā and khucu-dafā may be identified as modern Lusāi and Khāsiā.

"Khucu - dafa ar /
ihāra nā thake Sada²⁷
adhikāre Tripurār //

Khucudafā is a Kuki tribe and Luci-dafā another. These tribes do not always remain under the control of Tripura.

From this it is clear that these were border tribes of MIZO hills and adjoining areas²⁸. So they might be members of the Lusai and Khasiā tribes.

GOVERNMENT REPORTS

As to the number of tribes of Present Tripura, the Government of India Notification of 1956 declares that there are 19 (Nineteen) Scheduled Tribes here²⁹. They are (in order of numerical strength) :

26. R. M. - I P-50,

27. Krsna - Mātā (quoted in R.M. II)

28. Jampai Hills, Cachar Hills etc.

Tripurā (or Tripurī or Tiprā) Reāng Jamātiā, Cākṃā (normally written Chākṃā) Hālām, Noātiā, Mog, Kuki, Garo, Mundā, Lusāi, Orāon, Sāntāl, Uchai, Khasiā, Bhil, Lepcā, Bhutiā and Chāīmal.

In addition to this, some think that there is a tribe called Desi Tripurā. Further, some reckon several of these tribes, (Jamātiā, Reāng, Noātiā etc.) as branches of the Tripurī tribe, because they speak dialects of the Tripurī or Kokborok language.

By far, the biggest tribe is the Tripurā, (or Tripurī or Tiprā) who use the surname Deb Barmā or rarely Deb Barman as has already been noted.

The comparative numerical strength of the 19 tribes is shown in the following table (as per census reports)³⁰.

Sl. No.	Name of Tribe	Census of 1971	Census of 1981
1.	Tripurī	250388	32 0000
2.	Reāng	64722	82 000
3.	Jamātiā	34192	44 000
4.	Chākṃā	28665	34 000
5.	Hālām	19076	28 000
6.	Mog	13273	18 000
7.	Noātiā	10297	7 000 ³¹
8.	Kuki	7775	6 000
9.	Gāro	5559	7 000
10.	Mundā	5347	8 000

29. Vide Tripura District Gazetteers, P-143 (Edited by K. D. Menon, Agartala, 1975) also Govt. of Tripura - Statistical Deptt. Instructions for filling up the Returns on Annual Census of Employees, P-8.

30. Vide. J. Gon Chaudhuri - Tripura, The land and its People, P - 10.

31. Tathya Panji O Nirdes'ika, Published by The Tripura Darpan. The Noatias are noted to be a numerically declining tribe (Vide Foreward by S. L. Chatterjee to Dr. S. B. Saha's Socio-Economic Survey of the Noātiā Tribe)

Sl. No.	Name of Tribe	Census of 1971	Census of 1981
11.	Lusāi (Lushāi)	3672	3700
12.	Orāon (Orāng)	3428	5000
13.	Sāntal	2222	2500
14.	Lepchā	177	
15.	Khāsiā	491	
16.	Uchai	1061	
17.	Bhil	169	
18.	Bhutiā	03	
19.	Chaimal	No recording	

THEIR RELIGION

Now, the tribal religion of Tripura really means the religion/religions professed by all the above noted nineteen or twenty tribes inhabiting the State of Tripura. The subject is practically new and is not dealt with any earlier book of reference. Before going into details it may be pointed out that most of these tribes profess Hinduism despite their own peculiar customs and beliefs which we call tribalism. The Mogs and the Chākmās are Buddhists while Lusāi, Kuki and some Gāros people are Christians. The total number of Chākmās and Moghs gives us the total number of Buddhists.

	1971 Census	1981 Census
Chākma (Cākmā)	28622	34000
Mogh	13273	18000
Total Buddhist	41895	52000

(The new arrivals of Chākmās from Chittagon) in recent years are not included here. Again the total number of Lusāis, Kukis and Gāros marks the total number of the Christians.)

	1971 Census	1981 Census
Kuki —	7775	6000
Lushāi —	3672	3700
Gāro —	4000 ³²	7000
	15447	16700

The rest of the tribals generally belong to the Hindu fold. Their number is far greater than either of the above two. The following table will make it clear.

	1971 Census	1981 Census
1. Tripurī	250388	320000
2. Riāng	64722	82000
3. Jamātiā	34192	44000
4. Hālām	19076	28000
5. Noātiā	10297	7000
6. Mundā	5347	8000
7. Orāon	3428	5000
8. Sāntāl	2222	2500
9. Uchai	1061	1300
10. Khāsiā	491	460
11. Bhil	169	800
12. Lepchā	177	105
13. Bhutiā	3	22
14. Chaimal ³³		18
Total Hindu Tribals	400000 approx.	500000 approx.

Since the population figures have gone up in the recent census, we may take it that about 6 lakh Hindu tribals may

32. Out of a total of 5559 of 1971 Census.

33. In the census of 1961 their number was 50. But in 1971 census no recording made. It is not clear whether they have left Tripura totally.

be there. The Buddhist and the Christian totals also may be similarly higher, say about 7000 Buddhists and 25000 Christians ; Hindus 6 lakhs ; Buddhists $\frac{3}{4}$ Lakh ; Christians $\frac{1}{4}$ Lakh.

THE TRADITIONAL RELIGION / RELIGIONS

In the foregoing pages it has been pointed out that the tribals of Tripura profess Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity in addition to their tribalism and that by far the biggest number belongs to Hinduism. This religion³⁴ seems to be the oldest traditional religion of the tribals of Tripura. Other religions have come later on. Christianity is practically a 20th century development, though some early traces are there.

(a) Buddhism—Buddhism is practised by about 10% of the tribals. It is of course pretty old and dates from the 5th or the 6th Century A. D. According to some Buddhism spread to Tripura as early as the days of Ashoka³⁵.

The Gunāighar Copper plate inscription seems to indicate that Buddhism flourished here around 507-508³⁶ A.D.

Buddhism might have spread in Tripura in the 6th Century or earlier. A Buddhist Āś'hram was built on the Lalmai Hill in Tripperah. A member of the royal family of Agartala (Tripura) was converted to Buddhism by the Monks of this Monastery, he built a new Vihara and a temple with a large image of Parinirvana Buddha.³⁷ Still it is more probable that even in the early centuries only a small percentage of the tribals adopted Buddhism. The greater number of Buddhist

34. Hinduism.

35. Vide Priyabrata Bhattacharya's Paper in J. Gon Chaudhry - OP. Cit. P - 64.

36. Loc - cit.

37. Dr. Kartik Lahiri quoted it from Hein Bechert's contemporary Buddhism in Bengal and Tripura, (Vol - II) Education Miscellany (No. 3 and 4 Page - 13).

converts obviously belonged to the Bengalees of Tripura plains. For we know that the Gunaighar Buddhist monastery was situated some where near the present Comilla town in erst while Tipura District of Bangladesh.³⁸

This shows that the Buddhist Centre was in the Bengalee Circle of Tripura, not in the tribal-inhabited hill Tripura.

However, Buddhism was an old religion among some of the tribal people of Tripura while the major population kept to Hinduism. Relics of old Buddhism still survive in Tripura.

THE MOST IMPORTANT ARE THE PILAK³⁹

Find images of Buddha and other Gods, Buddhist seals with Portrait of Stups inscription of Buddhistic teachings and so on. A colossal stone or (bronze) image of Avaloki-teś'vara⁴⁰ was found here, and it is now removed to Agartala Museum. It is dated around 8th or 9th Century.⁴¹

An image of the dreadful God, Hevajra⁴² was found at Dharmanagar, North Tripura. Images of God Vajra hu n kara, M ā rici and goddess Cunda were also found in different places. These Buddhist Gods and goddess indicate M ā hay ā na and Vajray ā na Buddhism sometimes prevalent in Tripura.

The St ū pa type temples of Tripura also indicate the influence of Buddhism. Thus Buddhism may be regarded as a traditional religion of the tribals of Tripura, in as much as it dates from very early times as noted above. This religion still prevails among the tribals.

38. Vide Priya Brata Bhattacharya's Paper in J. Gon Chaudhury P-65.

39. Pilak is near Jolaibari in Belonia Sub-Division of South Tripura.

40. Literally visible God i.e. image of Buddha.

41. J. Gon Chaudhury - op. cit P. 66.

42. For Hevajra and other deities, vide ibid P. 67 ; also J.A.S. Vol. XVIII, No. 1 - 4 Plate 25, T.D.G. Plate - II, Bhattacharjee - Indian Buddhist - Iconography P - 157-158.

The present Buddhist monastery is at Benuvan Bihar, Agartala. It was constructed in the year 1946. This Monastery is popularly known as the Buddha Mandir. It was founded by the late Mahārāja Bir Bikram Kishore Deb Barman Bāhādur. There are some other small Āśhrams at Aboynagar, Kanchanpur and other places. The local Buddha worshippers assemble and utter their prayers there.

As has been noted, above, the Mogha and Chākṃās are the main adherents to Buddhism. A small percentage of other tribes also profess this faith. The Moghs and Chākṃās originally belong to the Buddhist country of Arā Kān including Chittagong Hill Tract⁴³. with the Military expeditions of the Mogh Kings of that country, the Moghs and other tribals came over to Tripura and settled there. Even now large number of Chākṃā have entered Tripura from Chittagong region as a result of Communal disturbances there. Naturally these people are Buddhists.

Some of the Moghs, called Rājvansi or Badua moghs, who use the surname Baḍuā have a mixed origin from Bengal and Āra Kānī father or mother.⁴⁴ and are Bengali speakers, so that it is difficult to call them tribals. They are however Buddhists and belong to southern school of Buddhism. They do not admits Tibetan. The Sub-division wise distribution of tribal Buddhists in Tripura is shown in the following table.⁴⁵

Amarpur	—	6214	Khowai	—	135
Belonia	—	5216	Sabroom	—	5827
Dharmanagar	—	7779	Agartala	—	100
Kailasahar	—	7455	Sonamura	—	22
Kamalpur	—	770	Udaipur	—	198

43. Also vide T.D.G. P-153, The tribes of Tripura P-15 Published by the Directorate of Tribal Research, Agartala.

44. Vide Tripura Darpan dated 27 Nov., 1991, P-2. (An Article by Dipyayan Singha, Tathyar Āloke Mogh Samprādayer Ithihās)

45. T.D.G. P-141, Statistical Abstract, Tripura, 1965, P-15.

The present figure may be higher than these. The annual celebration of Lord Buddha's birth anniversary at Benuvan-Bihar, Agartala is a big festival and people irrespective of caste and creed throng there in addition to the Buddhists to pay homage to the Buddha, who is also regarded as a Hindu Avatāra (Incarnation) by Joydev and others.

A Buddhist monk named Buddha - datta Bhiksu has started an Ās'hrama at Aboynagar, Agartala. He is a Pali Scholar with M.A. and Ph.D. in this subject, serves as a School teacher at Agartala.

It is said that old Buddhist manuscript are still available with Chākmā Chiefs who read these holy texts in the evening. Also 'one will be spell bound to see the maintenance of the temple of Lord Buddha in a Chākmā village.⁴⁶

Tribalism : Buddhism discussed above is an old and minor religion of the tribals of Tripura. So is their own tribal religion which we may term 'tribalism'. This is also old or traditional. They are practising this peculiar religious form from time immemorial. This religion consists in the worship of a number of deities who are quite unknown to the non-tribals. The deities are named in the tribal tongue, whence the significances are far from clear. Then there will no physical features or anthropomorphic characteristics-attributed to them. At best some bamboo or piece of stone may be used as a symbol of the deity some what in the manner of a Sālāgram stone for Viṣṇu or the linga⁴⁷ Pratika of Śiva.

Then there is no temple dedicated to any deity, says a Tripura writer.⁴⁸

Among the Tripuris deities are found. In most cases the structures of the deities are made with bamboo poles or stone.

46. The tribes of Tripura (Published by the Directorate of Tribal Research, Agartala, P-11.)

47. Or yoni - linga (Phallus standing on the Yoni - Pitha)

48. Debapriya Deb Barman - Treatise on Traditional Social Institutions of the Tripura Community, P-55.

A notable example is the symbol of the God "Budā devatā" (The old God) at Agartala in the compound of the Caudda - Devatā Temple.

This system of worship without a temple and without images reminds us of the early vedic system of worship. The Vedic Aryans worshipped their numerous Gods and Goddesses with simple rituals in most cases without the help of a temple or an image, probably this situation is preserved in the tribal society till today. This is practically nirākāra - Upāsānā.

Scholars are of the opinion that primitive or tribal religion is characterised by animism,⁴⁹ spiritism, fetishism, ghost worship or ancestor worship, totemism, magic or witch-craft etc.⁵⁰

The tribals of Tripura of the present day are not without traces of these early forms of religion like any other tribal people of the world or any backward non-tribal rural people. Totemism is often noted among the Riāngs. Some of their old men say that their race has descended from famous Purānic bird, 'Garudā'. The bird is therefore, respected. The tribal name 'Riāng' is also supposed to be derived from the word 'Vihariḡa'. Further, some of the Riāng clans are named after beasts, fish and other objects, such as tiger, leopard, tortoise, wheel etc.⁵¹ However, such beliefs are now on the wane as a result of education and contact with other civilized peoples.

Spiritism or belief in spirits is also noticed among the tribals. Some abodes of spirits are also generally admitted, such as a deserted house, an old pond, a road crossing, big trees and hillocks etc. are regarded as haunted by evil spirits.⁵²

49. Some add also another variety animatism (Vide J. Gon Chaudhury - The Riāngs of Tripura. P-66.

50. Edwards - The Philosophy of Religion. Page-39, 94-101.

51. —J. Gon Chaudhury - The Riāngs of Tripura - Page 67-68.

52. —D. Deb Barmā - op. cit. P - 57.

About animism or spiritism, it is said to be an important factor in the religion of the Jamatiya Tribe⁵³ so far as we see the Jamatia, as subtle spirits, good or evil, some of whom are also worshipped. This is no animism but rather spiritism. The Major tribe Tripuri is no exception.

But such belief in spirits is not a new thing. Even the Vedic Aryans had it. The countless spirits admitted by them are recorded in the Vedic hymns and the Daivata Kānda of the Nirghanta. Such spirits are the Rbhus, Vāstās Pati, Nirrti etc. As a result the spiritism of the tribals is not felt by the non-tribals as a feature of their religion, because this is a common both. J. H. Hutten observes⁵⁴.

'It is difficult to draw a line of distinction between Hinduism and the tribal religion. The latter presents a kind of surplus material which has not been built into the temple of Hinduism.'

This material is very similar to that which was used in building up Post Vedic Hinduism⁵⁵. Reverence of trees, rivers, animals etc.⁵⁶ is there in Hinduism and is not felt as animism or totemism. So there is reverence for trees etc. among the tribes of Tripura. What should we call it, seeing that their religion is not limited to that but extends to worship of God and Goddesses. These are sacred things in all religions. Therefore it may be said that animism, totemism etc. can not be totally got rid of, and they linger in every religion at every stage of development as the popular form of religion more prevalent among the rural masses.

In addition to the so-called animism, spiritism and totemism, the tribals of Tripura Worship a number of deities of their own. Let us give a brief account of this Pantheon, so

53. —Pradip Nath Bhattacharjee The Jam ā ti ā s of Tripura - P - 46.

54. —J. H. Hutten - Census of India 1931, Vol-I, P-P, 391-398.

55. Quoted in P. N. Bhattacharja's - Lokvrtter Āloke Kalai Sampraday (in Bengali), p -37.

56. Trees-Tulsi, Bel, Rupasi, Rivers-Ganga, Yamuna etc. Animal Cow.

far as it prevails among the major tribes, Tripurī, Riāng etc. Many of the deities are common to all tribes. But some new ones are noted in some tribes, The Riāng tribe probably has the largest number of deities. The homes and system of worship of these deities are noted below.

Traditional Tripurī deities⁵⁷

Matai Katar, Matai Katarmā, Akhatra, Bikhikra, Tooima, Saugrām, Mailooma, Thoomnairok, Banirok, Chhakajook, Barasa, Haichukma, Siri Jamdu, Siri Judu etc.

Jamātiā deities⁵⁸

Lampra, Mailongma, Khuhungma, Noksa, Buriarag, Buriarag, Mailan-mung, Taimankernung, Kuechanima, Garia, Mahadeb, Madev.

Riang deities

Perhaps the deities of the Riang Pantheon for outnumber those of other tribes. But only some of them are important. The important deities are Randhok, Mailooma, Khuluma, Barua, Nakchumatai, Beti Kapru, Badiya, Mamita, Matai-Katar, Thumhairog, Balirug, Ghang, Nakdi.⁵⁹

The fuller list comprise some 35 names.⁶⁰ It is to be noted that some Gods have wife, son and daughter too, who are also regarded as deities. This resembles the Hindu families of Gods—s'iva (husband) Durgā (Wife), Kārtika and Ganesh (sons); and the family of lord Krsha including his brother Balarām sister subhadrā, son Aniruddha and grandson Sāmba.⁶¹ whether the tribal conception of a god family is

57. D. Deb Barma, op. cit. pp-52-54.

58. P. Bhattacharjee, op cit, p-46.

59. —Vide--S. Chakraborty and S. Banerjee. Riāng (in Bengali), PP 31-33.

60. —J. Gon Chaudhury-- the Riangs of Tripura, PP-- 69 70.

61. —This is known as Vynhavade in Vaisnavism, which is obviously derived from the popular Siva--Durga Parivara worship.

derived from the Hindu conception, or is a parallel growth can not be determined with certainty. But since the worship of S'iva is very old in tribal religion, some influence of the S'iva Durgā family can not be ruled out.

Riāng deities are divided into two classes good or evil.

The good deities are Sibrai or Subrai,⁶² his wife Taocing Chaungma, their daughters Devalaksmi and Devatarini, Toibuma Matai (Goddess of paddy) Mai Kachan Ma (do), Khunaukma (Goddess of Cotten), Noa-kuma Matai (Goddess of home stead), Suna rungma (Goddess of Peace and prosperity),⁶³ Akhitra and Bikhitra (Gods of Love).⁶⁴

The evil or Malevolent deities are Buraha (a forest deity causing illness to animals and carrying away animals)⁶⁵

Hai Kukma (his wife), thunairao Matai (God of death, of Hindu Yama) Suihirao Matai (Messenger of death God), Baruirao Matai (do), seven sisters causing disease namely -- Alotai Kanyama, Asotai K. m. Longlitai k. m, chunglitai k. m. Bukh k. m., Kukli k. m. Abarhya k.m. ; Longdrai Matai (God of elephant) ; his wife Sankha-- tarini ma, his son Kalajivan, Biloor, Matai (God of tiger) , Binaigar Matai (God of bear).⁶⁶

The Gods of elephant, tiger and bear are obviously conceived out of fear of their wild animals who are the neighbours of the hill people and they live in constant fear from them. These God, are to control these ferocious beasts. This is similar to the Aryan conceptions of a God of wind, rain, God of lighting (Indra), God of Fire (Agni) and so on, which

62. —Probably a name of Siva. This deity is mentioned also in the R. M.—I (Trilocana khanda).

63. —Comparable to Lakmi of Hindu Pantheon.

64. —Jointly known as Lamprā, Gods of love and marriage—J. Gon-Chaudhury—Riāngs of Tripura, P—70.

65. —Of Vedic Panis who carried of the Cows of Gods.

66. —In J. Gon Chaudhury's list God Mamita is not found. This God is worshipped also by the Kalai Tribes.



Photo of GABRIA PUJA

conceptions are obviously out of fear for these powerful natural phenomena.

The basis of conception of a deity is the same in both Aryan and tribal societies—fear for a natural phenomenon or a wild animal. This is most conspicuous in the Bengalee conception of a Serpent deity⁶⁷ on whom a vast literature⁶⁸ has grown. This literature acts as a feed back to the deity, that is, it makes the deity, more popular to the Society, even small deity like Sani, Lakmi, etc. are popularised by means of literature known as Panchali (e.g. Sanir Panchali, Laxmir Panchali).

The tribal deities could not become so popular in the absence of such a literature. The only exception is the 14 deities popularised by the Rajmala and royal Patronage.

Two Gods, Garia (or Gadiā) and Ker are admitted and worshipped by almost all tribes and their worship is also performed with wide publicity at the initiative of the Govt. of Tripura since early days. These two pujas have been recognized by the Govt. of Tripura and holidays are observed in Schools, Colleges and offices on these occasions, other Pujas are confined to tribal circles only especially in the hills and are felt or noted by the non-tribal public. The greatest of the tribal Pujas is Kharci Puja or worship of the deities in the rainy season. But this is not purely a tribal affair. The deities are all Hindu deities by name but tribal conception. So this will be dealt with in connection with their Hindusim in the next section.

Now let us give a brief account of the worship of various tribal deities—The purpose of worship, place of worship and the procedure. Only the important deities will be taken up.

(i) Gadia Pūjā—This pūjā is specially held in the Jamatia, Riang and Kalai Societies, the more among the

67.—Manasa.

68.—Called Manasa Mangal --Padma Puran.

Jamātiyās. Gariyā Pūjā has a deep rooted significance in the Jamatiya. Garia is dear to them, and the Pūjā is performed socially unlike other tribes of Tripura, The Jamātiyās perform this as a community festival, says P. N. Bhattacharya.⁶⁹

Gariā Pūjā starts from the Caitra Sankranti day and continues for a week. The God Goria is often called Goria Rājā or Baba Goriā. A song goes like this :

**Goriā rājā Padiyā thāke
Cāul Cibāiya**

--- Gariā rājā lies flat after chewing rice.

As to the origin of Goria Puja, there are two views (a) that it is a festival at the beginning of the Jum cultivation--from the Caitra-- Sankranti to 7th Vaisakha. Soon after this festival the jum operations are started. The hard jum work requires a new energy, and this is supplied by the seven or eight day long festival marked by music and dance by young men and women. The hills with all jungles and thickets therein tremble at the deep sound of music and drum--beating with the result that all ferocious animals (tigers, Snakes etc.) get frightened and leave the place for safe shelters at distant quarters, and the jum work can be carried on safely.

That it is a festival commemorating a military victory of Tripura over a Kuki chief of a neighbouring principality. The story goes that in ancient time a white elephant belonging to a King of Tripura was caught and taken away by the Kukis of Kuki land (obviously modern Jampai Hill and Mizoram area) and was not returned inspite of repeated requests. Upon this, the Tripura king invaded the Kuki land and won after a stiff fight. The victorious Tripura army returned with rich

69. —Vide his Jamātiyās of Tripura, P.46. also his lokavrtter Āloke Kalai Sampraday, P--40, where he Observes --Gariā Pūjā is performed with the greatest pomp among the Jamātiyās.

booties including a head image of the deity Gadiya made of gold. They returned to Tripura Capital on the Caitra Sankranti day. From that day onwards great rejoinsings were held for a week in The Capital. The Caitra—Sankranti or Mahavisuv day was fixed as the day of Gadiyā Pujā. The gold image of Gadiyā that they brought from the Kuki land was installed that day and the worship started.

The Gold image of Gadiyā was brought by The Jamātiyā soldiers from the Kukis. So this image is still kept by the Jamātiyā tribe. They worship this image. Other tribes worship the deity in other symbols. The Tripuri soldiers brought a bamboo from there and hence bamboo symbol is used by them in Gadiyā pūjā. From the second view we learn that the deity Garia is not Original in Tripura but was imported from the Kuki land. Why there are two images as two brothers, worshipped here? this is a problem which is yet to be solved. It is quite probable that Gaur—Nitai have been transformed to Gariā brothers among the tribals. Some scholars⁷⁰ doubt also the first view that Gadiyā Pūjā is a festival inaugurating Jum Cultivation. They say it is a coincidence that both start simultaneously.

Usually two images are made for worship. The two are regarded as brothers.

This Pūjā is a big and complex affair lasting seven or eight days. It is comparable with the Durgā Pūjā of the Hindus. Animal sacrifices (including buffalo) are made on a large scale.

But swine is a taboo in it. Fowl is common. So is he-goats. wine is also offered profusely. Subscriptions are collected by the devotees from every house of the locality.

70. —Vide Articles of Mahendra Deb Barmā and AnadhiBhattacharya on Gadiyā Pūjā in Dainik Sam'bad Patrika dated 13th and 14th April 1993.

Various songs are sung during the Puja days. The image of Gariā is taken out of the Pūjā Pandel after the Pūjā and taken to every house. This seems to be an imitation of the Hindu Ratha-Yātra, where Lord Jagannātha is carried on the wooden chariot. In Nepali Ratha-Yātra, not Jagannātha but Matsyendra nātha is carried on the ratha. The name Goriā probably derives from Gaure or Gaudiya, and the two Garia brothers may be Gaur-Nitat of Naba-dwip. The Jamātiās have adopted Vaisnavism in a large Scale.

For further details of this Puja, P. N. Bhattacharya's books on Jamātiyā and Kalai and S. Chakraborty and S. Banerjee's books on Reāng may be referred to. The latter work contains a number of songs and talks used in this puja.

Reminiscence of Nagarkirtan

The purpose of this Pūjā is said to be general welfare of the society, the state and the worshipping family or families. But so far as we think, this is a form of nagar-kirtan introduced by Mahāprabhu Sri Caitanya and his companions in the early 16th Century at Nabadwip for the purpose of spreading a simple devotional religion among the masses. This religion of Caitanya Mahāprabhu spread to Tripura and Manipur very early especially among the Mani puris amid—The royal family of Tripura.

(ii) **Ker Pūjā**—Ker Puja is another important tribal religious ceremony. It is held after a fortnight after the Khārchī Pūjā or Worship of the 14 deities in the month of Āsadhā (July). Among the Uchai and Kalai⁷¹ tribes this Puja is held in the month of Agrahayana. (Nov—Dec.). But the generally, accepted date is in Asadha (July) and the Govt. of Tripura also recognises it. Schools, Colleges and offices remain closed on this date.

The Puja was given great importance by the royal family of Tripura for the Puja was held by the Kings themselves in

the palace compound. The tribal people performed this puja in every village. The purpose of the puja was said to be general welfare and safety of the village, the state and the royal family.

The importance of this puja is seen in the naming of road crossing at Agartala as 'Ker chaumohani'. Kerpuja has some peculiarities. An area is fixed for the pūjā. This is in the case of the pūjā performed by the royal family at Agartala. The area covers a big zone around the palace. This area becomes the pūjā compound or the alter of the deity. In tribal villages, the village boundary becomes the Ker area. During the pūjā, no entrance or exit to and from the Ker area is allowed. The sick people and women at an advanced stage of pregnancy are taken out of the area before hand. It is supposed that any death or birth in the pūjā area during the puja hours forebodes ill. The restriction starts from the previous night and continues for the next day and the next night. "During the celebration of the Ker Pūjā, everyone including even the reigning sovereign is subjected to numerous—restrictions—not being allowed to put on shoes, to make use of an umbrella, to fire a gun, to light a fire etc. All who violate any of these injunctions are declared by the high priest to be guilty of sacrilege, and in order to expiate the offence before the fourteen tutelary Gods, a fine is inflicted on the culprit and appropriated by the priest.⁷²

This resembles the modern curfew inverted by the Tripurī Kings. For they were in constant of invasion by the Pathans and Mughas of Gaūda, and the Moghs of Ārākān.

However the device soon assumed a religious colour and come to be known as Ker Pūjā.

The meaning of the word 'ker' is not clear and is not attempted by any writer so far.

71. —Regarded as a branch of the Hālām tribe.

72. —W. W. Hunter— A statistical account of Bengal — P — 492.

Vedic Deity'ika' Vs' ker'

Bearing in mind the close relation of the tribal animistic worship with the early Vedic Nature worship. We may assume the vedic deity Ka (who) in Ker Pūjā. Ker seems to be a genitive form of Ka, so that Ker= whose the deity Ka (who) is eulogised in the famous Hiraanya Garbha-Sukta of the Rg Veda⁷³, in which the verses end with the burden 'Kasmai devāya havisa vidhuna' (To which God should we perform pūjā with ghee and other offerings).

This deity Ka is identified with Prajapati by commentators. But actually Ka is an unified, unknown Nirguna type Deity, who is later called Brahman— in the Upanisads.

In the Kena Upanishad we see Brahman is also Unidenti fied and unknown to the Gods **Agani**, Vayu etc. Brahman is there called a yaksa or a wonderful being by the Gods. The yaksa of the Kena Upanisad, the Ka of the Hiranya- Garbha Sūklā of the Rg veda, and the stem of ker (Ker Puja) seems to be the same unknown, undefined Brahman. Thus Ker Puja may be regarded as the ancient Vedic Ka — Pūjā. K. P. Sen says that the deep silence in the Ker Pūjā depicts the situation before the creation of the world.⁷⁴

In modern times the old restrictions in the Pūjās are relaxed to a great extent. In the villages, the Pūjā is held at the house of the head man called Chaudhuri, Kalai Rai and the like. A big feast is also held in the house. The expenses are met by collecting subscriptions from all. According to some Kali Pūjā is held on the previous day as a preparation to Ker Pūjā. By the way, animal sacrifice, especially that of hegoats, is a must in the pūjā as in other tribal Puja.⁷⁵

73. — R. V. 10, 121.

74. — K. P. Sen. R. M.— I, PP 144— 145.

75. — For further details Vide P, N. Bhattacharya op. cit. PP— 40— 42 Shyamlal Deb Barmā—Sadharan Samiksar Aloke Uchai — P 36. Chakraborty and Banerjee—Riang P —33. K. P. Sen—R. M. I. PP—143 —145.

Now for the less known tribal pūjās. None of them having any special importance worth mentioning, these are noted below in their alphabetical order.

(iii) Akhitra and Bikhitra : —

These two deities are jointly known as Lāmprā. They are said to be the sons of Matai Katar and his consort Matai Katarma. This worship is held at the beginning of all religious and social ceremonies.⁷⁶

It resembles the worship of Ganesā, the bestower of all success, in Hinduism, K. P. Sen says this is actually Ganesā Pūjā.⁷⁷

(iv) Būdia, Betikapru :—

These are deities of Paddy. These deities are worshipped in the jum field by the priest called Acai at the beginning of harvesting.

(v) Bāruā

This puja is held in Ghata or earthenjar with the image of Kali painted in Vermillion on the ghata. This shows that it is a form of Kālī Pūjā. The Riāngs perform this pūjā. The woman folk make the auspicious ulu-dhvani in the Hindu manner in this Pūjā.⁷⁸

(vi) Burasa

A male deity causing disease. He is worshipped when some one of a family suffers from severe pain or fever with the hope that the deity will relent and cure the patient.⁷⁹

This pūjā is held outside the village like the worship of Kal-Bhairav is under a big tree (usually banyan) on a river

⁷⁶. D. P. Deb Barman - Treatise on the traditional Social Institutions of Tripura Community.

⁷⁷. K. P. Sen - R. M. I. - P - 117.

⁷⁸. Vide Riāng P - 31 of the Education-Directorate.

⁷⁹. D. P. Deb Barman - op. cit. P - 54.

side outside the village - comparable is Buda S'iv of the Hindu folk literature.

(vii) Chhakal Jook

This deity also worshipped outside the village. He is the deity of witches. He cured patients suffering from illness caused by witches by their harmful mantras.

(viii) Ghung

Actually 'ghung' is a bamboo signal forbidding entry into a place, especially in the Ker Puja area. This ghung is also worshipped like the flag staff of Indira (Indradhvaja)

(ix) Haichukma

A female deity, regarded as consort of Barasa. She is supposed to bring back any straying domestic animal. She is worshipped by those who have lost some animals in the jungle.

A pig and two black fowls are sacrificed in the pūjā.⁸⁰ This puja resembles the worship of Gora knath (or rather Tinnath) which ceremony is also performed for the same purpose.

(x) Khuluma

A Goddess of Cotton. The tribals grow cotton also in the jhoom. So a goddess is assumed as presiding this crop. She is obviously worshipped, for safe growth of cotton. An earthen ghati (Jar) is used as symbol of the deity. Some cotton is put into the ghata as a mark of identifying the deity. Then the pūjā is held normally with flowers and offerings. The Goddess of Paddy is also often worshipped with her, obviously these goddess are reflections of our Laxmi Debi.

80. Loc. cit.

(xi) Lāmprā

The pūjā is specially performed by the Jamātyās. But the Tripuri tribe also does it. According to K. P. Sen the royal family performed this pūjā before any auspicious ceremony or on the eve of tour or expedition. He thinks this is the worship of God (Ganes'a) called Vināigar by the Tripurīs.⁸¹ The worship of Ganes'a at the beginning of all functions in Hinduism is well known.

It has already been noted (in III above) that the deities Akhitra and Bikhitra are jointly called Lāmprā. These two deities may be Kārtika and Ganes'h, as hinted by K. P. Sen. P. N. Bhattacharya thinks the word Lāmprā (Langra) means a junction, here a group of deities. As many as six deities are included in the group⁸² not only the two - Akhitra and Bikhitra which D. P. Deb Barman holds.⁸³

The solution of this tangle seems to be this. The Tripuris admit two deities and the Jamātyās. In the lampra group are : Akatha, Bikatha,⁸⁴ Tybuk, Sangrang, Sukundray, and Mukundray.⁸⁵ comparable Bengali word is perhaps, Lābda, Lāphra (a mixture of many vegetables).

(xii) Māiluma

Goddess of Paddy, worshipped by the Riāngs along with another Goddess Khuluma (Goddess of Cotton). They are worshipped in earthen Ghatas (Jar) as their symbol. No animal sacrifice is mentioned in connection with this pūjā.

81. R. M. - I. P. - 117.

82. P. N. Bhattacharya - The Jamātyās of Tripura, P - 51.

83. D. P. Deb Barman - Treatise on Traditional Social Institutions of the Tripuri Community. P-53.

84. Akhitra and Bikhitra of the Tripurīs.

85. The last two names with ending Ray seem to be Bengalee names Mukunda Ray, Sukhendu Ray etc. regarded as Folk deities.

(xiii) Māmīta

This is also known as Maikatal Pūjā. It is performed on the occasion of new rice or navanna festival. Binni rice⁸⁶ produced in Jum is required for this pūjā. The deity may be a form of Laksmi. This pūjā is widely prevalent among the Kalai tribe. An image of the deity is made with bal. boo. The puja is performed with the help of a priest called Āchāi. It is believed that this pūjā leads to prosperity and good progeny. A good number of animal sacrifice is needed in this worship. The number of sacrifices should be as many as there are members in the family concerned. The victims are usually goat, swine, ducks, fowl, pigeon etc. With every goat a pigeon is required, and with every case of swine a duck or fowl. The principle is that with every four footed animal one biped animal is to be sacrificed.

A peculiar regulation in this worship is that no outsider can attend this. This shows that it is actually a private of confidential ceremony. But after the pūjā is complete, neighbours are invited to take prasād and food. Some old coins are to be given in this pūjā out of the house owner's own collection. The priest's (Dakshina) includes money cloth etc. According to some this is equivalent to the worship of Ganesa of the Hindu Pantheon.

Hunter observes⁸⁷ that 'in the month of Ashin, at the beginning of the harvest season, a festival called Mkkātal (from mi, Paddy and Kātal, new) is observed by the hill men, which resembles the Bengali Nābādund, its chief object being to invoke the deities to bliss the land with abundant rice crops.

86. Binni or Birani is a special variety of Paddy. It's rice has a good scent and when cooked it becomes somewhat Viscid. It is very tasteful to eat with milk, curd, fish, fry, malasses etc. It is usually grown in North Tripura, Cachar, Karimganj and Sylhet.

87. W. W. Hunter - op. cit., P - 492.

(xiv) Matāi Katar

Mataikatarmā - 'Matāi' means 'God' and 'Katar' great, so that Matāikatar means the great God of Hindu Mahadeva and Jyestha Brahman of the Atharva Veda. Matai Katārmā is his consort. According to some Matāi Katārmā Pūjā - Kalipuja⁸⁸. But this is rather doubtful. For Matāikatar is a male deity according to D. P. Deb Barman. Therefore Kālipūjā may be - Matāi Katarmā Pūjā. So. M. Katar is Ś'iva and M. Katarmā - Durgā or Kāli. Thus the names M. Katār is Ś'iva and M. Katarmā - Durgā or Kāli. Thus the names M. Katār (or Great God) and Mahadeva or Ś'iva become comparable.

This pūjā is performed outside the house like that of Kāl Bhairav. Some animal sacrifice is made in it.

(xv) Naksu Matāi

A female deity. She is regarded to be the guardian of homstead by the Tripurīs. The Riāngs consider her to be a serpent deity. According to some the Riāngs are the first worshippers of this deity. So it may be said that she is a special deity of the Riāngs. They worship her on the occasion of Navanna festival. The Tripurīs perform her pūjā for the purpose of recovery from some illness. Both vegetarian and non-vegetarian offerings are made to the deity.

The Riāngs believe that this goddess has six sister.⁸⁹

(xvi) Nākri, Lāgri, Lākri

This deity is worshipped by the Kalai tribe as a precaution against evil eyes. A piece of wood is posted in the ground at night fall by the priest (Ocāi) with due worship with offerings of meal and other things. This is regarded as a safeguard against all evils and dangers.

88. Vide - Riāng - P. 33 (Edu. Directorate - D. P. Deb Barman.

89. Vide Reang - P - 32 (Edu. Directorate), D. P. Deb Barman - Treatise on Tripuri Community. P - 53.

The word *nākri*, *Lagri*, *Lākri* seems to derive from Bengali *Lakdi* (fuel, wood) and the worship actually means the worship of a deity in the wooden pole as his symbol. It is just like the worship of *Indra-dhvaja*. The worship is performed in the month of *Caitra* March - April.⁹⁰

(xvi) 'Rantak or Randhak'

This deity is worshipped on the occasion of new rice festival at the end of harvesting, the *Jum* crops. The *Ucai* tribe performs this *puja* also on the New year day and *Laksmi-purnima* as well.⁹¹

Two big *ghats* (earthen jars) are required for this *pūjā*. The *Ghatas* are filled with new *atap* rice. Some pieces of stone collected from the *Jum* are also put into the *Ghatas*. These stone are considered lucky stones, and the *Riāngs* want to have such stones in their houses as a mark of good luck. The word *ra*, *dhak* is probably connected with our root *radh*—to cook.

(xvii) *Sangrām*

A deity worshipped by the *Tripuris* for prosperity and recovery from illness. This deity is regarded as a male deity who is the husband of the Goddess of Water. Probably the word is a corruption of *Sangam* (a confluence of rivers on the meeting of a river with the sea). The *Sangam* places are regarded as sacred, eg. the confluence of *Ganga* - *Yamunā* at *Prayāg*, and the *Gangā* - *Sagār Tirtha* in Bay of Bengal.

(xviii) *Tooima*

A female deity regarded as Goddess of Water and consort of the aforesaid deity *Sangram*. She is worshipped as a

90. —P. N. Bhattacharya—*Kaloi Sampraday*, pp - 42 -43, 47 *Riang* (Edu. Directorate) P - 33

91. —*Shyamlal Deb Burma* - *Sādharān Samiksar*. *Āloke Uchai*, P - 36, *Reang*, P - 31

precaution against fell diseases like Pox, Cholera etc. The worship is held on a riverside. A buffalo and a hegoat are to be sacrificed to her. This is prevalent among the Tripuris. Skt. toya (water) seems to be the base of the word and Tooima may be – toya – ma (Water Mother, or the Goddess Ganga).

(xix) Thoomunairok, Banirok

These are Gods of death like Yama of Hindu-Pantheon. The former is called thunairas Matāi by the Rīāngs.⁹² The former is worshipped in the courtyard of a house and the latter (Banirok) in the jungle Animal sacrifice is keeping death.

Hindu Bhrāṭṭy dvitiyā

This is comparable with Hindu festival of Bhratr dvitiya, where a sister seeks to keep away death from her brothers by putting a finger mark with Sandal Paste on the forehead of the brother.

The sister syas while making the mark –
 bhaiyer kapāle diye photā
 yamer duāre dilam kānta.

By putting a circular mark on the forehead of my brother,
 I put a thorn or barrier at the gate of Yama's house.

Concluding remarks on tribalism

In the foregoing pages, some of the tribal deities and their worship are described. There are some more such deities of a very minor characteristics whose worship is scarcely found. one is longtharāi Matāi in the Long Tharai hills. Some of them are included in the lists of deities given above.

But as has been pointed out in some cases, some of the deities are reflections of well known Hindu deities. This is not unlikely, There are common deities between Hinduism and

92. – Gon Chaudhuri – Riāng of Tripura – P – 70. D. P. Deb Barma – op cit, P – 54

Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as Tāra and her various forms (Mangal Candi etc.) Ś'iva (comparable with Buddhist Avoloki - tes'ware) etc. So there may be such similarities between Hindu and tribal deities, both people being neighbours for long centuries.

As to the absence of earthen images of the tribal deities, it has already been said that it indicates their love of nirā kāra Upāsana to some extent. But it may be due to lack of artisans among the tribals. Had there been mud artists among them, the situation would in all probability, have been otherwise.

In the Rājmalā, we see that Māharāj Vijay mānikya (1532 - 1567) A. D. first brought a member of Bengalee artisans to Tripura from East Bengal.⁹³

But the tribal people remained aloof from bearing any art or craft. This doubtless had a bearing on their construction of images. They are still content with bamboo frames only, which are used inside an image by the non-tribal Hindu icon-workers.

A Tripuri Scholar observes⁹⁴ the religious beliefs and practices of the Tripuris of Tripura depend almost entirely on the Hindu mythology. But they have some of their own traditional deities, majority of them are male in character. Among the male deities Gorā, Lāmpira, Owathap, etc. are principal deities. Female deities are very few in number and the chief among them are Naksa matai etc.

What is said here about the Tripurī deities applies to almost all tribal deities - Riāng, Jamātiā, Kalai, Uchai etc. Some relation with the Hindu deities - general deities or local or folk deities, - is traceable and we have sought to point out this in every case as far as possible.

93 - R. M - II (Vijay mānikya khaṇḍa)

94 - D. P. Deb Barman - Treatise on Tripuri Community. P - 49

The worship of the peculiar tribal deities is a part of the tribal religion and we should like to call it their tribalism. This is maintained or practised side by side with their Hinduism. We may therefore, call it (i. e. their tribalism) a sectarian peculiarity of the tribals.

As to the various Hindu religious sects have their own peculiarities although they are all Hindus, so the tribal people have peculiarities in their worship, despite their affiliation to general Hindu faith and their worship of Hindu deities and observance of Hindu festival. However, there are some extremists among tribal writers who hold that tribal deities are their own without any root in Hindu mythology. But this is not so. Both Hindu and tribal gods have got mixed in the tribal pantheon.

Tribal Hinduism

Last of all we come to the wide – spread Hinduism of the tribal people. This religion dates from the hoary past. No exact date can be assigned to it. As a result of gradual Aryan conquest of India in the dim past all the & Primitive peoples of the country –Dravidians and the tribes of various hills and mountains gradually adapted the Aryan culture and faith. Their own tribal culture was not totally abandoned, but for the most part they switched over to Aryan culture. The Aryanisation process continued ever since. In historical times, the Hung, Sakes, Greeks, Mongols, etc, who came to India as invaders ultimately adapted Hinduism and disappeared as a separate entity. This must be true of the ancient tribes of Tripura and elsewhere. They can under Aryan domination quite early and got Aryanised.

In the Rājmalā, the oldest chronicle of the Tripura dynasty, mention of Tripura at the hand of Ś'iva, the powerful Aryan God.⁹⁵ and the succession to the throne of King

95. – R. M. I (Tripur Khanda) P. 11.

Trilocana, who was a son of S'iva. This obviously refers to Aryan conquest of Tripura in the dim past since then, the people of Tripura followed the religion given them by S'iva. He asked them to worship the Aryan deities, S'iva, Uma, Hari, Laksmi, Saraswati ect.⁹⁶

These deities, numbering fourteen Deities (Caturdas'a Devta)⁹⁷.

This shows that the worship of the Hindu Pantheon came into Vogue among the tribes of Tripura in the long long past in the prehistoric days. According to the Rāj mālā king Trilocana was a contemporary of Yudhishthira of the Mah ābh ārata.⁹⁸ Then we see the Aryanisation process of the tribes of Tripura began as early as the Mah ābh ārata era, or atleast very early period of Indian history. The Tripura royal family has all along declared themselves to be of the Ksatriya race belonging to the lunar dynasty. They do not speak of any other origin. This also shows that the Aryanisation and Hinduism of the Tripura Tribes are events of pre-historic days. The names of Tripur kings and the tribal people of Tripura are generally from the Aryan Vocabulary⁹⁹ from time immemorial despite their own special dialects. This is also another sign of early Aryanisation and adoption of Hinduism.

The various tribes of Tripura, again are not different linguistically. The Tripuri or Kok Borok language is the mother tongue of most tribals – Tripur ī, Re āng, Jam ātiy ā etc. with local variations in some cases like different dialects of Bengali. If the Tripuris claim to be Ksatriya as the most of the tribes speaking this language become Ksatriyas, that is

96. – ibid pp 15 – 16

97. – Popularly called caudde Devata (in Bengali)

98. – R. M. I P – 33.

99. – Such as Trilocana, Ratnama nīkya, Dhanyam ā nīkya, Vijay m ā nīkya, Amar m ā nīkya – Gobinda M ā nīkya (King) Kamala, Laxmi, Jahnavi (Queen) etc.

a Hindu Caste from Long past. The statement of D. P. Deb Barman noted above to the effect that the religious practices of the Tripuris are derived from Hindu mythology.¹⁰⁰ also indicates the early adoption of Hinduism or Aryan religion by the Tripuri and other tribes of Tripura.

Date of Tribal Hinduism in Tripura

Let us now attempt to assign a probable date of switch over from tribalism to Aryan faith. Since S'iva is regarded as the leading deity who gave the Tripurī tribes a religion, we may assume the age of S'aivism as the probable date. S'aivism as a powerful religion arose in India in the age of the yajurveda and the Atharva vede¹⁰¹ where Rudra S'iva is the most powerful deity. The Rudra dhyāga of the white yajurveda¹⁰² and vradya kanda of the Atharva veda¹⁰³ depict this deity as all powerful and worshipped by all people high and low. This means this age was marked by the rise of S'aivism.

This age is roughly eir 100 B. C. from this time onwards down to the puranic age is a long period of several centuries. The tribals of Tripura might have adopted the Aryan culture and religion sometime during the period and before that their tribalism prevailed so we may roughly assume 500 B. C. as the period of transition from tribalism to Hinduism.

Early Worship of Aryan deities

King Trilocana of Tripura belongs to the Puranic age ¹⁰⁴ is reported to have worshipped a number of Aryan Gods and

¹⁰⁰ - D. P. DebBarman - Treatise on Tripuri Community. P - 49.

¹⁰¹ - Vide - A. B. Keith - Rg Veda 'Brahman' (Introduction).

¹⁰² - Vide - Vaj Saneyi Samhita.

¹⁰³ - Atharva Veda Chapter - XVI, Khanda - XV.

¹⁰⁴ - eir 500 B. C.

Goddesses, as has already been noted. This is the earliest record of the Tripuri peoples practice of Hinduism.¹⁰⁵

The King was ordered by Lord Ś'iva to worship fourteen deities. Ś'iva, Visnu, Durga etc. The full list is –

Hara, Uma, Hari, Ma (Lakmi), Vani, (Saraswati), Kumara (Kartika), Ganesa, Brahma, Pṛthvi, Ganga, Abdhi (Samudra), Agni, Kamesh, Himalaya¹⁰⁶

It is to be noted here that four of these deities (Pṛthivi, Samudra, Himalaya and Kāma) are no traditional deities of the Hindu Pantheon. The remaining ten are of course famous deities. Temples are erected to the major Hindu deities by Tripurī Kings of the State. King Trilocana and his subjects worshipped these deities in a group called the fourteen deities. No full image was perhaps made of the deities, for only the heads are preserved till today. The fourteen heads of fourteen deities are used for the pūjā. The Heads are kept in the temple of the 14 deities at old Agartala and are brought out during the days of annual worship in the month of Āsadha (June – July). The pūjā continued for seven days when Trilocana did it and this is the system till today.

“The family Gods of the Tipperah Kings are known as the Chaturdash Devata or fourteen Gods; and they include Thima, a river Goddess, Lampra, the god who rules the sky and ocean and Burasa, the forest god, the remainder being Hindu deities¹⁰⁷ out of these fourteen gods, only Lampra and Saṅgramā are being worshipped everyday, the remainder

105 – Vide Rājmaḷā – I (Trilocana Khanda)

106 – ibid P – 16 In P – 30 – 31 the name Kāma is given to Kamesh here, Kamesa actually means one, who has conquered Kāma, i. e. Ś'iva. But Ś'iva is already mentioned at the beginning. So the reading Kāma seems to be better.

107 – Quoted by Dr. K. C. Lahiri in his book Tripura Temples. from ‘The Imperial Gazetteer of India’, P – 120.

remain asleep through out the year, only to wake up in the Bengali month of Āsā dha.¹⁰⁸ This pūjā is characterised by countless animal sacrifice. In the Rajmālā it is stated that King Trilocana performed a Laksa bali (a lakh of animal sacrifices) including buffalo, yaks, goats, swine, tortoise sheep¹⁰⁹ etc. The laksabali is perhaps a traditional target of ancient king e.g. (Suratha) and the Tripur king also tried to reach this goal. The solid fact here is that continued animal sacrifice was a notable feature of this pūjā. But the rule did not require so many animal slaughters. Only three sacrifices to be performed by the king himself seem to have been the rule. Other sacrifices were not compulsory but optional. The R. M. Says—

**tihbali hrpatiye
Savahaste chediba
tih devata bhinna ruddire tarpibe
anya yata bali sav
mandap vahire ¹¹⁰**

The king shall cut up three victims with his own hand. He has to propitiate three deities¹¹¹ with separate flows of blood. All other sacrifices are to be performed outside the pūjā Pandel or the temple. King Trilocana is said to have performed also Durga Puja. Dol or Holi festival, Surya pūjā in the month of Magh (Jan - Feb) and manasa (Padmavati) pūjā in the month of Śravana (July - Aug) ¹¹²

Thus we see that King Trilocana was fully Arayanised and was a complete Bengalee Hindu worshipping all deities of the Bengalee Hindues. He also performed pitri-tarpane (libation to manes)¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ - Vide Dr. K. C. Lahiri's book - Tripura Temples.

¹⁰⁹ - R. M. - I, P - 28

¹¹⁰ - *ibid*, pp - 31 - 32

¹¹¹ - Probably Durga, Ganga and Agni.

¹¹² - R. M. - I, P - 33.

¹¹³ - R. Loc cit.

Human Sacrifice

Human sacrifice is not mentioned in the Caturdasadevata pūjā of Trilocana. But this is referred to in the case of later King beginning from maichilli¹¹⁴

This sacrifice was made before the 14 deities. Thousands of human victims were beheaded every year, usually the Bengalee people were collected as victims.¹¹⁵

Mahārāj Dhanya māṅkya forbade large scale human sacrifice. He allowed only one or two human victims annually or at longer intervals in the temples of 14 deities, Tripura Sundari (Udaipur) and two other places yet his son Deva māṅkya and grand son Vijaya māṅkya, made numerous human sacrifices before the 14 deities. Deva māṅkya sacrifices a number of his army chiefs. In case of vijaya māṅkya the victims were arrested court martialled army men. He also sacrificed the captured pāthan general Mumarak Khan, the Sultan of Gauda before the 14 deities. However, this custom did not continue afterwards, and seems to have gone out of fashion with Vijaya māṅkya (1532 – 1563 A. D.)

About human sacrifice in Tripura the following observation is noteworthy¹¹⁶ 'Human sacrifices prevailed at an early period in Tripura.....In no part of India were more human victims offered than in Tripura which appears to have been one of the strongest holds of Hinduism'.

K. P. Sen remarks with awe and indignation, 'who will count how many crores of human and animal victims have been sacrificed before this Deity (the 14 Deities)? Though human sacrifice is now dropped, countless animal sacrifices continue.'¹¹⁷

114. – R. M. – I. PP-44 – 45 also called – Rajeswara (No. 104 in Genealogical tree).

115. – R. M. – II, P – 29 (Dhanya māṅkya Khaṅda).

116. – Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. XIX (Quoted in R. M. – II, P – 104 Footnote)

117. – R. M. – I, P – 148.

Poet Rabindranath Tagore has noted this fact in his historical novel *Rāyarsī* on Gobindamanikya.¹¹⁸

There the King (Gobinda-mānikya) saya :

ā m ā r Tripur rajya
Ye Karibe Jib-hatya Jibjananir
Pūjā - Cchele, tare diva nirvasan danda

I will punish with banishment anyone in my Kingdom who will perform animal sacrifice for the sake of the mother of all beings.

In this connection it may also be observed that human sacrifice in Tripura perhaps indicates early cannibalism of the tribals. The *Rājmalā* mentions an incident of eating human flesh by King *S'iksma*. Some human sacrifices were made before the 14 deities on the Astami day. Some human flesh was taken from these by the Cooks of the king and was cooked. The king ate the meal and relished it much without knowing that it was human flesh. When he came to know it he scalded the cooks¹¹⁹.

However, this incident occasionally taken even by members of the royal family. **Later S'āktism - (1490 - 1520 A. D.)** Maharaj Dhanya mānikya founded the Tripura sundari Temple at Udaipur which is still extant. The image of the Goddess was brought by him from Chittagong which was under the Govt. of Tripura at that time. This temple is now the great and most frequented religious site of Tripura. The worship of this goddess is characterised by blood shed resulting from constant animal sacrifice. The Vaisnavite people, therefore, hesitate to visit this Shrine. Maharaj Gobinda Mānikya (1660 - 1676 A. D.) once tried to abolish animal sacrifice from this temple but could not be successful

118. - (b) Obviously during the Khārci Puja or (14 deities).

119. - R. M. - I, PP - 40 - 41.

owing to the obstinacy of the high priest. The blood-shed continues unabated till today.

This is doubtless a relic of the early Vedic sacrifices and the early tribal life of meat eating before the invention of agriculture. Actually, vedic sacrifices were also held in Tripura on two occasions according to K. P. Sen.¹²⁰

Later Developments S'aivism and Vaisnavism

Gradually the Tripura Kings and their subjects came into more contact with the Bengalee religious sects and religious teachers, especially of Nabadwip. As a result worship without animal sacrifice i. e. worship of S'iva and Visnu came into vogue. The kings founded many temples here and there to these deities especially at the old capital Udaipur and present capital Agartala. The temples at Udaipur are now in a dilapidated condition except the Tripura Sundari Temple and one or two more. But the Agartala Temples are in good condition and are daily visited by worshippers, tribals and non-tribals both. The Vaisnava temples Laxmi Narayan Bā d ī and Jagannath Bā d ī are most frequented, and even of these two, the former is given priority. All people go to visit these Shrine before and after every important ceremony like marriage etc.

Some of the Tripura Kings were initiated by the Goswami Gurus of Nabadwip¹²¹. This vaisnavism spread among the Royal family and gradually also among the tribal people especially among the Jamātiyās, who adopted Vaisnavism during the reign of Birchandra māṅkya (1861 - 96 A.D.).

120. - R. M. - I, PP - 98, These sacrifices were held about the 7th Century A. D.

121. - Vide R. M. IV, PP - 84 - 85.

Rasikanda Goswami, Vrindabon Chandra Goswami and other Gurus are mentioned.

Thus the tribals of Tripura have turned into devotional Vaisnavism at last from their early S'aktaism and S'aivism¹²².

According to Hunter¹²³, Tipperah, the last country that yielded to the tide of Musalman invasion had long been the chosen abode of S'ivaism. The fact, that the aboriginal religion was supplanted by Hinduism is indicated by the Myths which describe Siva destroying the Asura Tripura, and represent Tripura as the favourite residence of Siva, the right leg of Sati having fallen there.

But the worship of Sakta deities also continues side by side.

Current trend

The Hindu tribals of Tripura are now little different from the non-tribal Hindus. They worship almost all Hindu Gods and Goddesses and observe almost all Hindu festivals including Sani Puja, Laxmi Puja, Trin Nather Seva etc. Even they are taking mantras from the modern Thakurs or Saints.¹²⁴ It appears that in another fifty years or so tribal Hinduism will get totally merged in general Hindu religious system. They also want it to get dissolved in the all engrossing Aryan religion as interpreted by modern Saints like Ram-Krishna, Vivekananda, Ram Thakur, Niga mananda, Mahanam brata and others including Caitnya Mahaprabhu and his servants of Nabadwip.

Tribals of urban and rural areas—

There is a little difference between tribals of urban and rural areas as regards religious practices. The town living

122. —Also vide R. M. IV. P—83. About the Vaisnavism of the Jamatias vide P. N. Bhattacharya — Jamatias of Tripura P—45 and Samendra ch. Deb Burma — Tripura Rajyer Census Bibarani.

123. —Vide W. W. Hunter, A statistical Account of Bengal pp—498—99.

124. —Lt. Col. H. Deb Barma of Agartala is disciple of Ramthakur, and many other educated tribals belong to the R. K. Mission.

tribals, especially the educated section, are almost like the non-tribals in their religious activities. They perform only what is prevalent among the Bengalee Society, and avoid all peculiar tribalism. They are initiated by monks of this or that Thakur of W. Bengal and observe all the prescribed duties of this Sect. None can imagine that they are tribals. They avoid all their original tribalism, over and above, they study Hindu religious texts carefully and try to live up to the ideals set there.

Only the tribals living in rural areas and slum areas of towns retain some of their original tribal religious practices. But it seems that gradual urbanisation and spread of education among the tribals will in the long run, greatly minimise their practices and bring about an assimilation as in their urban counterparts. Total uniformity may not be achieved or expected because some racial peculiarities are always preserved in some form or other. Allowing for that, the modern trend is towards gradual assimilation of tribal religion with the general Hindu religion of this region. S'āktism, Vaiṣṇavism and the humanism of modern Thakurs.

In the assimilation work the Bengalee priest-hood also is a big factor. The educated tribals now often engage Bengalee Brahmins as Priests. These Priests are introducing all Bengalee ways in the tribal ceremonies, is also accepted by the tribals.

● Conclusion :

In the foregoing pages the traditional religion of the tribal people of Tripura have been discussed in some details. It has been pointed out that most of the tribals belong to Hinduism from pre-historic days. They worship all Hindu deities jointly (in the deities and Durga Puja) and severally observe all Hindu Pūjās and festivals and take prasada too. Many of them have turned to Vaiṣṇavism and the religions preached

by modern Thakurs.¹²⁵ Side by side, they also worship some special deities of their own. This is the relic of their original tribalism.

At some point of time during the rise of Buddhism in India some of the tribals of Tripura¹²⁶ adopted Buddhism. But their number is less than one lakh out of the total population of about 28 lakhs.

Hinduism and tribalism go hand in hand per Hindu-tribals practice some tribalism¹²⁷ as well. Such tribals are about six lakh, while the Buddhist may number about 75000 and Christian 25000, as noted above. The process of acculturation is going on, and the trend seems to be towards Hinduism, despite the Christian Missionaries hectic activities for rapid spread of the religion among the tribals.

126. - Moghs and Chakmas.

125. - Vide - Foot Note 114

127. - i. e. They worship some special deities - Mat āi Katar, Longtharai M ātai etc.

**MODERN DEVELOPMENT
- CHRISTIANITY****1. Introductory**

A small minority of the tribals of Tripura has embraced christianity for various reasons during the present century. This religion, therefore, should be discussed in connection with the tribal religion of Tripura of to-day. It should always be borne in mind that Hinduism remains the main religion of the tribals of Tripura since pre-historic days. Earlier Buddhism and later on christianity were professed by small groups of the tribals of these two minor religions, Buddhism dates from long past, most probably from the days when Buddhism was flourishing in this part of India,¹ and hence it has been regarded by us as a traditional religion of a section of the tribals of Tripura. But christianity is a modern development. It came with the arrival of the Europeans in Tripura.

2. Early history of christianity in Tripura (16th Century)

Though christianity in Tripura is a 20th Century development, yet its early history reaches mid 18th Century or even earlier days. But that does not concern the tribals of Tripura. Mahārāj Amarmānikya (1577 – 1586 A. D.) had an artillery regiment in his army consisting of portuguese soldiers. The Portuguese were noted for their valour in armed clashes in this country. So Amarmānikya, who was always facing danger of invasion by the Moghs of Ārākān, employed Portuguese

1. May be during the reign of the Pāla dynasty of Bengal or even earlier, Huentsang, the Chinese traveller, saw a large number of Buddhist monasteries in Bengal during the years – 630 – 644 A. D.

gunners in his army to encounter the Moghs. In the *Rajmāla*, the Portuguese army-men are called “*Fer āngi Sainya*”²

**Ras ānger yuddhe r āj ā
Kare anusthan**

Dv ā das B āngl ā sainya

Calila Sahite

Sarva Sainya lai y ā gela

Ras ānga yuddhete

Fer āngir sainya cale

nauk ā y bhari y ā

tusta haila Amardev

Sainya dekhi y ā.

—The king made preparations for the Ras ānga³ war. The armies of the twelve districts of Bengal⁴ accompanied the Tripur army. The king led all his troops to the Ras ānga war. The Fer āngi i. e. Portuguese regiment marched forward in boats packed to capacity. King Amarm ā nīkya was pleased to see the army on the March.

The Portuguese armymen employed by Am ā rmanīkya were all Christians by religion. The Portuguese regiment settled at Udaipur, the then capital of Tripura, constituted the first Christian Population of Tripura in mid-16th century. But christianity remained confined to them in those days. Since that time the portuguese remained in service under the Tripur kings. When the capital was shifted to Agartala⁵ about 1760 – 61 A. D. by Mah ā r ā j Krishna mā nīkya, the portuguese armymen also came with him to the new capital—

-
2. R. M. III, P-27 (Amar mā nīkyn Khaṇḍa).
 3. Ras ānga was an oldname of Ar ā k ā n, which was a kingdom of the Moghs. vide R.M-II, P. 312 for further details.
 4. These twelve districts were ruled by twelve semi-independent rulers called B ā ra – Bhuiyans (or twelve landlords R. M. – III, PP 279 ff.
 5. Old Agartala or Puratan Haveli, now called Khayerpur, about 5 k. m. east of present Agartala Town.

**egāra sa sattair san
haila yakhan
Āgartalā rājdāni
Karila rājan.⁶**

—When it was 1170 Tripura era (= 1761 A. D.). The king founded his capital at Agartala.

The Portuguese soldiers settled at a place called Mairamnagar in between old Agartala and modern Agartala Town. This because the oldest christian village, a colony near Agartala.

In this connection the following extract of District Gazetteer may be noted⁷. The Portuguese who had settled in the neighbourhood of Satgaon in the second quarter of the 16th century, and had exercised considerable authority on the eastern and north-eastern coasts sided with the Moghs when they attacked Tripura during the reign of Mahārāj Amar mānikya (1577 – 85)⁸. To counteract the attack of the Moghs he raised a Portuguese artillery, and it was in this capacity that they settled at Udaipur, the then capital of Tripura. They were very loyal to the Tripura Rāj. They followed the fortunes of the Rājā, and when the capital was shifted to old Agartala, during the reign of Mahārāj Kṛṣṇa mānikya⁹. They also moved with the court, and settled at Mairamnagar or Mariamnagar as it is locally called. K. P. Sen says that the Portuguese soldiers were in service even during the reign of Mahārāj Bīrcandra Mānikya (1862–97). Later on the Tripura army was practically dissolved by the British, and the

6. R. M. IV, P – 51 (Krishnamānikya Khandā).

7. T. D. C. P. P. 387 – 388 (Mariam nagar).

8. The T. D. G. data of Amarmanikya here is(1877–85), and is obviously a misprint.

9. The T. D. G. here wrongly writes Krishna Kishore Manikya who was a much later king (1829 – 1849). He shifted the capital from old Agartala to the present site.

Portuguese soldiers settled in Mariamnagar turned into cultivators for their livelihood. They are still living there by this profession. They have established matrimonial relation with local Hindu women since the early days of their settlement there. So they are often called Indo-Portuguese. Their personal names are a mixture of Indian and Portuguese words e. g. Venu Moucher, Helen Moucher, Manika L āg ā rdu¹⁰ etc.

In these names the latter parts are Portuguese and the former Indian (Venu, Helen, Manik ā). They are christians as before. They have founded a church at Mariamnagar, which belongs to the Roman catholic sect. The present father¹¹ and the sisters of the church are all christians of Indian origin, recruited from different parts of India, Kerala, Meghalaya, Tripura etc.

So the early Portuguese settlers of Udaipur and Mariamnagar, Agartala are the first christian population of Tripura. By marrying Indian girls, they spread christianity among them gradually.

This is the first phase of christianity in Tripura. It was confined to the Portuguese population. The tribals of Tripura were not yet involved in this religion brought by the Portuguese settlers of Udaipur (16th century) and Mariamnagar near Agartala in the mid 18th century.

But it can not be said that the people were totally indifferent to this religion. Apart from the Portuguese settlers of Mariamnagar who were counted as ordinary army-men, British officers of high rank were frequently visiting the state capital.¹² The Tripur Rāj family also always contacted the British authorities of Calcutta for various problems and disputes about succession to the throne. All this had an effect

10. Shyamlal Deb Barma - Uchai, P-35.

11. or Portuguese Padre, Beng, Padri.

12. Udaipur and later on Agartala.

on the culture and religion of the people. Already Calcutta people were inclined to English education, English culture and christian monotheism with its nirākāra Upāsana (worship of God without image or idol). Even the great Śakta saint Rām Prasād who was in service at Calcutta at the time (mid 18th century) seems to have been influenced by the christian nirākāra Upāsana, as is evident from his song.

**dhātu pāśān matir mūrti
kaj ki retor se gathani ?
tumi monomay pratima gadi
basao hrdi padmā sane.**

—metal, stone and earthen images? What is the use of your such constructions? You should rather construct a mental image and install it on the lotus-seat of your heart.

Therefore it can be assumed that this trend spread to some extent also in the hills of Tripura where the British supremacy was established in 1761¹³ with the surrender of Kṛṣṇa māṅikya to the British army led by Lt. Mathews.

3. The Second Phase (1910–1970 A. D.)

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries passed without any tangible progress of christianity in Tripura. The Mariamnagar colony of portuguese christians, however continued. With the dawn of 20th century, strictly from 1910 – 11 A. D. hectic activities were started by Christian Missions for the propagation of this faith in the hills of Tripura. Most of the hill people of interior areas were poor, uneducated, ill-fed, ill-clad, and without any clear idea of religion. This was more applicable with regard to the tribals of the remotest areas, notably the kukis and lusāis of the North-East. The

13. Actually Feb. 25, 1761 (vide Gon-chaudhuri-Tripura the land and its people, P – 32, T. D. G. etc.)

early Christian Missions attempted to spread their religion among these tribals of interior areas.

Accordingly a christian mission from Manipur entered Tripura about 1910 to work among the poor Kuki tribe. It was known as the Thadu Kuki Mission of Manipur¹⁴. The Kukis were then living in the Jampui Hills of North Tripura. But the mission could not make much headway. About twenty five years passed then it occurred to a leader of the Mission that they should invite some foreign agency for the purpose. Accordingly in 1935 one Mr. H. Rankhal of the T. K. M.M Mission went in search of a foreign mission which could take up the work of preaching christianity among the tribals of Tripura. A foreign mission was soon discovered at Brāhmanbā diyā, a town in the erstwhile district of Tripperah, about 20 miles from Agartala. It was the Newzealand Baptist Mission (NZBM). Mr. Rangkhal invited the mission to come to Tripura and begin baptism work among the tribals. The mission accepted the invitation gladly and lost no time in sending a representative to Tripura. The missionary sent by the WZBM was Rev. Jones. He visited Tripura in 1935 and started work. By 1938 he obtained permission from the then Mahārāja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahādūr (1923-47) to preach christianity and establish a church. He was allowed to occupy a big plot of land at Arundhuti nagar, Agartala for establishment of the Church. Soon a church was constructed there, which exists till today. Rev. Jones was an enthusiastic worker and he was able to establish more than a hundred primary schools among the tribals by the year 1967, including the mission school at Arundhuti nagar Agartala.

14. Abbreviated T. K. M. M. (vide J. Gonchaudhury - Reāngs of Tripura P - 77.

According to some one H. Sailo of Jampai Hills embraced christianity as early as 1906, —A. M. Dutta P - 33. A study on the Lushai's of JAMPUI Hills in Tripura P - 33.

After this, the Government of Tripura began opening schools in tribal areas. So the foreign mission confined its work to preaching and opening churches only. During this period large scale conversions were made by the missionaries from among the tribals.

Apart from preaching christianity among the tribals, the foreign missionaries also secretly indoctrinated the tribal people politically. A feeling of separation was created among them. Noticing this, the Government of Tripura ultimately asked the foreign missionaries to quit the state.

As a result the foreign missionaries have left Tripura. But they have left behind able successors from among the Indian christians, who are continuing the work with the same zeal.

In the wake of the above mentioned mission of Newzealand, many other Baptist Missions have come and gone, such as the Anglican Church, Free Church of India, Baptist Christian Union, Roman Catholic Mission ect.¹⁵ They all have co-operated in propagating christianity, especially among the tribals. Though all of them have left Tripura physically, their connection with the christian establishments to Tripura is not cut off. They are patronising all baptist activities in Tripura. They are also financing the missionary work here. Lakhs of rupees are spent by them every year for the purpose. The chief donating countries are Newzealand, England, U.S.A. and Canada, out of this bigfund, the church and missionary schools are run and propaganda work and publication of christian literature are undertaken.

4. Distribution of Christianity among various tribes of Tripura.

As a result of long drawn missionary work in Tripura, there are christians in almost all the tribes of Tripura, though the number is not equal in all communities. There are some tribes

15. J. Gonchaudhuri - op. cit P - 77

who top the list as to the number of population professing christianity. They are the Lusāis (or Mizos) and the Kukis, as has already been pointed out.

4. (a) Christianity among the Lusāi people.

The Lushāi or Lusāi people live in the Jampui Hill in North Tripura. They are also called 'Mizo' today. They originally lived in the Lusāi Hills, now called Mizoram. From there they entered the Jampai Hills of Tripura, which is adjacent to Mizoram. The impact of christianity on the Lusāi people of Tripura is great says A. M. Dutta, a writer on the Lusāis of Tripura.¹⁶ According to him the christian missionaries came to them to help them in education and many other fields, and side by side, they preached christianity. The first batch of christian cultivators from Lusāi Hill entered Tripura in 1912. Their number was only forth. They came with the Lusāi chief Hranvungn who also settled in Tripura with one thousand followers. By 1917, the number of Lusāi christians in Tripura rose to 380

Jampai-1	—	100
Jampai-2	—	180
Jampai-3	—	50
Sakhan Tang Hill	—	50
TOTAL	—	380

In the census of 1931 out of 2175 Lusāis of Tripura, 2102 people were recorded as christians, only 73 persons remaining non-christians i. e. Hindus. With the March of time the entire Lusāi people of Tripura embraced christianity.¹⁷

In the census of 1971, the number of Lushāis was approximately 3700 and in the next census (1981), this

16. Vide his study on the Lusāis of Jampai Hills in Tripura Page-18.

17. *ibid* P. 18 (Last para)

number remains almost the same. The figures of 1991 census are yet to come.

So, we see that the Lushāi christians are taking almost all of them as christians.¹⁹ The Jampai Hill, which is the main habitation of the Lusāis of Tripura, is divided into ten villages, phuldungsāi, Vāngmun ect. The hill is about 30 miles in length and two miles in breadth. So these ten villages have an average area of $3 \times 2 = 6$ sq. miles each. Each village is populated mostly by the Lushāis and in a small degree by the Riāngs. Each village has a church. The village phuldungsāi is regarded as the model village of Jampai Hills. It has three churches – two for the Lushāis and one for the Riāng christians. In this village all Lushāi are christians and some of the Riāngs are Hindus. The Lushāis are portestant christians under the Newzealand Baptist Mission (NZBM). In the Lusāi churches prayer or service is held thrice a week, on Wednesdays and Thursdays, besides the usual Sundays. This is noteworthy. Hindu influence may be at the root. V estern christianity has given priority to work and relagated re igious activities to a day of no work. Tribal christians of Trpura have given more importance to religion than their western counter parts. The local language is the medium of service. Drum beating and music¹⁹ accompany the prayer. Three main festivals are observant – Christmas, Good Friday and Easter. But one notable fact is that the church is mainly attended by the old people, the women and children. The young men seem to be more interested in the youth club of the village. Most probably they seek some other alternative.

The Lushāi christians get rich presents,²¹ from the christian church authorities of Newzealand on the occasion of big festivals.

18. A. M. Dutta says 'All Lusais are christians in the village of phuldunge sai (Jampai Hill) vide his study of the Lusais of Jampai Hill. Page – 36

19. Religious songs.

21. Clothes, friuts etc.

For higher education the Lushāis go to Newzealand, Shillong, Aizal etc., where they study in the medium of English, even when reading in a school or college of Tripura. This is due to their christianity and missionary influence.

Even Lusāi christian family performs baptism of their boys and girls at the age of fifteen. This is age of Upanyana of Brāhmana boys according to Manu.

**ā sodasā d brāhmansya
sā bitrī nā tivartate²².**

—upto sixteenth year in the case of brāhmanas the time limit of initiation or Upanayana does not expire.

Since the counting of sixteenth year begins from the day of conception, sixteenth year actually falls in the 15th year of age. It is not clear whether there is any connection between the age of Lusāi baptism and that of brāhmanical Upanayana. But the similarity is remarkable.

It is said that upto 1870 the Mizos or Lusāis professed a religion which was a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism. In the year 1871, the Mizos attacked a tea garden near Silchar. There they killed the British Manager Mr. Winchester and kidnapped his daughter.²³

This enraged the British Government and a British army was deployed to deal with the Mizos. The army rescued the girl and struck terror into the heart of the tribals. This led to their gradual submission to the British Government and adoption of christianity. They invoke Jesus Christ as the supreme Deity for bliss and happiness of all living beings.²⁴

4. (b) The Kukis

The Kuki tribe is one of the 19 scheduled tribes of Tripura. They stand 8th in respect of population among the nineteen scheduled tribes.

22. Manu Smṛti, 2/38

23. Tripurār Lusai Kukir Itikatha (Published by the Govt. of Tripura). P. P. 51 - 52.

24. The tribes of Tripura P - 25 (Published by the Govt. of Tripura).

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23. Tripurār Lusai Kukir Itikatha (Published by the Govt. of Tripura). P. P. 51 - 52.

24. The tribes of Tripura P - 25 (Published by the Govt. of Tripura).

Their number was about 8000 as per 1971 census. They are a branch of the Lushāis. But according to the old records the term Kuki is wider and it includes many tribes Lusāi, khāsiā ect.

Lucidafa ek kuki

Khucu dafa ar kṛṣṇamātā

—Lucidafa (Lusāi) is a kuki tribe and khuen dafa (Khāsiā) another. They were known as “Khacak” to the Bengalee population of the plains of Tripura, Sylhet and other adjoining districts of erstwhile Tripura, now included in Bangladesh. The Khacaks (Kukis) were a terror to the Bengalees, for they often raided Bengalee villages of the plains. Their attack on fifteen villages of Khandal pargana in Noakhali district and the havoc perpetrated there in the year 1860 remain in the memory of the people like a nightmare. A brave Muhammedan leader of the area named Guna gāgi gave a tough fight with the help of a small team of gunmen, and was able to drive away the raiding Kukis that day. But for his reckless bravery, the kukis would have devastated the district totally. A poet has sung—

Gunagazi āila sāji
sephāi sange kari
Tiprā Kuki phirāila
banduk āoyaj karē²⁵

—Guna gazi came well equipped together with a number of sipāhis (fighters). He drove back the Tiprās and Kukis by firing his guns.

The word Kuki is now rarely used. This is probably because of their early history of frequent raids and violent activities. They also had the habit of wearing almost no clothes. Some of them were Starknaked. This habit still persists among the tribe to some extent in interior areas. Even the Kuki women are seen in jungles without any upper garment. The phrase

25. Vide - Tripurār Lusāi Kukider tikatha - P - 47 (Published by the Govt. of Tripura).

“Lengt ā Kuki” (the naked Kuki) is still used in rural areas with regard to any boy or girl or any madman who goes naked. This indicates that the Kukis remained naked in the past.

For all these reasons the word Kuki is not now in general use. Instead the new word D ā rlong (or D ā rlong Kuki) is used. This word is also used as a surname by the members of this tribe.

By religion, the Kukis were originally semi Hindus. They worshipped many tribal deities, gradually they have adopted Hinduism. Since 1931 it is noted that some of the Kukis adopted christian religion. The number of christians among the Kukis or Darlongs have since then increased to a great extent, though the number of Hindus among them is still greater.

The following table will show the comparative strength of Christians and Hindus among this tribe

Year	Number of Kukis	Hindu	Christian
1921	4005	4005	Nil
1931	1479	1207	172
1941	1522	1522	Nil
1961	5531	3185	2345
1971	7775	3000 (approx)	4000 (approx)
1981	5500	3000 (approx)	2500 (approx)

It is clear from the above table that the Hindu-Christian ratio among the Kukis is almost 50 = 50. The tribe is not yet fully baptised like the Lush āis. The Kukis living in close contact with the Lus āis in North Tripura are christians by association. Those living with the Hindus, either tribals or Bengalees, are Hindus.

According to some most of the Kukis have embraced christianity.²⁶ But this may not be accepted as a fact. For, as has been noted above, there are many Hindu Kukis worshipping Hindu Deities as well as their own sepecial deities.²⁷

26. The Tribes of Tripura - P - 22 (Govt. of Tripura).

27. Pathien, Rodona ect.

4. (c) Garos

The Gāro population of Tripura is almost equal to the Kuki population (about 6000). The Garos are divided into four sections or sects in respect of religion. These are sonsadrik, Baptist, Catholic and Hindu, the first one is semi-Hindu, and the second and third sections are christians. In the recent past a large number of the Garos have embraced christianity.²⁸ Their number may be approximately three thousand or about 45 - 50% of the total Garo population of Tripura, the rest being Hindus worshipping Hindu deities.

The Gāros are almost equally distributed in the three districts of Tripura - North - 2930 South - 3000 (approximately) and West district.²⁹ 1500 (approximately). Many Gāros have left Tripura far Gāro Hills owing to pressure from political party.³⁰ Otherwise their number would be greater, The Gāros of the Gāro Hills are in close contact with the Bengalee Hindu population of Mymensing and Rangpur districts of Bangladesh. So they are well acquainted with Hindu culture and religion. Hindu sadhus have founded Ashramas among the Gāros there. Swami Nigamananda's Ashram at Kadaldhoyā and Swami Yogānanda's Ashram called Gārohill Yogāashram are important Hindu religious sites among the Gāros, who render valuable service to the sadhus. Thus the Gāros have acquired a pro-Hindu religious attitude and christianity could not make much progress among them. This is the trend in Tripura also. That many of them³¹ embrace and do embrace in Christianity, is partly due to the indifference of the Hindu Sādhus who prefer to establish Ās'ramas in urban areas and live a cosy life there.

28. The Tribes of Tripura, P - 24 (Govt. of Tripura)

29. As per 1981 census vide Tathyapanji Nirdesika published by the Tripura Darpan, 1989 P - 27.

30. J. Gonchavelhay - Tripura P - 27

31. Also other tribal people.

Had they set up their Ashramas in the forests like the ancient Munis and Rsis the hill people would certainly their religion. In the absence of this, and owing to the Christian Missionaries service among the hill people in the difficult hill terrains, the tribals are being converted to christianity having no other alternative. Even the great R. K. Mission is setting all their schools at Agartala Town, but not in the hills. How will the tribal people be attracted to these town-based religious Institutions. The Christian Missionaries are filling this gap in such interior and adverse areas. They set up churches in hills and towns both. If the Hindu sadhus of today do not change their modus operandi, the tribal people will have to quence their religious thirst by the foreign missionaries as these hill people get immediate service from them. Ancient saints of India did not fear to live among the Asuras³² of the hills. They performed sacrifices there. Why are the modern Hindu sadhus averse to hill life and fond of town life only? this paves the way to christianity.

4. (d) The Riāngs :

As to the religion of the Riāngs it is noted that the majority of them belongs to Hinduism. While a "growing minority"³³ is christian. According to the census of 1981, there are about 5000 christians³⁴ among the Riāngs of Tripura out of the total Riāng population of over 80000³⁵ in the state. This is $\frac{1}{16}$ of the Riāng Population and is not much compared to Lusāi christians. Most of the christian Riāngs live in the Jampai Hills as neighbours of the Lusāi christians. The plains dwelling Riāngs are mostly Hindus and worshipping Hindu

32. Actually tribals.

33. J. Gonchaudhury - Riāngs of Tripura P - 66.

34. Ibid. P - 76.

35. Tripura Darpan - Taithyapanji (1989). P - 27.

as well as tribal deities. There are M. L. As and Ministers from the Rīāng tribe, and some of them are Hindus.³⁶

4. (e) Other tribal christians

The above noted tribes are connected with christianity to a great extent. But the other tribes are not so. There are christian among other tribes also, but their number is negligible. Some educated tribals of these communities have adopted christianity as a fashion, as the educated Bengalees have the fashion of taking diksā from a modern Thākur or his Ās'hrama, notably the R. K. Mission. All this seems to be a hobby rather than real religious craving. Such fashion christians are there among the Tripurī's, Uchai and Hālām tribes. In the census of 1971 there were 520 christians among the Hālāms of Tripura out of a total of over 10000 Hālām population.³⁷ the remaining 18520 being Hindus. The number of christians from Tripurī and Uchai tribes is negligible. The Tripuris are holding high positions in the Tripura Administration and many of the then live in Agartala Town in close association with the Bengalee Hindus. the Tripur Rāj family also belongs to the Tripurī for they use the surname Debbarma or Debbarman like the Tripurī's, and the members of the royal family are all Hindus and supporters of Hinduism. This is a check to the Tripurī tribe in adopting christianity. It is quite probable that their example will encourage other tribes also to follow suit.

5. Christian Establishments in Tripura.

The Christian establishments in the state of Tripura are quite a few. These comprise the churches, schools and small centres of the christian missions. The biggest churches are at (a) Arundhutinagar, Agartala (b) Mariamnagar, a village, a

36. The Ex. Health minister Mr. Kasiram Riāng who is a Hindu.

37. J. Gonchaudhury - The Halams P - 22

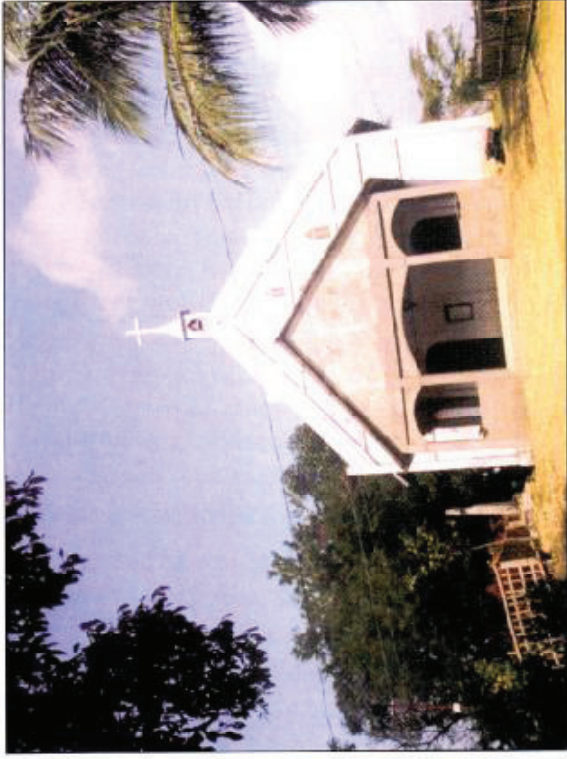


Photo of MARLAM NAGAR CHURCH (Agartala)

few miles North East of Agartala (c) phuldungsāi (Jampai Hill) and (d) vāngmun (Jampai Hill). The exact number of churches in all Tripura is not available, many of them being stationed in remote hill areas inaccessible to general public. Smaller Centres are there in several places including one at Amtali (Agartala) and another at Ganganagar in Dharmanagar sub-division about two miles from Dharmanagar Town. The place is known as Mission Tilla.

There are several schools at Agartala run by the christian mission. These are St. Paul's School, Holy Goss School, and another school near Amtali in the outskirts of Agartala on the Agartala Udaipur Road. The schools are all secondary schools and are of high standard. Rich people of the town and send their children to these schools for good knowledge of English and Western culture. Rudiments of christianity are also taught through various means. Teachers are mostly christians and they prefer christians in everything.

A visit to Mariamnagar church near Agartala sometime back was enlightening from many points of view. It was sunday and the weekly prayer was in progress. The devotees were sitting on the ground on a mat or something like that. There was a full size imagedressed in Skyblue sādē within the prayer hall. It looked like goddess Sarasvati, on enquiry it was given out that the image was that of Mary, the virgin mother of Christ.

This Sarasvatī-like image seemed to be a near approach to Hinduism. Village people are easily attracted to christianity by this goddess like image. Ignorant people may think that christianity is just another form of Hinduism, with a fine goddess to worship. It may be treated as a Hindu sect.

The congregation sang many songs and said many prayers. It all looked like the performance of any Hindu Ās'ram. Actually some people call this church an Ās'rama. In order to attract Hindu converts christianity of rural Tripura is thus

undergoing some metamorphosis, though this fact is not noticed by all. Lord Buddha has been accepted as an Avatara in Hinduism.³⁸ Jesus also may be treated as such. There are indications of christianity undergoing change in rural Tripura in Hindu milieu. Still christianity is a missionary religion universalistic in character and appeal, claiming to transcend all boundaries of caste, social position, nationality and race³⁹

Another thing that catches eye in the Sunday prayer in the Church is the absence of any talk or noise. Even in the short gaps between songs and prayers no talk is heard. All seem to be deeply absorbed in the prayer and songs.

At the end of the function, the Father or Pādrī Saheb who leads the prayer distributes "**Prasad**", called "**Khrīsta Prasād**" among the devotees present. All come to approach the Father one by one for the Prasād, and the Father puts into the mouth of each a piece of sweetmeat. On receiving the prasād, the devotees leave the hall in a queue silently and go home. The prasād is not given to any non-christian. On enquiry, I was told that one has to adopt christianity for receiving **Khrīsta Prasād**. This is a difference from the Hindu system. The Hindus distribute **prasād** to anybody willing to have it. However, the Father is kind enough to entertain outsiders with other things at his office room such as tea, cakes, jelly etc.

Another thing noticed is that the Father was silent about his own christian religion unlike some leaders of our religious sects who always speak of the superiority of their sects, which talk is regarded by them as "**Thākūr - Prasanga**" (a discourse on the Thākūr or saint). The Father abstain from such uncalled for preachings. But he is always ready to answer any question about the religion that may come from the visitor.

38. Vide Jay deva's Gītā Gobinda.

39. D. Miall Edwards The philosophy of Religion P - 130

The Mariamnagar Church has a big library which contains many valuable books and documents. The Father is liberal enough to issue these books to interested readers from outside for detailed study. One has to return the books within a reasonable time. This is a good service rendered by the Church authorities.

The Church missions in the hill areas also render other valuable services to the local public, such as supply of text books free of cost to the poor school students, free medical treatment, supply of baby food and the like. They also have published the Bible in kokborok or Tripuri Language⁴⁰. All this attracts people to the missions and the religion preached by them.

But it is also noted that the christian mission also foster extra-religious motives or aims. They want to make out of the tribal people an English speaking christian nationality demanding a separate administrative set up. On their instigation, the tribals demand Roman alphabet for writing the tribal languages, though the Bengali alphabet is widely used in Assam, Tripura and Manipur. The English alphabet will create a distance between the tribals and non-tribals and this will have an adverse impact on India's National Integration. This attitude of the foreign mission has been found out and this political motive has acted as a brake to the spread of christianity here. The political motive has got the better of religious aims. So the future of christianity here does not look bright so long as political motives are involved.

6. Christian Messages Preached.

Now, let us have some discussion on the christian messages Preached here by the foreign Missionaries. Whatever is preached by them is accepted by the hill people because practically they were without a religion. They were far from

40. P. N. Bhattacharjee - Kalai Sampraday - P - 101

general Hindu society. The Hindus dared not enter dense forests for fear of life at the hands of the Kuki tribes who were notorious head hunters. This Kuki people (including the Lushai) became isolated from the general Hinduism, and a great vacuum was created in them in respect of religion. So when the British arrived and with them foreign missionaries, the Kukis fell easy preys to them. They accepted christianity not as christianity but as a religion which they lacked. The first lesson that caught their eyes was the importance given to man and the service to mankind. So they became lame receivers and followers of christianity with all its doctrines preached by the missionaries.

The missionaries started various welfare work among the tribals and continued preaching side by side. Their first message was—

(i) **The importance of man.** They cited the example of Jesus who regarded man's life as extremely valuable. (St. Mark, 8. 34-37). This value to man was not given by preacher of Hinduism, except Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. His message of (**five preme**) "Love to all creaturers" was forgotten and hatred for the low and depressed reigned supreme. In the situation the message of equality of all mankind was highly welcome to the tribals. Various Biblical statements to the same effect were cited to emphasise the point 'God takes care of the birds, and you are of more valued than birds. He will take care of you.' (Matthew. 6. 25-33)

The importance of man was a great message of hope among the tribals, for they were looked upon by others as in significant hill people.

(ii) The next message is that there is one Almighty God above all. He is the father, and all men are his children. Here not only the idea of one God is given, but also a cordial relation between God and mankind is established. In Islam this relation is only a master-servant relation. But the relation of

father and son is sweeter and that is preached by christian missionaries. Master-servant relation also is admitted in christianity. In Hinduism these two types of relations and same other types⁴¹ are also admitted.

(iii) Jesus Christ is the prophet of the New age. He is the messiah and the servant of God. The words Christ and Messiah mean the something – anointed, the anointed person. It is almost equivalent to our word “abhisikta” or bathed and anointed for ascending throne or holding any post. The kings and priests of old Israil were anointed. So the Apostles believed that Jesus also was anointed for holding the Messianic position.

(iv) Jesus is the saviour of mankind. So all should accept the religion preached by him. They ask the people ‘repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for having your sins forgiven.’ This is a new call indeed. In other religion one has to enjoy the fruit of one’s action for all sins, the sinner has to suffer the consequence in hell or in some form of other. But here one can hope for forgiveness even for the sins committed. This of course is not totally a new message of the christians. Such a hope is also held out in the Bhagavad Gītā. in verses like –

**aham tvā m sarva papebhyo
moksayisyāmi mā sucah⁴²**

– I will redeem from all sins. Don’t worry.

**mām hī partha vyapās ritya
ye’ pi syuh papayonayah⁴³**

—Even if the sinning people resort to me, they too attain to the supreme goal.

41. In all five relations we admitted in Hinduism Śānta, dāsyā, sakhya, vātsalya, and madhura.

42. Gītā – 18/66

43. Ibit – 9/32

Jesus may be regarded as the Kṛṣṇa of the West because of the similarity of messages for the common people. Owing to passage of time our Kṛṣṇa's messages in the Bhagavata Gītā, was forgotten by the masses and it was lying in the pages of the Gītā text only. Hence arose the necessity of a similar message from the mouth of a modern man. It came from Jesus Christ. His apostles and missionaries carried this and other messages of Jesus to distant quarters of the world. In India these messages were accepted as a boon by the down trodden castes and communities including the tribes of Tripura.

5. With the belief in Christ as the Messiah of the new age, belief in the Gospel i. e. messages of the Bible is also preached. The common people mostly unlettered, were without a book, not to speak of a big religious book. But without a book containing the principle tenets of a faith it is not possible for ordinary men to grasp everything all on a sudden. So a holy book is a must in all religion. The christians have the Bible a book, also called the New Testament. This book was presented as the holy book and reverence to it was demanded.

For making the book (Bible) available to the new converts, translation of the holy text was undertaken in different Indian languages. These were distributed either free of cost or at a nominal price. English version were also distributed to the tribals of Tripura who learnt it. Recently the Church missions in the hill areas have published the Bible in Kokborok.

Thus unity of God, unity, of prophet and unity of scripture were preached. In this way a short digest of christianity was presented to the new converts. These unities have served to preserve unity among the religion (Christianity) for a long time. Otherwise schisms of various sorts would crop up by this and we would have diverse christian sects. The various churches founded by Missionaries of different countries in Tripura denote no sectarian difference. The three unities are strictly maintained by each.

6. Jesus is the son of God. This is also another doctrine as baffling as the Resurrection. Jesus called himself son of man, which is quite understandable. But more paradoxical is the statement & God sent forth his son, born of woman' (Gal. 4. 4. - 5) Jesus is son of God and at the same time son of woman. It is difficult for converts to grasp the real meaning of such terms and statements. They are to believe without a question, and actually this is happening. Here the Hindu way of thinking seems to be more reasonable when S'iva is regarded as God, his consort Kāli and sons Kārtika and Ganesa are also regarded as divine. None are regarded as half God and a woman. So the tern son of God as applied to Jesus will have to be understood in a secondary sense - a woman born man with divine inspiration in him. The Christian term half mythological and half human or of the world of reality. As a result, it will be difficult for converts of this country including the tribals of Tripura to have unflinching belief in such terms for a time. The full fledged Hindu mythology with its Vyūhavada or god families seems to have a stronger effect than the above half mythology of christian belief. This seems to be one of the potent causes of slow progress of Christianity here. The Kukis of North Tripura and other tribals of adjacent districts have stuck to this faith for about a century simply because they are aloof from the general Hindu Society and they had no religion with them. So whatever was presented to them by the Christian Missionaries was welcome to them in their hour of need. If Hindu religious preachers could enter the dense forests of these areas and started Ās'hrams, the tribals of Tripura would rather turn to these areas Ās'hrams and the Hinduism preached by them. Christianity has got more converts in the South India among the neglected and depressed classes who found Christianity as the Saviour from their age old oppressions. They did not embrace this faith as a more reasonable one than Hinduism.

7. The Kingdom of God is both present and future. By this it is meant that with Jesus Christianity has begun on earth and that is the Kingdom of God—Here God is the highest authority. All Christians believe in God as the King and the mankind especially the christian believers as his Kindgom. It is equal to the concept of a dharma rajya or Ram rajya of the Hindus. This is what is meant by the present Kingdom of God. But the kingdom has not been fully established as yet. All people have not been converted to this religion as yet. It will take more time to do so. People are therefore exhausted to listen to the message of the Bible brought by Jesus. They are exhausted to turn away from the Path of sin and turn to God and reorient. This lives accordingly, when more and more sinners will turn to God and embrace christianity, the kingdom of God will be realised in full. Much time will be required in this. But the Kingdom will come true. This is stated again and again in the Bible. The parable of the Mustard seed states that the proposed kingdom will acquire more and more extension in course of time. (Matthew 13. 31-32). In the next parable it is stated that the christian kingdom will permeater the entire human society. This is intended to inspire or encourage the new and prospective converts to christianity. This message of extension of the kingdom of God i. e. Christian religion on earth has come true to a great extent by this time for out of the five or six⁴⁴ continents of the world, all except Asia and parts of Africa have embraced the religion of Jesus by now.

But the term kingdom of God should be carefully understood. It does not necesarily mean the Christian religion but true religion with belief in God and observance of God's rules as preached by various prophets or sages, old and new. The way in which the term kingdom of God is interpreted by the Christian Missionaries here is not correct cent per cent. They

44. Taking South America as a Separate continent.

mean the Christian religion or the society is the Kingdom of God. Such was the mistake with the early Muhamedan preachers too, who held and preached that Islam is the true religion and all other faiths are paganism.

Now they have come to realise their error, and they no longer put forth their old claim. In the same way, the Baptist Missionaries also will have to re-interpret their kingdom of God in a new sense to include other religions also side by side with their faith. Otherwise they will keep in dark all their oriental converts, chiefly the tribal people of Tripura and adjacent areas, about the narrowness of the interpretation of kingdom of God, when the converts will someday get out of this mis-interpretation owing to the preachings of the Hindu religious preachers, this entire belief in Christianity may crumble down all on a sudden, and all may revert to Hinduism of the surrounding areas. So the missionaries should be careful before hand, and start giving the right interpretation of the Biblical messages. Any religion is included in the kingdom of God, present or future. so if anyone professes a religion, he should not be persuaded to give up that religion and embrace the Biblical religion as the true religion. The tribal people of interior areas, such as the Kukis, Nagas, Mizos etc.. of Tripura and adjoining areas were practically without any religion, as were the early Bedwins of Arabian deserts. So Christianity or Islam has been acceptable to them in the form it was presented. This does not rule out their possibility of shifting to some other faith in case any wrong idea was given to them by the early preachers.

8. God is the shepherd and the people are his sheep. (Luke 12, 32 : 15. 3-7). God looks after all mankind not excepting a simple one. There is no question of high and low, special privilege to some and cold neglect to others. God favours all mankind. God is not a careless shepherd, but a good shepherd. He looks after all his sheep carefully. He does not neglect even a single one of his flock on any pretext. This is highly

attracting to the down trodden people of all countries of the world.

As to the equality of all mankind before the Christian church, the following line of the Bible is noteworthy.

There cannot be Greek or Jew
circumcised or uncircumcised
barbarian, seythian, slave, freeman,
but Christ is all and in all.

(Col. 3.11; also vide Gal 3, 28)

The discrimination of man and woman is also not made in Christianity. All are equal (Gal 3.28)

9. It is also preached or proclaimed that Jesus will come again. His work has remained unfulfilled. Jesus has drought in the new age, but it is still in its dawn. Jesus will come again to consummate the age, that is, lead it to its climax. The world is not yet freed from hatred between man and man. In order to do it Jesus will appear again on earth in a new form, a new messiah or Incarnation as the Hindus say the Kalki Avatar will arrive to restore peace to the world. This tendency is noted also in some modern Inidan religious sects. They say their Thakur will again appear in another form. Ramkrishna is believed to have been as Anukul Thakur.⁴⁵ The followers of Prabhu Jagadbandhu believe that their Thakur, dead 50 years back, will arise again.

10. It was preached that Jesus went about doing good and healing all. (Acts 10 - 38) so service to suffering humanity for their welfare and upliftment is an imperative necessity in Christianity. The Missionaries set examples there or undertaking various welfare activities such as founding schools, health centres, free-medical help and so on. This also became an incentive for baptism. Such welfare activities are found in some other Indian Missions too, but probably the original inspiration was derived from the foreign missionaries.

It is the Christian Missionaries in this country, who first showed the path of public service as a mode of divine worship. The service has been name “**Daridra Narayan Seva**” by an Indian Mission, and “Bharat Seva”, by another. It is noted in the above quotation from the Bible that Jesus himself wandered about doing good to others. He taught the lesson to others by practising it himself, as our Mahaprabhu did—
apani acari dharma

jivere sikhay.

—he practised dharma himself and there by taught mankind.

The missionaries too did it and Christians and religious minded people are to do it. This was an important religious preaching which had a great bearing on the Society at large.

● **Conclusion :**

It is to be noted that out of the total 6,00,000 tribal population, only 24,000 and old people profess Christianity. This shows that only 4% of the tribals are Christians. This is not much. It is also a noteable fact that there are no external faith among the tribals inspite of the fact that the Mughals of Bengal ruled at Udaipur for quite sometime after the fall of Yasadharmanikya in 1618 A. D. during the reign of Emperor Jahangir at Delhi.

Probably the frequent Muslim invasions against Tripura beginning with those of Hussain Shah in the early 16th century created a bitter antipathy among the tribals towards the Mughals and Pathans and their religion.

The tribals preferred to remain within their tribalism cum Hinduism and join their fate with the Hindus in Weal and Woe. They remained Hindus for all along, Only as late as the second decade of the present century (20th) the tribals partly leased towards christianity and yet uptill now only a small fragment of them has embraced this faith. This is partly due to indifference of the Hindu religious leaders towards the hill

people, as already pointed out. This Christian Missions of foreign countries have capitalised this situation, and succeeded in converting a small percentage of the tribals, especially the Lushais and Kukis of the Jamai Hills bordering on the Lusai Hills (now called Mizoram). However, Christianity is a fact among the tribals of Tripura as one of their religion today, especially among the tribals of the northern border and some difficult interior areas.

According to N.K. Bose⁴⁶. It (Christianity) came clothed with the civilizing mission of the West and not merely a religious reformation. Shri O.S. Adhikari⁴⁷ observed that Christianity has brought the message of richer life, a wider companionship and a new sense of dignity of converts. Dr. Suchintya Bhattacharya opined that the effect of Christian education in Missionary schools is far worse. The tribals begin to imitate the European Missionaries in dress and talk and draws inspiration not from own culture but from European culture. Coming back to his village he begins to look down upon the non-Christians backward and ignorant folk.⁴⁸

46. N. K. Bose — Some Indian Tribes, p-145.

47. O.S. Adhikari — Four Immigrant Tribes, p-6.

48. Dr. S. Bhattacharya, The Kaipengs, p-79. (Published by the Govt. of Tripura).

**METAPHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL
TRADITION**

1. Introductory :

It has been said that there is no man without a philosophy. The question is not of philosophy or no philosophy, but of good philosophy or bad philosophy.

Everyone has a philosophy however rudimentary of undeveloped it may be. From this point of view even the primitive men and the tribal people have a philosophy including some metaphysical and spiritual thinking. As water flows from high lands and inundates lower lands, so does culture and cogitation raidate from upper and enlightened circles to some extent among the undeveloped sections of humanity. Some sages aries among all groups of mankind, and give them a lesson on some sort of philosophy.

In the primitive age men ate raw meat. Later on somehow they learnt to eat roasted meat when some men discovered fire. Then long after their men came and learnt to cook meat in utensils. Such men flourished in all walks of life and taught more and more advanced lessons. In this way philosophical thoughts grew and gradually developed more or less in all humanity not excluding the hill people, we call 'tribal', as a matter of course, that is, by the slow process of evolution. Thus arose the so-called animism, totemism, fetishism, etc. among the primitive people which still hang about the backward communities including tribal people.

This is the earliest phase of metaphysical and spiritual thoughts. The tribal people have not yet preceeded much with Metaphysical thinking. The reason is obvious. It is extreme poverty. They are unable to earn their daily bread even by the sweat of their brow. The semi-barren hill land around them

is too unmanageable for them to give them a good livelihood. Being hard-pressed with the thoughts of food and clothing of the fare necessities of life, they find little time for higher thinking.

So, we do not expect the Aryan monism of the Upanishad or the idealism of Hegel in their metaphysics. They are as yet lying with the early Vedic Nature-worship of Naturalism for the most part.

Another bottle-neck in the way of development of Philosophical thoughts among the tribals is the absence of writing and written literature among them. Whatever thinking grows among the tribal people dies out with the death of the profounders and no advancement can be made on its basis by the future generations. The few educated tribals have studied western literature and Philosophy in the English Language. But their own philosophical thinkings or metaphysical ideas remain where they were in the long past. If tribal languages could be developed and education would stread among the tribals, much new metaphysical ideas could be expected in their writings.

2. Sources of Tribal Metaphysical Thoughts

Besides tribal beliefs and metaphysical conception, there are three types of literature of ancient Tripura from which metaphysical thoughts of the Tripura tribes can be gleaned. These are —

(a) Some epigraphical records in Sanskrit. (b) The **Rajmālā** (in Bengali and Sanskrit) which is a poetical work on the history of the Kings of Tripura (c) The folk-lore of the tribal people¹ which was never written down till recent years but handed down through verbal transmission.

1. Vide — N. Deb Barma — *Prācīn Tripurī Lok-Sangīit Sankalan.*
S. Chakraborty and S. Banerjee *Riāng* (in Bengali) PP-46 ff.
J. Gonchaudhury — *Tripura* PP. 169 ff etc.

The epigraphical records are obtained from various sources old temples and tombs of kings and queens of Tripura and else where. These writings were made by the orders of the ruling monarchs of different times. Since these monarchs belonged to the Tripuri Tribe, the writings made by their orders, of course go to the credit of this tribe indirectly. These Sanskrit verses were composed by the Sanskrit Pandits of the Bengalee Community whose names however, are lost to us in most cases. But these were readout and explained to the ruling monarchs and their high officials belonging to the tribal society. Thus the contents of these epigraphic writings had the approval of the ruling class, and the metaphysical ideas contained there in may be taken to have been admitted by the tribal chiefs. We shall point out the salient metaphysical aspects of these epigraphic records as far as possible.

The 'Rājmaḷā', though a historical writing, contains stray passages or religion and philosophy of the Tripur kings and their tribal subjects. These also will be pointed out. By the way, the name of Tripurī high priest,² Durlabhendra is attached as one of the authors of the 'Rājmaḷā'.³ Therefore, the philosophical tenets contained in it, of course, become admitted by the high priest.

The folklore of the tribal people is a collection of beliefs, songs and tales. It is collected in part by contemporary investigators of Tripura, and these also contain some metaphysical and spiritual thoughts.

Dr. J. Gonchaughury writes⁴—'The people have a rich storehouse of folk-lore-myths, legends, tales, beliefs, songs, ballads etc.....There is an explanation for every natural Phenomenon and the origin of everything deities, demons, witches, human beings, birds and animals. Each community

2. Called contāi in Tripurī language.

3. The other, two authors of the earliest volume were Bānesvar and S'ukres'var, who were Bengalees.

4. Dr. J. Gon Chaughury — Tripura p-160.

has its cosmogony which may be a little different from that of others.

We shall refer to some of these compositions forming part of the Tripuri folklore⁵ in course of our discussion on Tribal Metaphysical and spiritual tradition in the State of Tripura. These compositions are mostly in the tribal languages and without a translation, it is not possible for non-tribals to understand and appreciate them. Luckily we have a Bengali translation of a portion of the folklore made by competent authors, to our great benefit.

3. Epigraphic Records

Inscription of Dhanya Mānikya

An Inscription of Maharaj Dhanya Mānikya (1490-1515 A.D.) quoted in the 'Rājmaḷā' (Dhanya-mānikya Khanda) and originally found on the wall of Tripura Sundari Temple, Udaipur⁶ runs as follows :

**MayaMurarer iyam Ambikaya
Muncatva Musva nikatam nakutra
Prante Bhavanya dhruvam asa Kesavah
Sri Dhanya Manikya Viniscitistvian.⁷**

The Goddess Ambikā is a form of Visnu nowhere leaves her company. Kesava certainly stays by the side of Bhavāni. O Dhanya mānikya, this is the firm conviction (of us all)

The last line is deciphered as :

Sri Dhanya mānikya Katham to vismitha? by C. Vidyavinod. In that case the meaning is : Why do you wonder

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5. We mean the folklore of various tribes of Tripura, not only the Tripuri tribe, though this is the main tribe numerically and from other considerations.
 6. Vide RM-II (Ed. K.P. Sen) p. 30 "Math-madye Pathare likhila ei loke" (This verse was written on a stone slab in the temple).
 7. In the Silalipi-Samgraha (by C. Vidyavinod) the last line has a different reading.Katham tu vismitah (why do you wonder?) with little difference in the contents.

O Dhanya mā nīkya? This shows that Dhanya mā nīkya had a little doubt about the identity of the Goddess and Viṣṇu. But such doubt is natural among the laymen of this country⁸ who are accustomed to worship of various Gods and Goddesses, Śiva, Durgā, Viṣṇu, etc. without any of thought of the ultimate unity of all names and forms.

King Dhanya mā nīkya had constructed a temple for Lord Viṣṇu. But before installation of an image of Viṣṇu there he dreamt a dream where the Goddess Kālikā asked the king to instal an image of the Goddess in that temple bringing it from the cattles'vari Devi temple at Cātigram (chittagong). Accordingly the idōl of goddess was brought from there and placed in newly constructed Viṣṇu temple at Udaipur⁹. So the king might have some hesitation in his mind about the propriety of the act.

The verse in the aforesaid Inscription is obviously intended to remove this hesistation from the mind of the kind as well as other people who might have fostered similar hesitation about the identity of both deities¹⁰. It may be that the king had spoken out his mind to the learned courtiers of his royal Assembly and some Philosophically bent member of the court removed the doubt in the kings mind by explaining the ultimate unity of all gods and goddesses Viṣṇu, Kāli etc. and this fact is summed up in the verse of the Inscription.

The religio-philosophical conceptions attaching to the verse are; (a) Viṣṇu, Kali etc. are the gods and goddesses, admitted and worshiped by the Tripur kings and their subjects, (b) The various gods and goddesses are not different in the ultimate analysis but are the names and forms of ultimate Reality. (c)

8. i.e. Hindus — tribal and non-tribal.

9. The town was called 'Rāṅgamāti' at that time.

10. Viṣṇu, Kāli.

The conception of *māyā* (illusion or illusory creation) is also perhaps admissible here on the evidence of the word 'māyā' in the verse. The Goddess is called a *māyā* or form of Lord *Viṣṇu*; (d) *Murāri* or *Viṣṇu* is regarded here as the highest Deity but the Goddess is also a form of *Viṣṇu*. In other words the supreme Reality may be called by the name *Viṣṇu*, (e) Hence, obviously *Vaiṣṇavism* and *S'āktaism* were favoured by king *Dhanyamānikya*. Though he had no objection to the worship of other deities favoured by other sects. The Philosophy in the above verse may be called *S'ākta-vi-S'ēstā-davaitavāda*. This is why he founded also *s'aiva* and *Vaiṣṇava* temple¹¹, besides the *s'ākta* temples.

From this it may be surmised that *Vaiṣṇavism* too was striking root among the tribes of Tripura from that time. It was a new religion for them. The *S'ākta* religion or *Devi* worship characterised by bloodshed is similar to general tribal worship where various animals are sacrificed. But *Vaiṣṇavism* steers clear of all bloodshed, which fact, is quite novel to the tribals. Yet the kings attraction for this religion is a notable fact. It indicates a general trend of the tribals towards this new religion.

It is doubtful whether *Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism* preached by *Gourāṅga Mahāprabhu* (1485-1535 A.D.) reached Tripura by the time of *Dhanyamānikya* (1490-1515). Both were contemporary. *Mahāprabhu* left home at the age of 24 in the year 1509 A.D. and spent six years in touring. India i.e. upto the year 1515 the year of *Dhanyamānikya's* death. He was preaching his *Vaiṣṇavism* all throughout this period and even later. His disciples and devotees of Bengal visited him at *Nilāchal*

11. *Svayambhunath Temple* (*S'iva*), *Bhuvanēsvarī Temple* (*Kali*) etc. The image of *Bhuvanēsvarī* was made of a large amount of Gold (one maund) vide R.M-II p. 29

(Modern Puri) every year and came back enlightened by his teachings. It is not unlikely that Mahā Prabhu's religion was carried to Tripura by some Bengalee Vaisnavas during Dhanyamānikya's later days. The Bangalee immigration to Tripura started as early as the reign of Ratnamānikya.¹²

Hence there is every possibility of Gauḍīya Vaisnavism reaching Tripura in the early 16th Century. Whatever the source of Vaisnavism of thinking,¹³ the fact remains that he was a lover of that religion. At the same time he admitted the unity of all deities and all Hindu sects. He seems to have a predilection for Sankar's monism and Māyāvāda as evident from the verse in the Inscription.

An Inscription of Kalyān mānikya.

Now we shall cite an Inscription of Kalyān mānikya. It was found in the Gopināth Temple at Udaipur. The first verse of the Inscription gives the religion and Philosophy of the king. The verse eulogises viṣṇu and runs as follows :

Yatpāde Vinatā girindra Pavanendu-

Kādayo maulibhih

Yam devā api Cintayanti Satatam

brahmānda - bhāndāntāre

Yat-kirtem Suvinita-Kandhartayā

Gegiya mana trayi

tatpāde bhavetārāni dbhuta-matham

Kalyanadevo bhyadāt.¹⁴

- Mahārāj Kalyān Mānikya dedicated a wonderful temple to the world - saving foot of Lord Gopinatha¹⁵, to which — the Mountain Chief Himālaya, the wind God, the Moon God and

12. Latter half of 15th century.

13. Dhanyamānikya.

14. Vide Ś'ilālipi-Samgraha (of C. Vidyāvinod.)

15. Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu.

others bow their head low. All the Gods in the entire creation mediate on Him at all times. The thrice Vedas sing his glory over and over again in a very polite manner.

In this verse we see that Viṣṇu is enlised as the Supreme Deity. All other gods are sub-ordinate to Him. Even the Vedas glorify Him as the Highest Brahmana. Thus the idea expressed in the previous Inscription of Dhanya-mānikya and the idea contained in this Inscription of Dhanya-mānikya and the idea contained in this Inscription of Kalyān mānikya are almost the same. Devi or Viṣṇu is the God of all Gods. Spiritual unity in the diversity of a creation is the ultimate truth.

The Inscription was, doubtless, composed by a Sanskrit pandit, and the Philosophy reflected in it was primarily his own Philosophy. But without the sanction of the king, it was not possible to affix the epigraph on the temple constructed by the king. The contents of the epigraph must have been read out and explained to the king before hand. Therefore it may be admitted that the Philosophy involved in it was accepted by the king too as also his courtiers and other important figures of his cricle.

The Philosophy of the above epigraphic records is mainly the Philosophy of the Royal family of Tripura of the 16th and 17th Centuries and it was obviously derived from the Bengalee Scholars of the serving in the court of the Tripura kings. So this Philosophy ultimately is traceable to Indian Philosophy of the type of qualified monism as preached by Rāmānuja.

But how far this Philosophy was known or admitted by the general tribal population of Tripura of the day is a question. However, it makes little difference. For even in other societies, Philosophy is always confined to higher circles, and the common masses are generally in the dark about the various Philosophies of their own race or any people. Common people

remain satisfied with various religious rites and care little about the Philosophy behind. Therefore the general tribal people are scarcely to be blamed if they did not share the Philosophical thoughts of the royal family of their race and other dignatories. But we shall see later on that the tribal people of Tripura are not totally bereft of metaphysical and spiritual thinking in their own way, though they may not be aware of any system of Hindu Philosophy such as the Vaisnava Philosophy of Rā mā nujā and so on. In view of the above, the Philosophical thinking contained in the above quoted verses of temple Inscriptions may be regarded as a part of tribal Philosophical thought, though confined to the royal family and tribal origin but imported from outside.

4. Metaphysical and Spiritual beliefs of the tribals :

On investigation it transpires that the tribal people of Tripura have some metaphysical and spiritual thinking of their own. In the absence of any written literature among them one can not be sure about the date of origin of such thinking among the people. Both, possibilities are there—that of an early date and a late date. Here the following observation of a Western Scholar¹⁶ deserves notice—“Some have maintained that lurking at the back of the savage mind is a conception of a Supreme Spirit over and above them all¹⁷ while the savage peopled the universe with spirits in accordance with his general animistic outlook, by another channel, through a kind of intuition, he placed an All-Father or maker of all in the Supreme place far above the world of spirits, they have a Supreme Being. It is true that the idea of a Great God in the dim background of things is not uncommon among savages. But the idea is not at all a primitive one, and indicates a more or less advanced phase.

16. D. Miall Edwards - *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 101-102 : also Andrew Lang.

17. = Other smaller spirits.

..... nor do they worship, this remote being. He is, " an absentee Deity".

From the above observation of the learned Scholar it appears that the idea of God among the tribal people is not a very ancient idea but is a later development. Belief in spirits and even Supreme spirit in a nebulous form among the tribals dates from hoary past. But a clear cut idea and worship of the Supreme Being among them come into being later on, if at all.

The case with Indian tribals, however is a bit different, even admitting the above tenet as a fact. The tribals side by side with this Indo-Aryan neighbours right from the Vedic age (1500 B.C.). The enlightenment that dawned on the Aryans must have spread at least to some extent the tribes too. Therefore their idea of Spirits and a Supreme Spirit can be dated from the pre-Christian era, whereas that of the tribals of the West must be post Christian affair.

The tribals of India including those of Tripura have come in contact with the ancient faiths of India-Hinduism and Buddhism and they can not but derive some metaphysical conception from these faiths. Most of them have adopted Hinduism and a good number of their Buddhism. This fact also indicates their love for metaphysical and spiritual doctrines prevailing in these faiths. Thus there has always been a metaphysical and spiritual tradition among the tribals of Tripura (and elsewhere) from time immemorial. Even in their own tribalism there are found traces of this tradition. This will be made clear in the following sections of this Chapter.

4. (a) Metaphysical Conception of the Tripuri Tribe.

CONCEPTION OF GOD

The Tripuris believe in a Supreme Deity or God and a number of other deities. The Supreme Deity is called

Matāikatār.¹⁸ He has a consort called Matāi Katārmā.¹⁹ This seems to be, a reflection of the Hindu Conception of Ś'iva-S'akti, Laksmi - Nārāyana, Rādhā Kṛṣṇa etc., where Ś'iva, Nārāyana, and Kṛṣṇa are regarded as the Supreme Deity and S'akti (= Kāli or Durgā), Lasmi and Rādhā are their consorts, called S'akti (energy). Though Matāi Katār is regarded as the Supreme God, it is not made clear whether other Gods and Goddesses are Sub-ordinate to Him or what relation prevails between the Supreme Deity and the other deities. The relation remains vague, and for the matter of that, the idea of Supreme Deity (Matāi Kātār) also becomes vague, so that, matāi Katār may be regarded as a 'great God' only like Mahādeva of the Hindus Trinity but not the Supreme Being. Again in the famous caturdas'h devatā Pūjā (Worship of fourteen deities) of Tripura, the so-called Supreme Deity Matāi Katār is not included in the Pantheon, where Hara or Ś'iva is number one. This also shows that Matāi Katār is just the name of a deity, but not the Supreme Deity, yet some regard Him to be the Supreme Deity.²⁰ Probably this is a recent view not founded on sufficient ground. The position of the Matāi Katār (Chief god) seems to be similar to the prominent Vedic deities, Indra, Varuna etc., None of whom were regarded as the Supreme Lord overall other deities but all were looked upon as Supreme by their devotees. The Idea of an all-Pervading Supreme Being developed later on in some rare passages of the Rgveda Samhita and the unity and Supremacy of God head was clearly stated in numerous passages of the Upanisad texts.

18. Matai - god ; Katār = Chief.

19. D. P. Debbarman = Treatise on Traditional Social Institutions of the Tripuri Community, p-52.

20. D. P. Debbarman = op. cit p-52 Matāi Katār is the Supreme deity.

So Tripurī Matāi Katār may be compared to Vedic Indra, Varuna and the like but not to the Upanisadic Ātman or Brāhman.

BELIEF IN LESSER SUPERNATURAL BEINGS OR SPIRITS

The Tripuris also believe in lesser super-human beings, usually evil in character. These spirits, they say, haunt deserted houses, some kind of trees, road crossings, old ponds, jungles and such other deserted spots. These spirits may be compared to angles and evil spirits of other religions.²¹ Such spirits are mentioned in the old Vedic theology also, who are called *ṛāstu-pati*, *Ksestra-Pati*²² etc. The Philosophically important fact here is that the Tripuris believe in a world of spirits which is a metaphysical or spirit world. This physical world is not all. There is a subtle spirit world too where the invisible and incorporeal spirits dwell. This is the *Sūksma jagat* or subtle world of the Hindu eschatology. This world is also called the "bhūvarloka" or the world of just beyond the material world or *bhūloka*. This is one of the seven²³ succeeding world, one above the other of the Hindu Cosmogony or Scheme of creation of both the gross or material world and the subtler heavenly world. The spirits of the Tripurī Conception, however, are small beings compared to the angelic beings of the semitic religions, who are often very powerful. The Tripuri spirits are not given any names, and are regarded as causing disease and other harms to man. So people, especially women and children have to avoid all haunted spots for fear of this spirit world.

21. Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

22. Presiding spirit of homestead, crop-field etc.

23. bhū, bhuva, Sva h, maha, jama, tapas and satya.

THE SOUL

The Tripurīś, like the Hindus believe in the existence of a soul or Ātman in human body. The soul is called "Fala"²⁴ in their language. The origin or derivation of this word is not clear. It can not be derived from Buddhism or Jainism for Buddhism does not admit the soul at all and Jainism was not preached in this part of the country. So far as can be assumed the word 'fala' (soul) and the conception of the soul are derived from Hinduism. 'Fala' may be a corruption of Vedic Prāna (soul, life) or Skt Phāla (a name of Ś'iva²⁵, probably a stone linga, of Prastara - Phalaka (a stone-slab). Eng. Phallus.²⁶ A deeper probe into the origin of this Tripurī Term is highly essential and it is expected to bring to light such interesting religio-philosophical data about the Tripurī Tribe and its absorption of the Aryan ideas. As to the invisible, imperishable and beyond all sense perception, as described in the Bhagavad Gītā. But at the same time, the Tripurīs believe that the soul may assume any form, appearance or colour it likes. This however, is a common belief among all mankind. It does not indicate that the soul has any form, colour etc. but a different fact that the soul exists even after death and can appear before mortals, when necessary, in a visible form for man to see.

The Tripurīś believe that the soul during sleep temporarily goes out of the body and later on returns to the body. But this belief is noted also in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanisad. Sage Yājñavalkya seems to have held this view. For there are verses cited by him in this Upanisad to this effect -

(During Sleep)

27. Bṛh. Up. 4.3 11-12

24. D. P. Deb Barman - Op. at p. 57

25. Vide Apte's Sanskrit Dictionary.

26. Latin Phallus, Gk. Phallos.

'The soul leaves this body alive and roams about outside the body at pleasure, and again arrives at its original place in the body.'²⁷

So it may be assumed that the Tripuri belief of the soul's exit from and re-entry into the body during sleep was derived from the similar Aryan belief noted above.

But at death the soul leaves the body for ever never to come back again into the body. The Soul exists even after death. It goes to heaven or hell according to the quality of man's work during life on earth. In case of death by suicide or any accident the soul turns into an evil spirit after death.

After enjoying or suffering for a time in the next world the departed soul under goes rebirth. The quality of action in the previous life determines the soul's status in the next birth. A doer of good deeds in the past life is reborn in the human society. But one who committed black deeds has to be born as a lower animal. This is also common belief among the Hindus and is noted in the Upanisad Bhagavad Gītā and other sacred texts.²⁸

From the above, it is clear that the Tripurī conception of 'soul' is practically the same as that of the non-tribal Hindus. The Tripuris believe in the existence of the soul, its eternity, enjoying the fruit of action.²⁹ and rebirth like other Hindus. Only a special name 'Fala' is given to the soul by them as noted above. So much for the metaphysical ideas of the Tripurīs, the main Tribe of Tripura.

4. (b) METAPHYSICAL IDEAS OF OTHER TRIBES OF TRIPURA.

Of the other tribes of Tripura, the Riāngs and the Jamātiyās deserve special consideration, for they hold second and third position as regards numerical strength. In

28. Vide - Ch āndogya Upanisad, 5-10, 7-8, where evil deeds are said to be reborn as big and small animals or the lowest.

29. Karma - Phala.

the field of religion also, they are more conspicuous than other tribe³⁰. So their metaphysical thinking is noted first.

RIĀNG GOD, SOUL ETC.

The Riāngs believe in a number of gods and goddesses like the Hindus, and also in God Almighty. But there is no Polytheism. The other deities are believed to be different manifestations of the Supreme God.

They also believe in a number of gods and goddesses and other smaller spirits like the Tripurīs. But there is no Polytheism,³¹ because all the deities are regarded as forms of the Supreme God.

The Riāngs like the Tripurīs call the soul 'Fala'. It is eternal and undergoes rebirth. But the Riāngs has a strange belief that during sleep the soul assumes the form of grasshopper³² and leaves the body for a time and returns afterwards. This belief prevails also among the Tripurīs except for the grasshopper form of the fala.

The soul exists even after death. It has to face a trial for its good and evil deeds in life. Then a rebirth occurs. It may take place even in a week's time, but there is no uniformity in the matter. The trying judge of the next world is called Thunairao. In semitic religion, it is God himself. But it is not clear whether Thunairao of the Riāng eschatology is just another name of God, or it is a separate deity, some think of Hindu Yama.

The Jamātiyās adopted vaisnavism in a large scale during the reign of Mahārāj Bir Chanda Mārikya (1861-96 A.D.). Only a small section of them remain outside vaisnavism.

30. Except the Tripurīs.

31. Dr. J. Gonchaudhury admits the deities as manifestations of God yet he finds Polytheism. This is not understandable, vide his Riāngs of Tripura pp. 66-69.

32. So the Riāngs avoid killing a grasshopper, for it may be the soul of a sleeping man nearby, who also may die as a result.

Therefore, the Vaisnava Philosophy is owned by the Jamātiyās Vaisnava. The remaining people have religio-philosophical conception similar to those of other tribes of Tripura.

Since the worship of a deity called Godiyā is very famous among the Jamātiyās, and is also regarded as a state festival in Tripura, it may be assumed that Gadiyā is perhaps the old name of God among the Jamātiyās. From the use of a trident (tris'ula) in Gadīyā Pūjā it seems that Gadīyā is connected with S'iva and the conception of God of Jamātiyās is a Saguna conception of the S'aiva type. The Halamstribes comes next in order of numerical strength. They are divided into a number of Sub-tribes, Kalai, Rupini, Rangkhāl etc. A good number of people belonging to this tribe adopted Vaisnavism and S'āktism in addition to their original tribalism. Therefore the Vaisnava and S'ākta metaphysical thoughts³³ are there among the Hālāms over and above their Primitive Spiritism. The aforesaid Gadīyā Pūjā is also prevalent among the Hālāms, especially the Kalai Sub-tribe. So Gadīyā may be regard as the old name of God in the tribe.

The Kuki tribe calls their God Puthienpu who is regarded as the one Almighty God. The conception of God as S'iva is also prevalent. The spirit also there. A large number of the tribe has adopted christianity and believe in its metaphysics in the formless God and His countless angles in heaven. E.T. Dalton observes³⁴ that "The Kukis recognise a supreme God and creator whom they call Puthein. He is regarded as benevolent deity but he is the omniscient judge of man's actions and awards punishments both in this world and in the world to come to those who deserve it.

33. Vide *The Tribes of Tripura (The Hālām)* published by Govt. of Tripura.

34. Vide E.T. Dalton - *Tribal History of Eastern India* p-45.

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33. Vide *The Tribes of Tripura* (The Hālām) published by Govt. of Tripura.

34. Vide E.T. Dalton - *Tribal History of Eastern India* p-45.

To sum up the Metaphysical and spiritual beliefs of the tribes of Tripura are practically the same as those of the non-tribal Hindus. With the difference that the names of God, smaller gods and goddesses and other spirits are different. **Matāikatār**, **Gadiyā** and **Puthien Pu** are the names of God in different tribes.

Tribal folk literature of Tripura and metaphysical thoughts therein

The folk literature of the tribes of Tripura is being collected for sometime past from verbal sources - songs, tales etc. Only a small collection has been made so far. Though this is valuable chiefly as literary compositions, yet it contains some speculation on God, deities, spirits, after life, birth etc. Thus the folk literature is a source of tribal Meta physical and spiritual thinking. In the following pages, a brief account of this literature involving metaphysical thinking of the tribes of Tripura is given. So far only the folk-literature of the main tribe (Tripurai or Tivrā) is collected to some extent, and that of other tribes as in the offing³⁵. We shall refer to whatever titbits are available from all these pieces of composition and glean the metaphysical speculations of the unnamed tribal poets and story tellers.

Tripuri Folk Songs

Let us note the following folk songs of Tripuri tribe.³⁶ The songs are all in the Tripuri language which is not intelligible to the outside world. Hence only a Para phrase in English will be given here on the basis of of Bengali rendering given by

35. Only a little of two other tribes has come to view. The tribes are **Mātai** (Halām) and **Riāng**.

36. A collection of folk songs has been published by the Directorate, Tribal Research, Govt. of Tripura.

N. C. Deb Barma, the Station Director of Agartala. All India Radio, Agartala, Tripura, the Compiler of the collection of songs. Only some important lines in Tripuri will be given. Now for the songs.³⁷ Birth and death are in evitable in the eternal course of life. The soul is undying. It goes from one body to another. Birth is followed by death and death by rebirth. Why are you afraid of travelling along the Path of life ?

This song seems to be a para phrase of a few verses of the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter - II. As in the Gita, here in this song too. The immortality of the Soul (fala) even after death and rebirth or transmigration of the soul from one body to another are admitted. The following lines carry these ideas -

barak him āni lā mā doyarī
hima-m āle lāma Caaī māna
Sagani S āgafala Sag ā solai fāiai
ācayai thuai ācāyai
falā³⁸ māng saloi fire.

(ii) O my beloved, I can not pass my days being born of human mother³⁹. If I were born of a sow or a hea my life could be short. I have come to the world market but have not even four price with me. So I could not make any shopping. I know that human life is the best, but I will never again come to a human life.⁴⁰

In this poem the idea is expressed that one can be born as a man or as an animal. This indicates that the soul can enter anybody it likes. In Hindu conception also there is the same tenet - the soul's wondering among eighty four lakhs of youes or wombs. The conception of rebirth or transmigration of the soul is inherent in it.

37. Song No. 37 of the Song book referred to in the foot note 36.

38. —fala = Soul ; ācayai = birth, thuai - death.

39. —Because of extreme poverty.

40. —Song No. 99.

In the last statement of the Poet 'I will never again come to humanlife' two conceptions are underlying -

(a) rebirth as another creature.

(b) final emancipation or liberation⁴¹ of the soul from the cycle of birth and death. The poet is fed up with human life. So he wants either to enter a non-human body in the next life a total cessation of birth and death i.e. liberation of the soul for all time to come.

Some lines of the Poem are :

Jādu manusya Janam

Uttam Janam

bānkhu, tāile nātiya Janam.⁴²

(iii) None can do away with the writings on the forehead of man by his destiny.⁴³

nāisokā nakhā

bora lāngkhā takhā

Cini Karama lekhā.

Only the first stanza of the poem is quoted here because this portion contains some philosophical thinking. Here destiny or an unseen All dispenser is assumed. This is nothing but the idea of God as the creator and sustainer of the creation. Then the idea of a predestined plan of life is not also met with here. This shows destiny or God as all powerful and human beings as having no freedom at all.

(iv) O. Brethren, why is it that you do not realise the fact that evil eyes may be cast on the village. We tried in vain to satisfy them by promising a buffalo to be sacrificed. We could not propitiate them by sacrificing even a pair of goats. How long will you remain pensive resting your forehead on the palm ?

41 = mukti.

42. —Cadu = O my beloved. The whole means : O my beloved I know human life is the best. Yet I will not adopt this life any more.

43. —Song No. 47.

The evil eyes of the lower spirits (apadevata) are cast on the entire village. By what offering and worship shall we get out of this danger.⁴⁴

In this song the spirit world and its evil effect on mankind are stated. It is believed that if evil eyes of these spirits are cast on a family or a village, it is difficult to get out of this evil effect. Animal sacrifice⁴⁵ are made to these spirits as a way out of this. It is also noticeable here that the entire village is said to be under the evil eye of the spirits. This shows that the spirits are highly powerful in the tribal conception.

(v) In the month of A sin negotiations for marriage begins. Please send your final word about our wedding. If mother does not give her consent, father will of course give his, for father is the representative of God (Kaithar). If father does not agree, mother will perhaps agree, for mother is the representative of the creator (Lārimā.⁴⁶).

In this song we get two names for God - Kaithar and lārimā. Further father and mother are regarded as representative of God on the other hand this is a way of showing respect to the parents and on the other there is a Philosophical significance of this statement. It is that man is a miniature representative or from of God. This perhaps echoes the Upanisadic statement tattvamare⁴⁷ (that thou art)

The last stanza⁴⁸ is worth quoting for its melody and the foresaid philosophical idea

māy Sayāibā babudā Sayanīā
 bābu bā Kāithar Yādā
 bābu Sāyaiba māyche Sayan
 may ba Larima Yādā

44. —Song No. 96.

45. —Sacrifice of a pair of goats (in lieu of one) of a big animal like buffalo etc. is usually made on such cases.

46. —Song No. 20.

47. - Chāndogya Upanisad, 6, 8, 7 also of the Biblical Statement God made man in his own image.

48. - If mother does not agree etc.

The name of Kāithar or Kāithar is not given in any lost of tribal deities of Tripura, and is found in this anthology of folk songs, collected from around Agartala Town.

(vi) The Jasmine flower is needed for worship of the God Surya (Sun), the Malati flower for the worship of Canola (The Moon God), the water lily for Laksmi, Karavi for the mother i.e. Kali and Kṛṣṇa cūda for Kṛṣṇa-worship.

...
 (Surya mukhi thai Surya no bhajimani mālati candre bhājimani ; Padma Laxmi Ma bhaji mani, Karabi māy na bhaji māni, Kṛṣṇa cūde bhajimāni).

These songs, Nos. 36 and 48 in the collection give the names of some principal deities adorned by the tribals of Tripura. Barring the solitary name Māmita, all other deities are taken from the general Hindu Pantheon. The deities Kāli, Durgā, Kṛṣṇa and Surya are names of the supreme being in Sakta, Vaisnava sects among the non-tribal Hindu Society. They have not made any change in their status and worship. These deities as the forms of God. Māmita may be looked upon as Laksmi, for it is deity of wealth and the Pujā follows the Durga Pujā.⁴⁹ of course Māmita is a special deity of the Kālai Sampraday.

Fate as a big force

In a number of songs of the tribal, of Tripura, fate is regarded as responsible for human weal and woe. The words like adrs ta (unseen), Kāpal (forehead) the writings on the forehead) bhagya (fortune) etc. are used to denote this fate. It is an unseen force they believe, like a god or goddess. Also it is believed that none can alter the course of fate. The

49. —Some compare the deity with Ganesā - Vide P. N. Bhattacharjee Loka Vrther Aloke Kalai Sampraday P - 43.

proverb goes that what is lotted can not be delotted. Every God can not change it. The Vaisnavas believe that only a devotee of God can control fate and good luck may result in place of something evil.

In the following song the poetess Smt. Krishnapati Deb Barma writes about the in credibility of fate -

(None can Undo the writings on one's forehead. So I have prepared myself for any eventuality. I will face all danger as and when they will make their appearance. I have hardened my mind in that way' (Song No. 47)⁵⁰. In another song Smt. Radhika Deb Barma has dreamt and its effects on human life as the theme. Dreams are believed to be forebodings of future events by many people of world. The tribals are no exception. From this it is evident that people believe in a world of dreams which are not idle dreams but reflections of realities beyond. A dream state of human soul⁵¹ is admitted - in Indian Philosophy too. The Song is -

'I have seen a hail storm in dream. I do not know what happens now. I have heard from aged men and women that when hail storm is seen in a dream, one's money increases in the chest. Also I have dreamt that a crow is looking inside the house from the door and is cawing. I don't know what will be fall me. Source say this increases the Man's Power of the house'.

But who knows what will happen ? Song No. 63.

The last song⁵² reveals fatalism. Poet Mugli Deb Barma writes - 'I have come to the world of mankind, but how shall I pass my days here ? How shall I earn a living ? We have not the luck (Kapal) to put on a wrist watch and wonder about.

50. Vide N. C. Deb Barma's Pr ācin Tripura Lok Sangit Sankalan, P-37.

51. —The three states of soul are - J āgratsvapra and Susuptt (State of Waking or dreamless sheep.

52. —Vide N. C. Debbarma's Pr ācin Tripura Lok Sangit Sankalan, P-100.

We are destitute of many and dwelling house. But the King will not accept that we are poor and the rain will not spare us, the consoled by our telling it that we are have nots' (Song No. 100).

The strong belief in fate or luck is clear. Some have the good-luck to use wrist-watches and some are devoid of luck. This their fate. In addition to this fatalism also the conception of soul's coming to this world from another world, obviously a spirit world is present in this song, as also from a few other songs noted above. The question of transmigration or rebirth of the soul is also slightly indicated here. The poet is extremely poor. But how can one be poor in the very first life? The poverty may be due to some vicious acts in a previous life. In a song cited above; "Karma" Karma Phal, result of action of previous life, fate, is admitted by the tribal poet as a fact. Thus Karma Phala and rebirth are admitted by tribal poet-philosophere of Tripura in addition to their belief in Fate as an all powerful but ill-apprehended Cosmic Energy which is almost equivalent to Divine Force.

FOLK TALE

A few folk tale of the tribals of Tripura are now available. These have occasional reference to Gods, spirits, deities. The following are some instances.⁵³

(i) An iguana belonging to an old woman was killed by some village urchine. They cut it to pieces and ate up its roasted meat with wine. The old lady was sleeping at that time. Suddenly she was roused from her slumber by a loud with telling her to rise and leave the place at once, she woke up at the call but found none there. The call was repeated several times. The oldwoman asked who are you? Are you a ghost

53. The relevant portions of the stories are noted here. Stories - I-II are taken from D. P. Deb Barman. Treaties on Tripuri-Community. pp-90-96.

or some deity? The reply was - 'I am your iguana. The boys have killed me. But I will destroy this village of the naughty people with a big blood. So, I request you to leave this place before the destruction, because you are my foster mother, so to say. So saying the voice stopped. Soon after the roars of an approaching flood were heard. In fear the woman left the place and in no time the place was flooded. Every house and the inmates went down the deluge and perished.

The story continues further. But the portion noted above contains all the metaphysical elements in it. The iguana died but its souls appeared before the old woman in an invisible form and asked her to escape the imminent danger. The old woman had belief in ghosts and deities. The speaker (iguana) turned out to be a ghost or departed spirit. It helped the woman. Even lower animals have a soul, the soul exists after death and it can do good to other and appear before man in invisible form are evident from this story of the iguana and the old woman. Also it is noticeable that even the departed soul of a lower animal has immense power to destroy a locality.⁵⁴ Non-tribal Hindu masses also have similar beliefs. Both communities often employ an *ojh ā* (*Oc ā i* in Tripura) or spirit priest to propitiate an evil spirit by various offerings and spells and dissuade it from perpetrating havoc or various mischiefs.

(ii) Two sisters were married in two families. The younger sister's husband was very rich, but the elder sister was married to a poor man. As a result the younger sister became very proud and one day she insulted her elder sister who visited the house. The elder sister was greatly shocked. She was thinking of her poverty. She returned home and got no peace of mind. At night she dreamt a dream. She saw God before her. God said to her, I have noted your poverty and the

54. Such stories are told of Biblical angels also. But this story has no connection with those stories.

insult. I feel for you. I will make you rich. Awake and you will find your house full of gold. When the woman awoke she found gold everywhere in her house. Thus she became rich by the grace of God.

This story contains the following metaphysical conceptions. God is there. He is all powerful. He is also compassionate towards distressed humanity. He can appear before man in a dream. He can bestow wealth to the poor. He can do wonderful things.

The story does not tell in what form God appeared to the woman. But it is clear that God is not always formless, but can assume a form when necessary. This is also the general Hindu view about God. He is both nirakara and sakara, nirguna and saguna. He is not confined to any limitation. This is his infinity and all powerfulness or all doing power.

(iii) There were a brother and a sister on a Kalai family.⁵⁵

The brother gradually fell in love with the sister and wanted to marry her. The sister did not like the idea at all, and vehemently opposed the proposal. But because of the instance of the brother the marriage was at last finalised. The sister then fled away from the house and climbed upon a lofty tree by the side of a river. Her mother went in search of her and found her there. She asked her to come down. But the girl won't. She prayed to God to save her from this awkward marriage and also to make the tree taller. Upon this the tree grew taller and taller. But the girl still did not feel safe. She asked king Yamo (Pronounced Yama) to send her a ladder make of gold so that she might ascend high in the sky with the help of the ladder. The prayer was granted. The girl ascended the sky by the ladder and finally escape the undesirable marriage.

55. Taken from P. N. Bhattacharya's 'Lok Vrtter Alope Kalai Sampraday' - pp - 70-73.

This story has ideas similar to the above. There is God above. He is merciful and all powerful. He responds to the prayer of the distressed. He can save the devotees by wonderful means. God is addressed in one passage of the story as king Jama (Yama-raja). The underlying idea or belief is that all names belong to the one God, as stated in the Rgvedic line --

ekam sad vipra
bahudha vadanti.⁵⁶

—The one self-existing Reality is called by various by the Sages.

6. Miscellaneous Spiritual Tradition :

Under this head we shall discuss the spiritual conceptions and spiritual life of different tribes separately. Actually the tribal philosophy is to be discussed here. But there is no written literature of old among the tribals which may be called Philosophy. As such, we have to content ourselves with the scanty and scattered philosophical thoughts in this respect are noted in the forgoing pages. In this section some more thoughts attaching to particular tribes will be discussed including the way of spiritual life led by these people.

Another important fact is to be noted here. The tribal people may be divided into two groups (a) Urban and Semi-urban living in towns and villages in vicinity of towns (b) those living in distant interior areas of hills. These two groups materially differ in their ideas and way of life. The urban and semi-urban tribals live side by side with the Bengalee Society and the Bengalee thoughts and way of life greatly influenced them, so that they are Bengalee than tribal in their metaphysical and spiritual thoughts. The situation is just the reverse in the interior areas. Of course, there are rare exceptions everywhere. For example, among other things, as

56. Rv. I. 164. 46

regards conceptions of Gods and other spirits, the tribals have two distinct views - (i) Their own original conceptions and (ii) The Bengali way of thought. In their own original thoughts, the Gods and spirits have no or very little anthropomorphic traits. Therefore they do not assume a human form for the divine beings and spirits. The simple bamboo images they make for these deities are indicative of this fact. The distinction of sex is also rarely admitted among the deities. The deities are generally of the male sex. In the urban and semi-urban group of tribals who are in close contact with the Bangalee Population. The Bengalee or general Aryan anthropomorphic conceptions of deities have gained ground. These tribals admit deities with human features as the Bengalees do. At the sametime they also do not reject the traditional tribal conceptions. Actually they have two sets of spiritual conceptions. Now for the spiritual thoughts prevailing among different tribes.

The Tripuri tribe which is by far the biggest tribe and is the representative one is also akin to traditional Hinduism in their beliefs and practices. "Practically the Tripuri relation is based on Hinduism. Many of the gods and goddesses are akin to the Hindu Gods and Goddesses particularly in the nature of belief". Says a Tripuri Scholar.⁵⁷

The Tripuris believe in the human soul which is called by them "Fala". When a person dies, offerings are made to the soul in the form of funeral rites. This also shows the Tripuri belief in a life after death and the existence of the soul even in a disembodied state.

As to the nature of the soul, the Tripuris have the belief that the soul is invisible and imperishable, as noted down in the Bhagavad Gītā. They further believe that the soul can assume any form as and when necessary. Another belief among them is that the soul leaves the body temporarily

57. D. P. Deb Barma - Treatise on Tripuri Community, p-104.

during sleep. This is however a deviation from the Hindu belief noted in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad (4.3, 12) which is to the effect that the soul leaves the body for a time during the state of dream, not sleep.

The Tripuris also believe that the soul of persons dying by suicide, accident and unusual causes (Snake-bite etc.) twins into an evil spirit. A similar belief prevails also in Hinduism especially with regard to cases of suicide.

The Tripurians, like all other people, have the belief in a life after death. The departed soul goes to heaven or hell according to its actions in the life in the world. If he performs good deeds in life, his soul goes to heaven. Otherwise the soul has to go to hell for suffering the consequences of blackdeeds. Heaven is above and hell is below. Hell is believed to be a subterranean World. This means hell is lower region in this earth. In the general Hindu conception hell is no doubt a lower region, but it is not a place in this earth (bhuloka). It is a region above, but is lower than heaven (svar-loka). The region of hell is in the space adjacent to the earth which is known as bhuvan-loka. In the islamic conception of hell a subterranean spot, i.e. the grave is believed to be the primary state of hell, where the Sinner is punished for the first time. This believe of a hell in this earth perhaps is a reminiscent of the days when no supernatural world or the spirit world far beyond the earth was admitted, and people were more materialistic than in the subsequent days. The old materialistic attitude lingers till today in some circles of the Tripuri People who do not believe in heaven or hell and enjoyment and sufferings there after the end of life on earth. They hold that man has to get the result of his action in this life itself. For this purpose, the assumption of a different world of heaven and hell is unnecessary. This seems to be partly due to the study of science. These science students do not believe anything without proof, and this after world is rejected by them as lacking any scientific proof. But such people are not many.

Most of the Tripuris are God-believers. They study ancient Indian religious texts—The Mahabharata, The Gītā, the Bhagavad etc. with firm belief and devotion and thereby religio-philosophical thought laid down there are greatly imbibed by them. Hence, their views on Metaphysical and spiritual questions are not different from those of the General Hindus.

Another notable feature of tribal Metaphysical thinking not noted above is that they conceive and worship various deities not for any spiritual gain, such as attainment of heaven or liberation (Moksa). Their only object is some worldly gain, such as curing a disease, warding off obstacles and so on. From this, it appears that the deities themselves are hardly supernatural but some imaginary forces of limited power. For them, heaven, liberation etc. are out of the question. Their deities may be compared to the minor vedic deities, vastospati (Lord of home stead) Bhu, Manya (anger) etc. who gradually faded into insignificance and were referred to by the class name. "devah" (deities) not only by their individual names. In the Upanisad literature they have faded into nothingness by the side of the great one God Brāhman or Ātman. The tribals have not discovered any great God like Brāhman or Ātman as yet. Their Matai Katar (The great God) is just another diety as Mahadeva (The great God Ś'iva) is just one of the Gods to the general Hindus. Only to the Ś'aivas he is the Supreme God. So, the tribal deities may have the same fate of extinction sooner or later when the idea of a Supreme God will gain ground. The tribals who have adopted Vaisnavism or anyother Hindu faith have accepted Visnu or some other great Hindu diety as the Supreme God, and consequently they have lost faith in their traditional deities. In the present moment the tribal conception of numerous vague deities and spirits who are also not all powerful may be called polytheism a polydemonism as D. M.

Edwards calls it.⁵⁸ This, however excludes the tribals who have adopted Vaisnavism etc. of the Hindus. In the traditional tribal belief the deities have no specific form. Only some bamboo symbols are used to represent them. But from this it is not to be assumed that they are formless or nirākāra. But the form is not shown in the symbols. That is all. Actually the deities are regarded as supernatural beings living a natural life like human beings. There are both male and female deities. They marry and beget children. This anthropomorphism is seen also in Hindu theology, where we have Gods, Goddesses and even their offspring. For example, there the Śīva family, Krishna family, Indra family of Hindu deities. In Śīva family, Śīva and Durgā are husband and wife, and Kartika and Ganesa are their sons. In the Krishna Parivara, We have Krishna, Balarama, Subhadra, Rukmini, Aniruddha etc. The first two are brothers, the third is their sister, the fourth (Rukmini) is the consort of Kṛṣṇa and the last one the son of Kṛṣṇa. This family relationship among Gods and Goddesses in Hindu theology might have a great influence on the tribal theology owing to the long association of the tribals with the neighbouring Bengalee population. The general poverty of the tribal people has been a potent cause of this influence. The more prosperous and cultured society always influences the less fortunate and less cultured society. Even the victorious Islamic people of Arabia were under the strong influence of the conquered people of Persia because of the latter's cultural and material superiority. As a result many Persian ideas and practices entered into Islam. The same may be true of the tribal religion of Tripura (and elsewhere).

Trance or Possession by a God

Another notable feature of tribal metaphysics is that they believe one may be possessed by a God and then the God may

58. 'The Philosophy of Religion' - p-99.

foretell future events. The belief in a God communicating with a man of this world is no new thing in India where "daivavani" (divine voice) is an old belief and is noted in the Mahabharata etc. A divine voice solved the tangle of S'akuntala's clandestine marriage with Dusmanta of which Dusmanta had forgotten everything. The divine voice uttered in the sky made it clear that S'akuntala was the lawful wife of Dusmanta and the son in the womb of S'akuntala was begotten by Dusmanta. The King (Dusmanta) was convinced with this divine voice. All his misgivings vanished. So he was ready to accept S'akuntala as his married wife. The Divine Voice was proclaimed in the following **bharaswa Putram Dusmanta mava mamanstha Sakuntalam tvam casya dhata garbhasya Satam ahe Sukuntala.**

—O Dusmanta, bring up your son, don't belittle S'ukuntale. You are the progenitor of the child in the womb. What Sukuntale says is true.

This is a direct speech of an invisible deity. But sometimes a spirit may enter the body of a person and speak through the mouth of the possessed person. This is believed even by non tribal people, both Hindu and Mahammedan. Usually some evil spirit enters the body of woman and an exercist can have a talk with the spirit. The replies through the afflicted person.

Some Bengalee Sadhus and even women are reputed to have power to produce a trance in their own body and in the state of trance, they can answer question about one's future. There are several persons both men and women at Agartala, the capital town of Tripura, who possess. this power. They are said to have won the favour of the Goddess Kali. On Tuesdays and Saturdays they can have the trance due to appearance of the Goddess in their body and in the state of trance they can foretell many events required by the distressed people.

Again persons trained in the Theo sophical Society of Madras can call in a departed soul in their body and this soul

answers questions put to him by the persons present in the occult performance. All these are prevalent among the non-tribal society. The tribal system may be an imitation of some of these practices. But it is only an ochai (priest) who can perform this feat. In the state of trance the Ochai gets in touch with a divine spirit and with its help he can foretell future events—good or evil of a person.

However, the main point here is that the tribals believe that a divine power may be called up from the spirit world and all necessary information can be gathered from it.

Among the Riang tribe a strong belief obtains about the after life that there is a dividing line between this world and the next. A huge tree trunk is placed on the frontier of the two worlds. This is comparable to the *vaitarani Nadi* (a boatless river) of the Hindu belief. When the departed soul crosses this border it cannot return to life again in the same body. The soul, after a short journey across the spirit-world, reaches a place in the eastern direction, which is called the abode of a good aged woman named-Larima. She is ever-busy cooking food for the deceased. She offers food and drink to every new soul that arrives from the world below. With the consumption of this food-stuff the departed souls forget all about their lives on earth. This kind-hearted woman may be regarded as a receptionist of the spiritworld.

The old woman then sends the soul to a higher authority for trial. That authority goes by the name of *Thunairao*. Some say, he is equivalent to *Yama* of the old Hindu conception.

According to Riang belief the departed soul does not stay in the spirit world for more than a week. Let them believe also that the dead man or woman will do his or her normal duties in the otherworld too and take the usual food. So they offer cooked food to the soul on the seventh day. They also offer utensil, agricultural implements and seeds of various crops, which they think, will be required by the departed soul in his life in the next world. It is believed that the departed soul will

continue its Jum cultivation work as in the life on earth. But there is a contradiction here. If the soul remains in the spirit world only for seven days, after which it undergoes rebirth, how will get time for agricultural operations there. But we are not to expect so much accuracy of conceptions from the tribal society.

They also believe that the soul may return to his house if it feels thirsty. So, water placed in good vessel for the soul near the bed room of the departed soul and it is kept there for seven days together during which time the soul stays in the world of the dead. This shows that the departed soul may visit the world it likes. This is also a belief among all other Hindus and many other people of the world. In Shakespeare's Hamlet, we see the ghost of Hamlet's father appearing again and again, though some persons did not believe it.

Though there is no conception of liberation (or mukti) in the traditional tribalism, yet the idea is imported from the neighbouring non-tribal societies. Now many tribals admit the existence of the soul after death and the necessity of liberation of the soul from the bondage of life and death and the sufferings connected there with. Many tribals, especially the Kalai people visit Gaya and the river Ganga to perform Gaya-Sraddha and asthi visarjana (immersion of the bones in the Ganga) for the liberation of the departed soul.⁵⁹ The concepts of eternity of the soul and liberation are admitted here.

The Kaipeng tribe⁶⁰, a branch of the Halam tribe has a peculiar belief that the various spirits and ghosts are the real cause of death of human beings. Thus they take it that the spirit are mostly evil spirits doing harm to mankind.

59. P. N Bhattacharya-Loka. Vrtter Aloke Kalaisampraday, P-101,

60. Vide. The Kaipengs (Published by the Directorates of Research. Govt. of Tripura, P-27.

They have also another peculiar belief that the soul of a dead man will reach heaven and live in eternal bliss there, if the dead body is burnt near the river. They believe that the river current carrying the ashes of the deadman will also carry with it the soul of the person and lead it to heaven. From this, it is obvious that they believe heaven is the destination of all disembodied souls. This is unusual. No people poster such a belief, only the pious souls are destined to reach heaven. Others are to hell. This is usual belief of tribals and non-tribals both. But the Kaipengs have the peculiar belief. They seen to give a "good" certificate to all souls.

Last but not least, the tribals are adopting all other Hindu beliefs about metaphysical and spiritual matters as noted in Hindu religious texts and religious preachers with which and who they are coming in contact more and more with the advance of time. Their own peculiar beliefs still linger to some extent, but these having little or no written texts behind are growing weak day by day.

● Conclusion :

In the foregoing pages Metaphysical tradition of the tribes of Tripura is outlined as far as possible from different sources Inscriptions, folksongs etc. Besides these sources in writing there are unwritten beliefs of the tribals are unlettered and do not derive and philosophy from books. But they have firm beliefs about God, deities, spirits, evil spirits, life after death, rebirth etc. similar to those available from the scanty literature cited above.

In addition to this, the annual worship of the Fourteen Deities at old Agartala (Tripura) also provides some important Metaphysical ceonceptions. Though a number of (fourteen) deities are worshipped in the Puja as in the Durga Puja. the Puja is really reagarded as worship of one God named caturdasa-devata. All deities are looked upon as constituting

one whole. Thus unity in all diversity is believed to be the ultimate Reality, as in the Durga Puja, the goddess is regarded as the only Reality, because it is called Durga Puja.

The Metaphysical and spiritual tradition of the tribes of Tripura, is by and large, the same as that of the non-tribals and may be regarded as derived from the latter because of close connection between the two communities for long.

The Royal family of Tripura became attached to Hindu religion and philosophy from very early days⁶¹ and they adopted vaisnavism, Saivism and Saktatism.

The tribal people slowly followed their examples and thus the Hindu religio philosophical concepts entered the tribal society by slow degrees. Only the Buddhist and later Christian tribals remained outside this trend for they adopted the concepts of those faiths. Yet they are not totally free from all Hindu rites and beliefs. Tribal Christians perform animal sacrifice even in Christian festivals.

In fine, tribal metaphysical thoughts comprise the lofty monistic conceptions of the royal family as expressed in the Inscriptions noted above and the less developed, vague popular beliefs of the general tribal masses amounting to dualism and pluralism in some cases.

But the speciality of age old Hindu Philosophy and customs are never denied by the tribals of Tripura but followed in their own ways.

61. From 5th or 6th century A.D. if not earlier,

rites and customs

1. Introductory :

Like every other community of the country, the tribals of Tripura have also their own peculiar rites and customs. These rites and customs pertain to various occasions or ceremonies from birth to death, which in Hinduism go by the name 'dasa vidha Samsk ā ras' (ten sacraments). Since these tribal people are surrounded by the general Hindu Community of non-tribals, the tribal communities have rites and customs practically similar to those of the non-tribal Hindus around. Besides, most of the tribal people also profess Hinduism, and as such their rites and customs naturally do not differ much from those of the non-tribal Hindus. Moreover, as a result of getting education, the tribals are coming into contact with the educated and urban Bengalee Population more and more and the Bengalee ways are also adopted by them in many matters. So their original rites and customs are in a state of metamorphosis now-a-days. Yet they have their special features. They have their own peculiar dresses and ornaments—which at once differentiate them from the non-tribals.

Even after adopting Christianity, and Lusāi People continue to perform animal sacrifice or religious occasions. For example, buffalo-sacrifice is performed on the occasion of the Christmas day, though this is not enjoined in the Christian Liturgy.

2. Rites and Customs of the Triupri tribe :

(A) **Birth :** During conception of a married woman, some worships are performed in the fifth and the ninth month.¹

1. The Pūj ās are called Kebengbuo Pūj ā and Faratana Pūj ā.

From the fifth month of Pregnancy sexual intercourse is prohibited. The eating of Mrigel (Mirgā) fish is a taboo during pregnancy. An amulet is also to be held by the expected mother. This is given by the Priest called 'Oc āi'. This is supposed to protect the coming baby and the mother from evil spirits and evil eyes of men. Only females are allowed to stay in the Labourroom-during delivery of a child. Two women are engaged in performing delivery. They are known as 'Lam ājuk' and 'Kumājuk'. After delivery these women give a new name to the newborn baby after the name of the day.

From the day of birth, the family and its near relatives observe a period of impurity² for eight-days together and in some cases, twelve days. In general Hinduism, this period varies from ten to thirty days. During this period, all the members of this family are forbidden from attending any ceremony elsewhere.

The child and the mother have a longer period of impurity. In case of male child, the period extends upto twenty days and in case of female, upto twenty-nine days. Thus practically the general Hindu Custom of thirty days³ of impurity is there among the Tripuris.

During this period, no worship or festival except birth rite can be held in the family. After the period of impurity a barber is called for haircut and nailcut of the male-members of the family as in the other Hindu families. The barber touches the hair of the baby with his rajor. After this the baby and the mother are given a ceremonial bath with many things-turmeric, mustard seeds, ahses etc.

Then the ceremonies of Sūrya-darsan, rice-eating⁴ and owāthap-worship are held. Then another pūjā is held at the bathingghat. A goat may be sacrificed in this pūjā. Then

2. Or as 'acue in general Hinduism.

3. For the S'udra classes.

4. Annaprāsan.

another pūjā is held on a wooden plank or tree-trunk, where clothes are washed. Wine is also used in this pūjā.

The baby is brought out to the courtyard by a woman and some rites are performed with ulm-dhvani from women. An umbrella is held over the baby. The ocāi, a priest has to perform many rites here.

Then the name-giving ceremony is held. Lamps or candles are lighted on the proposed written names. The light that burns upto the last decides the name. The name kept below that light is accepted for the baby. The urban Tripurīs observe the name giving ceremony in a slightly different way, on the 9th day of birth 'annaprāsan' ceremony is held, whereas in the general Hindu Community, it is held in the 7th month. The urban Tripurīs also follow the Bengalee Practice.

After this ceremony another rite is performed. In this the child is given various things for touching-wearing instruments, a chopper⁵, book, pen exercise-book etc. The dormant inclination of the child is determined thereby.

Now-a-days book, pen etc. are preferred. After all this another pūjā called 'Janglī Pūjā'⁶ is held for the welfare of the child with chicken-sacrifice and other numerous rites. After the Pūjā a feast or drinking bout is arranged for the guests.

(B) Marriage : Rites and customs associated with marriage among the Tripurīs are noted below :

There are various forms of marriage among the Tripurīs and a number of rites are to be performed for a marriage ceremony. Widow marriage is also prevalent among them.

On the different forms of marriage. the marriage by negotiation⁷ is the normal system in other societies. The forms

5. Called a tākal of takkāl in Tripuri.

6. Forest worship, worship of wild deity.

7. Called Hāmjuk tubui Kāimāni (in Tripurī).

of marriage are Love marriage, secret marriage by elopment, marriage by purchase, by abduction, by becoming a member of the bride's family⁸, marriage by service and marriage with near relatives. Different types of marriage among the Indian tribes are as follows—Marriage by capture, marriage by exchange, marriage by purchase, marriage by elopment, marriage by service, marriage by intrusion, marriage by trial, marriage by mutual consent, marriage by probation. Marriage by trial is most popular among the Bhils, marriage by purchase is most prevalent among the Munda, Oraon and Sāntāl.⁹ Love marriage and marriage by service are also prevalent. Marriage by purchase means marrying a girl by offering a big sum of money to her parents. In marriage by service,¹⁰ the would be bridegroom has to serve in the bride's family for a fixed period of one to three years. E.T. Dalton observes, "No religious ceremony is necessary for a marriage, but only the consents of the parents. If the bridegroom can give a dower, the marriage takes place at once, but if he cannot, he must serve one year in his father-in-law's house. Early marriages are not prevalent and Polygamy, though not objected to, is very rare."¹¹ Now-a days, in love marriage, the boy and the girl who fall in love with each other inform their parents or guardians of their intention to marry the girl or the boy concerned. Then the guardians perform the marriage by negotiations. All sorts of rites are performed in the normal or negotiated marriage. There is a 'Ghatak' or 'Rāibāi' (in Tripuri) or marriage broker who negotiates with the families of the bride and the bridegroom. the guardians of both sides are all important. Their decision is final. The bridegroom or the bride has nothing to say in this regard. They are to obey the decision of their guardians.

8. Called 'Chāmāri Amar'. This is = Bengalee Ghar-Jāmāi system.

9. O.S. Adhikari. Four Immigrant Tribes of Tripura. p-7.

10. Called 'Jāmāi Khātā' by some.

11. E.T. Dalton—Tribal History of Eastern India. p-110

The marriage is held at the house of the bridegroom. The bride's side demands a dowry of money, ornaments etc. from the boy's side. The boy's guardians alongwith the marriage broker go to the bride's house to see her and settle marriage. But if they hear any deer's cry or see a corpse on the way and such other Omens are found, they postpone the journey that day.

On the opening day or on the day of "Mangal ā carana", the groom's party goes to the bride's house and is entertained with wine prepared from rice

The bride comes and is presented with money by the persons present. A feast is held. After the feast the bride has to wash the hands of all elderly persons. This stage of marriage is called 'Kaksunga'¹² (in Tripuri).

The 'adhivāsa ceremony is also performed with several rites on the previous day of the marriage. This ceremony is called 'Ku ā it ā no'. Ceremonial water is fetched, betelnut and betel leaves are cut by women, 'uludhyani' is also made by them twice in the name of the bride and seventimes in the name of the bridegroom. All these are done in the house of the bride.

The boys take the P ā nsup ā ri (betel nut and leaves) in bell metal plates wrapped in new cloth, and go to invite people of the village including the headman called "Chaudhur ī". Then people come and prepare the marriage site called 'ved ī'.¹³

In the morning of the marriage day the deity called "L ā mpr ā W ā thap" is worshipped. This represents the 'N ā nd ī mukha' ceremony of other Hindus. Later on, a party is sent to the bride's house for bringing her. They go with a Palanquin, a bandparty and two waterjars. Also some

12. V ā g d ā na (betrothal)

13. Also called 'Kunja' by some. Actually, Ved ī' means a platform and 'K ū nja', a spot surrounded by plantain trees. The 'Ved ī' is usually made by wooden planks, but often it is just a portion of the courtyard.

ornaments are sent for the bride through them. Before starting for the bride's house some rites are performed on the water jars and the ornaments. Also two earthen water pitchers are placed in front of the bridegroom's house with mango leaf twigs on the pitchers. Two wicks are also lighted on earthen plates containing mustard oil. This rite is called '**Dangdua**'. Similar rites are performed by other Hindus too before all ceremonial journeys.

When the party reaches the bride's house similar Dangdua rites are performed to welcome them.

Then the bride's party go to invite the villagers there including their 'Chaudhury' to the marriage. A big plate full of Pānsupāri is taken at the time of invitation in all cases. All invitees are offered this Pānsupāri. This is an ancient custom prevalent in all rural societies where the use of Pānsupāri is in vogue. This is a mark of respect to an invitee. The invitation ritual is known as '**Khum Phunuga**'.

Then the bride boards the Palanquin and reaches the bridegroom's house. The mother of the bride is forbidden to accompany her. Her father and others can accompany her and attend the marriage. At the arrival of the bride at the groom's house she is welcomed with the benedictory. Dangdua rites noted above. The bride is then carried on back by a man to a room arranged for her. Then the bride and the groom have ceremonial bath performed by women with meticulous rites, such as bringing water, cutting the water with a sword or hopper,¹⁴ barber's work, lighting earthen lamps etc. All this is known as Hajtai rite. Actually these are the bath rites.

Then the bridegroom is carried in a Pālki (Palanquin) around the village. This is known as the Gajafiraga rite. After a while he is taken back to the marriage site and placed in the vedī. Then the bride is also taken there. A rite called

14. Vide—D.P. Debbarman, *Treaties on Traditional Social Institutions of the Tripuri Community*, p-20

Khupang subaio is performed by the bride. At every step there is a rite. The marriage is performed in the *vedī* around which some bamboos are posted. The marriage is like that of general Hindus. The bride has to move around the seated groom seventimes.¹⁵ After each round she throws a handful of flowers towards the groom and also makes obeisance.

A feast is held after the marriage. The couple also takes part in it. After the feast the couple is separated for the night.¹⁶ This is comparable with *Kāl-rātri* of general Hindu society. Next day the bride is brought back. The bride groom takes her inside the house by carrying her by the waist. Then again benedictory *dangdue* rite is observed. After this the couple bows to the elderly persons, who then give presents and blessings.

A big feast is held on the same day. A peculiar custom in the feast is that the couple has to wash the hands of all elderly persons after meal.

On the third day the couple dig a hole outside the house and bury their marriage crown in it. The marriage ceremony ends with this rite. When the bride has menstruation after the marriage, the relatives of bride and bridegroom are invited with in a month of the event. Some rites are performed on that occasion. A small pond is dug on the courtyard and mudgame¹⁷ is played thereby all. Then a drinking bout is hold. Then a cradle is hung in the house symbolising the birth of a baby.

Thus the marriage ceremony of the Tripuris is a longprocess

15. Known as *Sapta Pradaksina*.

16. Usually the bride is taken to the house of a near relative. In non-tribal society either the bride or the bride-groom may be taken outside for separation.

17. In Tripuri it is called "**Harpek thunga**". The word '**pek**' is used also in colloquial Bengali in the sense of mud. This is derived from Sk t '**panka**' (Mud).

with a number of rites and customs, many of which have their parallel in non-tribal societies also.

rites in other forms of marriage

Now, the rites and customs associated with some other forms of marriage may be noted in some detail.

MARRIAGE BY SERVICE

This form of marriage is called 'Chāmāri Kāmāni' in Tripuri Language. This form is also known as "Jāmāi Khātā" in Bengali language, for here the Jāmāi or bridegroom has to work in the household of the would be father in law. The groom has to work there from one to three years or even more as desired by the bride's side. The period of service is now-a-days sought to be curtailed to a great extent. Time may come when this system may go out of fashion altogether. The reason is that such a system of marriage is not found in the neighbouring Bengalee Society or any other society anywhere. The Ghar Jāmāi System among the Bengalees is, however, very rare now-a-days.

A matchmaker or 'Ghatak' called 'Rāibāi' in Tripuri, after due negotiations, fixes a day for the would be bridegroom to start his service at the house of his father-in-law. The bridegroom, on that day, goes to father-in-law's house in good dress (usually dhuti and shirt) taking with him a few friends and relatives. He has to take with him some necessaries of daily life such as clothes, bedding, a dish, a waterjar, a tākkal or bamboo cutting weapon (Chopper) and so on. This party is accorded a warm reception there. There they make an apartment with bamboo partition in the main house for residence of the groom. He keeps his bedding etc. there. His friends then depart and the bridegroom starts his service life there. He performs all sorts of duties assigned to him by the father-in-law. He does jum work, collects fuel and all that is

necessary. He is kept under constant observation by the members of that house. They note his capability to work as also his nature and dealings with others. In this way he has to pass the entire period of service there. However, this is practically only formal. No one is declared disqualified for the marriage. The actual selection is made already-before permitting the youngmen to come and serve.

During the period of service the boy and the girl are not allowed to share a common bed. After the expiry of the period of service negotiation is made for the formal marriage. The bridegroom's party has to go to the bride's house for finalisation of the wedding. But if any one of them dreams a tortoise, or a deer, or sees a deadbody before the journey is undertaken, that is regarded as a bad omen, and the journey is postponed.

When the bridegroom's party reaches the bride's house for finalisation of the marriage, they are received with due honour. Two pots of wine prepared from rice are placed before them. Even in Bengalee societies wine was formerly regarded as a mark of honour. In a Bengali poem, we see this—

Yakhan Samaje Yāibā
Madya Ghati Mānya Pāibā¹⁸

When you will attend a social gathering, you will be presented with a jar of wine, as a mark of honour.

For finalisation of marriage the bride's father asks for a moderate dowry from the bridegroom's party. The dowry consists of an amount of money and a pig. Some more things may also be demanded. The amount may be anything from Rs. One hundred and one and six annas as the minimum.

If the groom's party agrees to pay the demanded dowry, the marriage is settled. Then the bride has to bow to many senior persons there. All bless the bride.

The bride than has to pour water on the elderly persons

18. Vide—Gorkha Vijay.

for them to bathe. Then a day is fixed for payment of the dowry by groom's side.

On that day the groom's party along with the match maker (rāibāi) goes to the bride's house, and is duly received with meticulous formalities. A jar of wine, a lighted lamp and a brass plate with **dhān** (paddy) **dūrbā** (a particular grass), cotton, til (seasumum) etc. are placed before the party. Then the father of the bridegroom pays the fixed amount of money (bride-price) on the brass plate. After this the payment day is settled for the marriage ceremony. Then the **Ochāi** (Priest) is invited by bride's party to perform the marriage ceremony and the necessary rites. The ochāi must be a duly married man and his first wife should be living. This is a notable feature in the matter of selection of a priest.

A ceremony known as **Dangdua** is to be performed by the groom's party when they proceed to the bride's house on the day of the marriage. This is required to be performed on the way in the house of a chauthuri when crossing a village.

In the bride's house the preparation of the marriage ceremony includes erection of several bamboo poles and tying banana leaves and bamboo splits to each, fastening a cloth on the bamboo splits and placing a big banana leaf on the ground there. All the articles brought by the groom's party for the bride are to be placed on this banana leaf, many other minute rites are also performed there. The women present there make the "Ulu" sound as in other Hindu societies. The bride's party then performs a worship called the **Lānpura wāthap** worship. This pūjā requires as many as fourteen fowl sacrifice as against general Hindu system for fowl is not allowed for sacrifice in Hindu society of these 14 fowls, 10 are supplied by groom's party. After the fowls are sacrificed, the entails are offered to the deity. This is also a peculiar custom. Then another pūjā is held which is called the Longthorai Pūjā. For this pūjā big cocks are sacrificed. Then another pūjā called Māilomā Khoolumā is also held with sacrifice

of fowls. All this shows that the fowl sacrifice is an essential part of the pūjās and festivals of the tribals. Then the priest (**Ochā**) is presented with a bottle of wine to drink. This is obviously in lieu of tea of other societies. The ochā then gives his view about the marriage—whether it is going to be happy or otherwise. From this it is clear that the tribal priest is expected to be a fortune teller as well.

A man and a woman help the Priest in performing the ceremony properly. The man is called **Aya** and the woman **Ayajuk**. They put new dhuti and sārī usually presented by the groom's side. The bride's party also employs some workers. They are also entertained with wine by bothsides. Thus wine becomes a very important item of refreshment and honour.

These workers then proceed to a tank or river to fetch ceremonial water. A Chopper (**Tākkāl**) is also required here. The Ayas strike the water with the Chopper which is known as water cutting and then pitchers are filled with water and brought home. The significance of this is not known. But it may be surmised to some extent, probably that is done in order to test the purity of water. If there is any external thing in the water, the Chopper will hit it and the water may be regarded as unclean. When they return with water dance and music are held in the way by someother men and women.

The bride and bridegroom are bathed with this water. They wear new clothes. A turban is also put on the head of the bridegroom. This is a new phenomenon. This is not practised by the Bengalees who have the system of using an imitation crown (**Mukut**). Then the bride is carried by a man on his back to the marriage platform (**Vedī**). A flower tree is planted there. The bride has to break a branch of the tree from the back of the carrying man. Then she comes back to her own apartment in the house. This ritual is called **Khubang Subaia**. Then there is a thread cutting rite. A thread tying

the bride and the bridegroom is cut a sunder by the Ayajuk (helping woman).

The wedding platform is made like that of the Bengalees. But there are some details not noted in the Bengalee platforms. Another platform is made nearby for keeping presentations made by guests to the bride.

The wedding is performed with the Saptapadi rite by the bride. That is the bride goes round the groom seventimes and after every round she bows to the groom and throws flowers on him.

The peculiar custom here is that at least one flower thus thrown as to be eaten up by the mother of the groom.

After the seven rounds the bride and the groom are seated for sampradan of the bride (handing over) by the father or any other guardian of the bride. This is similar to the general Hindu Custom. After this many other similar rites are also performed. Then the couple bow to their superiors. At last a feast is held. The couple also join the feast.

The consumation of marriage is not allowed on that night. This system is also similar to Bengalee society. The union is allowed on the second night. On the next morning other rites begin.

A pūjā is also held for the welfare of the two families. Another feast is also held in which a curry of dry fish is a must. This shows the great love for dry-fish among the tribal people.

In Bengalee Societies dryfish is a taboo in social feasts. People think dry fish is a sign of poverty.

After the feast, the couple have to wash the hands of respected persons and some others as well.

After the marriage, the groom goes to his own house with the bride within a week. There they stay for two and a halfdays and then return to the bride's house.

Though rural tribal people engage their Ochāi Priest in marriage and other ceremonies, now-a-days many tribals,

especially the urban people, engage Bengalee Brahmin Priests for all religious ceremonies.

There are many difference of rituals in this system of marriage from the normal system (Marriage by negotiation). In the normal system the marriage is held at the house of the bridegroom, while in the marriage by service, it is held in the house of the bride. Then there are pond digging, cradle swinging, grind stone carrying etc. in the normal system which are not found in the other system. Also there are local variations in each system.

Another form of marriage is almost similar to the above system (Marriage by service). This is called Chamari Amar. Here the bridegroom goes to the house of the father-in-law and settles there for life of his own accord. Here no pre-marital service is required. This is equivalent to the Gharjāmāi system of the Bengalees.

MARRIAGE OF WIDOWER, WIDOW

Marriage of a widower and widow is allowed, but with restricted rituals. Further a widow is not allowed to marry a bachelor. She has to choose a widower only. There is no such restriction in the case of a widower. The widow marriage is called Sindoor foolna. W.W. Hunter observed that "A Tipperah widow may re-marry, if it so seems good to her. Every lad before marriage has his sweetheart and he cohabits with her whenever opportunity serves, this however, is without the knowledge of the elders. I once asked a young-man whether he was afraid of his liasion coming to the knowledge of the girls relatives. He replied. "No it is the custom; what can they say? They did the same when they were young, and their daughter is responsible for her own actions. She likes me and I liker her."^{19(a)}

19(a). W.W. Hunter—A Statistical Account of Bengal, Page 494.

LOVE MARRIAGE

Love marriage or Hamjak Laii Kailaimani) is widely popular now-a-days among the Tripuri Societies, The customs of this marriage is just like the normal social marriages. If the guardians of a boy and girl who fall in love with each other, are not willing, marriage cannot be held. In most cases, the boy and the girl elope from the house and get married.

Besides these forms, there are other forms like marriage by purchase (Fuisai Tooba), marriage by exchange (Nakkaisa Kaimung), marriage by capture (Kaklam Kuruini Kaimung), marriage by elopment (Kharlaioi Kajjakmani), marriage by insistance (Burui Hamjagni Kajjakmani) etc. but these types of marriages are not common among them.

DIVORCE

Divorce prevails among the Tripuris and someother tribes. It is called 'Kaklaimani'. This is against the Hindu system of old. What may be the probable source of its origin among the tirbals? It may be due to the comparative freedom in sexual matters in the tribal societies, as noted by capt. Lewin.^{19(b)} Muslim influence may also be there to some extent from 15th Century onwards. Tripura was in constant warfare with the Pāthān Muslim rulers of Gaud from that time. The large number of fowl sacrifice in tribal marriage and worships perhaps indicate a muslim influence.

For a divorce, a meeting of the village leaders is held at the house of the husband or the wife's father. There the husband or the wife seeking divorce makes a statement about his or her grievance. The answer of the other party is also heard by the assembly. Then the village council passes its

19(b). Capt. Lewin—The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers therein, (Calcutta, 1896). Also Prof. J. Gonchaudhury—The Riangs of Tripura. p-96.

'Judgement'. If divorce is the decision, the husband now-a-days^a has to sign a paper to this effect.

Even after divorce the husband and the wife may resume their conjugal life if they like. In that case they have to perform a puja with the help of the village priest and destroy the document of divorce, if any.

The usual causes of divorce are the following (a) wife's barrenness. (b) husband's impotence. (c) Any incurable disease in husband or wife. (d) Adultery by any side. (e) Constant quarrel between the couple. (f) Neglect of household duties by either side. However divorce is usually discouraged by the Tripuris like the Hindu Society.

DEATH RITES (THUILAI THANGLAI)

Both cremation and burial of the dead body is in vogue among the Tripuris. But cremation is now the predominant custom, obviously due to non-tribal Hindu influence. The dead body of a baby is however buried. Formerly burial was practised as an alternative method. Now the Christian tribals including the Tripuris Practise burial like other Christians. Some Hindu Tripuris also practise the same as of old.

The dead body is first washed with hot water and dressed. Then it is placed on a bier²⁰ with the head of the dead towards the north. Tulsi leaves and mustard oil are put on the eyes. The relatives put paddy, sesamum, cotton etc. at the feet of the body. Money is placed on the chest with the left hand. Honey is put in the mouth. A cock is sacrificed at the feet of the dead by striking it against the ground with the left hand. The rice is cooked in a bamboo-pipe or an earthen utensil. This rice and the sacrificed cock are offered to the dead putting them in a bamboo basket. In another basket some other things

20. Called 'Talai' This word is also used by rural Bengalee people in the sense of a paddy mat made of bamboo canes on which paddy is dried.

are kept. Then the body is tied with a thread in seven coils at the legside.

Then the funeral procession begins with the cry "Hari Hari Bol" (Uttar 'Hari Hari') and "Bol Hari". If a river or canal is on the way a thread is to be placed on both sides of the river and after crossing it, the thread is to be torn to pieces.

At the cremation ground the bier is put down with the head of the dead towards the north. The burning ground should be owned by the family of the dead. It is a common cremation ground, a mock purchase of the ground is to be made by throwing away four copper coins there in four directions.

Then the dead body is placed on the funeral pyre and some more fire wood is put on the body. A pinda or ball of kneaded rice, banana, sesamum, ghee, honey etc. is made and put into the mouth of the dead as his last meal. The funeral rites are performed under the guidance of a priest. He may be a Tripuri Priest called Ocāi or a Brahman Priest of the Bengalee Community. The trend is now towards the latter. Already Brahman Priests are engaged in the temples of Tripura except the temple of the Fourteen Deities where the traditional Contāi priest and his staff work.

Then the **mukh āgni** rite is held by the eldest son of the dead. This is called 'Hartanlaio'. This is like the same rite of other Hindus. The son makes three to seven rounds of the body with the fire in a bamboo stick held in his left hand. He touches the mouth of the dead body. A new earthen pitcher is then broken near the feet of the dead. Then the relatives present set fire to the pyre one after another.

The fire burns and the body is reduced to ashes. Then water is poured on the Pyre seventimes with a gourd shell of the Jum obviously to put out the dying fire. A piece of skull of the burnt body together with some other things²¹ are placed on a small raft made there and floated in a river nearby. Then

21. Incense, Lamp etc.

a small hut is erected near the funeral Pyre and some other household goods are put inside the hut. All this obviously stands for a tomb or a memorial stone of some other tribes. The hut probably indicates the early poverty of the tribe, as also their ignorance of masonry.

A little water is poured on the burning spot later on for the departed soul to drink and a piece of white cloth from the deadman's dress is hoisted as a flag there. Then the funeral party leaves for the house of the deadman. They never look back. On the way, they have to make some knots in the leaves of trees or plants. After returning they take bath, touch fire, and sprinkle their head and body with water sprayed with a **Tulsi leaf**.

The burning party can not eat boiled rice by that day. They are to eat other food stuff, fried rice²² etc. After dusk they have to see the star in the sky and then they are allowed to take boiled rice as usual. At that hour rice and seven curries are cooked and offered in the name of the dead. This sort of offering continues for three days. This is comparable with Kākbali of others.²³

On the fourth day the son who performed the **Mukh āgni** goes to the cremation ground together with some others. He collects pieces of the skull of the dead, puts it in a bamboo container, and later on buries it in some pond near his house. This resembles, or as reminiscent of the early custom of burial. In the burning ground a bhog²⁴ is offered to the deity Owāthap. The rite is known as **Maithaka**.

The period of mourning lasts twelve days and the srāddha ceremony is held on the thirteenth day. A Brāhman Priest is

22. = **mudi** or **muri**.

23. An offering for the crows to eat. This seems to be a relic of the old Iranian religion (Parsi) in which the dead body itself is offered for birds to eat.

24. Offering of food, rice, curry etc.

engaged to officiate and everything is performed according to his directions and in accordance with the Hindu Srāddha rules. So it may be said that this is practically adopted from the Bengalee society.²⁵

At the last stage of 'Srāddha' offering of food and drink are made to the departed soul. This is called the Maikhalai ritual. The place where the offering is made is cleared. Then an umbrella is put up on a bamboo pole there. Beneath this a turban is kept on a piece of wood. Then the offering is kept near the turban. If the dead was a vegetarian, then only vegetarian diet is offered and vice versa. The offering is carried in winnowing fan, Incense, light etc.²⁶ are also provided along with the bhog. Drink is also given. A half burnt piece of bamboo or wood is placed on the offering with the left hand.

The person who makes the offering to the departed soul, on return, bathes and makes obeisance to the Sungod.

Then another rite is performed in which dhān, dūrba etc. are placed on the heads of some persons and the Ocai Priest slightly touches their heads with a piece of stone. This is called 'Falasataba'. By this rite they acquire safety from any harm due to the death.

After the ceremony all members of the family can take normal diets, but the sons have to wait till the moon is visible at night.

The *asthivisarjana*²⁷ is performed in the river Ganga in the normal Hindu fashion or in any other river. The offering of Pinda²⁸ may be made at Gaya or at Dambur in South Tripura on the occasion of the Pous Sankrānti. So long as the

25. Also vide —D.P. Debbarma—op. cit p-44

In this case they are greatly influenced by other castes' rituals.

26. Dhūp, dip etc. of other Hindus.

27. Immersion of bones of the dead.

28. funeral cake.

asthi (bone here, a piece of skull) is not immersed in Ganga or elsewhere, it is kept buried in the courtyard and offerings of food etc. are to be made to it twice daily.²⁹

(C—I) The dead body of children below the age of 18 months is buried. Also the body of a patient who dies of Leprosy is sometimes buried.

(C—II) The town-dwelling and educated Tripuris observe the death rites a bit differently from those of the rural and hill areas. The town people are surrounded by Bengalee people and Tripuris follow the Bengalee ways to some extent.

D) **Dress etc.** Women's *riyā* the Tripuri male folk have no special dress. They wear *dhuti*, *Gāncha*, *Lungi* etc. like non tribal people. But their females have a special dress. They wear a loin cloth known as *Pāch dā*. It is a thick piece of cloth with stripes or designs woven by themselves in their looms. This is of half the length of a *sārī*. It covers the lower part of the lady from the waist. For the upper part they wear a sort of short blouse called *Riyā*.³⁰

It is mainly used as a brassier. But it is known for its beauty. At the time of marriage a new *riya* is presented by the mother in law to the new bride. At the death of a woman, her *riyā* is placed on a seat and offerings to the departed soul is made there.³¹

A good *riya* is made by skilled women artists and is highly appreciated even in foreign countries. Now-a-days educated Tripuri women wear *sārī* and blouse like Bengalee women. In hill areas tribal people both men and women carry load on their back in a long circular basket called "*bhem*". Sometimes the woman folk carry their babies in it.

29. Morning and Evening.

30. Some call '*richā*', it is also called '*Kāncli*'

31. K. P. Sen : *Rajmala I*, pp. 116-118 (about *riyā* or *Kāncli*).

In various festivals the Tripuri youths, both male and female perform dance jointly. In a dance called "leb āngbumani". They dance and make a peculiar sound by beating two bamboo splits. Hearing the sound an insect called "leb āng" come out of their holes and run towards the jum field for food. The woman folk then catch these insects to despatch them. By this they save the Jumkhet from the attack of these pests.

E) Tripuri customs regarding inheritance

Tripuri customs about inheritance may be noted here. These customs are not the same as the Hindu customs. They seem to be a mixture of Hindu and Muslim laws of inheritance.

This will be evident from the following—

- (i) Sons, daughters and wife get share of the property of their deceased father/husband. But the share is not equal. The eldest son gets the lion's share. This seems to be reminiscent of the days of monarchy when the eldest son of a king inherited the throne.
- (ii) The sons get two-thirds of the property left behind by the father. The remaining one-third is divided among the sisters and the widowed mother.
- (iii) If the widowed mother lives with a son or daughter, that son or daughter will inherit the mother's share after her death.
- (iv) The mother can give away her property to any son or daughter if she likes.
- (v) If any property is registered in the name of the mother, her daughter/daughters will inherit this property after her demise.
- (vi) The Tripuri father usually divides his property among his sons, daughters and wife while he is alive in order to avoid all quarrels among his successors.

- (vii) If a man has more than one wife, the sons of the second wife also are entitled to equal share of the parental property.
- (viii) An adopted son also is entitled to inherit the property of his foster father.
- (ix) If a man dies without issue, without any adopted son and without a wife living, then his property goes to his brother or in the absence of brother, the sons of the brother.
- (x) If a son lives separate from his father, he can not inherit the father's property.
- (xi) The Tripurī people living in urban areas and in close contact with the Hindu Society, the Hindu Succession laws are followed by the Tripurīs also.

SAVE OTHER RITES AND CUSTOMS OF THE TRIPURIS GRHA PRATISTHA OF HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

House construction in Tripurī Community is attended with some rites and customs and also superstitions. The first thing in this connection is the examination of the soil. But it is not a scientific examination but by other curious and ludicrous means, which constitute superstition. Some soil is collected from the selected homestead. The soil is kept under the pillow of the house owner. It is believed that he will dream a peculiar dream that night regarding the site selection.³² The man will narrate his dream events to the village Priest (Ochāi) or to some old person. The Priest or the old listener then gives his views about the site. Then the Ochāi is requested to perform some rites for the welfare of the family after construction of the house. The Ochāi does it. A bamboo post, a bamboo cane, a banana leaf with some rice on and a

32. The Riāngs have a similar custom in selecting Jum fields, *Infra vide*.

chicken are all that is required. The chicken is sacrificed to the deity. Naksōmatai by the Ochāi. This deity is said to be the guardian deity of a house. He may be compared to the Vedic deity Vāstospati (Lord of a residential house).

The Ochāi then examines the entrails of the sacrificed chicken to ascertain the future of the proposed house. If the entrails are in a good condition, it means good for the house. If not, the indication is that, the house will not do good to the family. This is obviously a superstitious belief. What is more obvious here is that chicken sacrifice is a must in every ritual of the tribals because of their excessive love of meat. The Priest however, performs further rites for welfare in case the entrails show any evil omen. However, town people do not depend on entrails examination but on the soil examination of the relevant department of the government.

After this soil examination and rites for well-being, the construction work is started with erection of the first post in the north-east (*īs āna*) corner of the homestead. In the hole mustard seeds, rice, turmeric, mango and tulsi leaves, a little gold etc. are placed before landing the post in the hole. A Priest guides all this affair. The same things are also tied at the top of the post. Sometimes a bow is also tied there. This probably shows the original hunting profession of the tribe.

After all this, the house is constructed with the help of the carpenters.

'GRHA-PRAVES'A' OR INAUGURATION CEREMONY

As in the general Hindu Society, some rituals are performed by the Tripuris before entering the newly built house. They have to worship two deities called Mā ilom ā and Khulum ā. They are the female deities of paddy and cotton respectively. These worships indicate that the house owner expects prosperity in respect of a paddy and cotton or food and clothing by the favour of these deities in the new house.

The Pūjā requires sacrifice of big cocks, we have already pointed it out that the fowl sacrifice is a must in everything of the Tripuris and other tribals alike.

After these Pūjās, **Lāmpra Pūjā** is also held. This pūjā is held on the day of entering the house, while the two other pūjās are to be performed on the previous day. So the whole is a two-day affair. After **Lāmpra Pūjā** some more Pūjās are also required the worship of Gangā, and two brother Gods **Akhata** and **Bikhata**. More cocks are sacrificed for these Pūjās. Not only sacrifice of cocks but their entrails examination is also held.

After all these rituals, the ceremonial entering of the house is done. The Ochāi guides every rite.

Last of all, a big feast is held in which the Ochāi and all other invited people take part. All are fed with fowl curry and other articles of food arranged by the house owner according to his capacity. This is the traditional Tripuri way of **Gṛha-pravesa**. But things are fast changing. The educated and urban tribal people are greatly influenced by the neighbouring Bengalee customs. Now many tribal people employ Bengalee priests in their social functions including **Gṛha-pravesa**. The Bengalee priests do everything in the Bengalee way. So at the hand of the Brahman Priests a big reshuffling of the tribal rites is made, and they have no objection to it. It seems that in course of time the Bengalee rites and customs will prevail even among the tribal society. A strong reason is that the Bengalee procedure is prescribed in ancient texts which are also respected by the tribal.

SOME TRIPURĪ BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS BASED ON THEM

The Tripurī people have a lot of customs based on time-honoured beliefs which may be called superstitions. Some of those are noted below—

Evil Omens

(i) If a hen lays a very small egg, it is a bad omen to the Tripuris. In that case, the house owner has to take the egg and turn it round his body three times. Then he has to throw it away in the Western direction. This is believed to be a preventive of any evil that was apprehended from the laying of the small egg.

(ii) If any goat or pig sits straight it is considered a bad omen. As a preventive of any evil to the family, the goat or pig is killed without delay and the meat is sold or eaten by the members of the family.

(iii) Seeing an empty pitcher at the time of a journey is also an evil omen. This is a common belief in many societies. When this happens before anybody's journey, the journey is usually postponed or undertaken with a broken heart.

(iv) If any deer eats the soil from any Jumfield, that is a bad omen. The Tripuris then avoid jum cultivation in that plot of land for fear that some evil may take place as a result of cultivation there.

MISCELLANEOUS BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

(v) Tripuris believe that evil spirits may do many harms to human beings. In order to prevent that evil eye of the spirits from a house, the Tripuris often hang up an earthen pot with some peculiar signs on it on the front door of the house. This is believed to keep away evil spirits. Of course the pot is made effective by the Ochāi by reciting mantras on it.

(vi) For protection of the house from enemies, the Tripuris use mantras-sanctified (**Mantrapūta**) nails. From such nails are driven into the four corners of the wall of the house. Then the nails are covered with stone and earth. It is believed that this antidote will remain effective for twelve years. A fresh set of nails etc. are to be used after that period. The Ochai does all these rites.

(vii) A curious belief of the Tripuris as regards the power

of Mantras is that an Ochāi expert in mantras can create a piece of flesh in the belly of a man. This flesh creates pain and the man dies eventually. This flesh may be found in postmortem examination.

They cite a curious example of such an event. A buffalo died suddenly somewhere. After its death it was found that a big tortoise was there in the stomach of the dead buffalo. The tortoise was alive. The people believe that all this was the effect of mantras applied by some Ochāi. Some one wanted to kill the buffalo belonging to another man. He employed an ochāi who created a tortoise in the buffalo and thereby caused its death.

3. THE RIĀNG RITES AND CUSTOMS.

Let us begin with marriage. The forms of marriage are the same as among the Tripuris. But the most popular is the marriage system of service of the would be bridegroom in the house of the bride.

Polygamy, is also practised but not Polyandry. Sororate and levirate are also noticed.³³ Marriage with other tribes and even Bengalees is also noted. Marriage is called Kailai in the Reāng Language. Divorce is also there. But there is a fine for the party seeking divorce as among the Tripuris. But the fine here is fixed if the husband seeks divorce, he has to pay Rs. 124 and paise 93 only being the sum total of

Six Kudis ³⁴ of rupees	=	120/-
Six adhulis of 1/2 rupees	=	3/-
Six Sikis = 1/4 rupees	=	1.50 paise
Six ān ās = 1/16 of a rupee	=	.37 paise
Six pice	=	6 paise
		Rs. 124.93 paise

33. Prof. J. Gonchaudhury : The Ri āngs of Tripura, p-46

34. Kudi = a score, twenty.

In case the wife seeks divorce she has to pay the cost of the marriage feast and the wages of the bridegroom for the entire period of service at the bride's house. The divorce is sanctioned by the village council, and a portion of the money, realised from the party seeking divorce is taken by council as fee.

Prof. G. Gonchaudhury says that premarital chastity is not a matter of serious concern. He quotes Capt. Lewin as saying the great freedom of sexual intercourse exists among the tribes of Tripura including the Reāngs and Tripuris.³⁵

Other rites and customs are similar to those of the Tripuris with minor changes in details only - some peculiar customs of the Riāngs are noted below—

(i) Good dreams are kept secret but the bad dreams are divulged. They believe that by this the evil effect of bad dreams is totally or partly done away with.

(ii) In order to select a field for jum cultivation, the Riāngs bring a clod of soil of the proposed field ; and keep it on bed under a pillow. They believe that they will dream³⁶ something about the good or bad result of selection of the land for Joom. Fish, good water, marriage, buffalo, elephant etc. are good in dream. But fire, corpse, house building nude woman, beggar etc. are bad.

(iii) For knowing future good or evil, a Priest expert in divination is employed. Then a pig or a chicken is sacrificed and its entrails are examined by the Priest.³⁷ Then he makes a prediction about the future of the house holder.

(iv) Some people get possessed by a deity at times and then can make predictions.

(v) The Riāngs use amulets to get rid of evil spirits and diseases.

35. J. Gonchaudhury : op. cit p-46.

36. Similar custom is noted among Tripuris is selecting a homestead.

37. Ibid. p. 68.

(vi) Various occult practices are there among the **Ri āngs** for causing injury or even death to the enemy. The enemy's cloth, hair, nail, wine etc. are used for this purpose. Sometimes the enemy's effigy is made with clay and it is piecered with an arrow or something like it. Spells are muttered in all such rites.

(vii) A person possessed of some evil spirit called *sckal* (= Witch) is avoided by all.

(viii) Worship of some minor deities are held for good crops, weather, welfare of live stock, removal of barrenness of women and so on.

(ix) After a **P ūj ā** the deity is requested to return to his/her own place lost any dishonour is done by children. Then three lines are drawn on earth by the Priest demarcating areas of God and man. In this a **mantra** (spell) is uttered containing the names of Rāma and Laxmana of the Rāmāyana³⁸ obviously to produce a strong effect. The inclusion of these names in the mantra is significant. It indicates that the **Ri āng** Community is somehow connected with Rāma cult and has a great faith in Rāma as an Incarnation of God.

(x) If a **Ri āng** woman has some irregularity in her monthly courses, it is believed that an offering of some articles near the hold of a crab will cure this irregularity. So this is done. It is to be noted here that the soil of crab's hole³⁹ is regarded as highly efficacious in some rites on other rural communities also.

(xi) The **Ri āngs** have a belief that big trees like mango, jack fruit, black berry etc. provide shelter to evil spirits. So they do not like to have such trees in their lands for fear of

38. **Rāmkuṅdri, Laxman Kuṅdri** etc. **Kuṅdri** seems to be a degenerated form of the Skt. 'Kuṅḍali'.

39. So also the soil of a mouse's hole.

evil spirits. Now a days this belief is gradually dwindling away.

(xii) For Jum Cultivation the Riāngs select a plot in a peculiar way. They take a little soil from the proposed plot and keep it under the pillow of the house-owner. If the owner dreams any bad dream that night, it is believed that selection of the plot is not right and the plot may be rejected.

(xiii) They believe in witches called **Dāin**⁴⁰ or *sekal*. Usually women knowing occult practices and mantras to call up spirits become witches. The witches can do any harm to man by their occult rites. So the Riāngs fear the witches and in older days killed them. A male Dāine named Kapiray Reang was mercilessly slain in 1881 A.D.⁴¹.

This belief and practice of killing a witch (**dāin**) can be traced to other races of the world also. Joan of Arc of France, who liberated her country from the British Yoke, was at last sentenced to death by a French court on charges of witch craft.

(xiv) The Riāngs believe that all ailments are caused by evil spirits or dangerous deities. So the only way to get rid of diseases is to propitiate these deities or spirits, as the case may be, by making offering to them comprising chicken, pig etc.

(xv) For good rainfall in proper season, the Riāng's worship the Goddess of water with sacrifice of chicken etc. They believe this willbring rain in time. Hindu **Gangā-Pūjā** is comparable here.

4. THE JAMĀTIYĀS.

Now for the rites and customs of the Jamātiyās who are third in numerical strength in Tripura and are also represented in the Tripura Legislative Assembly and the Ministry. Some the these are noted below.

40. In Bengali 'Daini', Skt. 'Dāikini', p. 76, also p. 69.

41. Gonchaudhury—The Riāngs of Tripura.

(i) Pregnant women are not allowed to eat somekinds of fish such as **Mrgal** or **Mirga, boyal** and fish that have no scale.

(ii) During the advanced stage of Pregnancy a Pūjā is performed with a duck sacrificed.

(iii) The pregnant woman must not kill a fish by striking it against the ground lest her child should get deformed.

(iv) The husband of a pregnant woman must not hunt or kill an animal⁴² and join in the cremation of a dead body.

(v) The period of impurity at birth is eighteen days in case of male child and seven days in case of female child.

(vi) In the traditional marriage system of the Jamātiās, the bride is to be older than the bridegroom⁴³. Among the educated or urban people of the tribe the seniority of the bridegroom is the custom as in other communities of the country and the world at large.⁴⁴

(vii) In marriage ceremony two bamboo pandals are made one for marriage and the other for worshipping the fourteen Deities. This is a new custom among them. Only two types of marriage by negotiation. In the first system, the bridegroom has to serve in the father in law's house even after marriage for two years at least.⁴⁵

In the second system the proposal is initiated by the groom's side and the marriage is also held in their house. The educated people however follow the Bengalee system of marriage at the bride's house.

42. In a Bengali entitled *Tantralok* published recently from Dharmanagar, North Tripura, The author argues against the custom. But this shows his extreme love for animal sacrifice and meat eating only.

43. P. N. Bhattacharjee : *The Jamātiās of Tripura*, p. 27.

44. Also vide Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (Let thy love be younger than thyself etc. Here 'Love' = Lady love, bride).

45. This custom is also seen in Shakespeare's *Tempest* where Ferdinand had to serve in Miranda's house for sometime. This service is a sort of bride price. The *Haradhanu-bhanga* of Rama and *Laksyabheda* of Arjuna are also similar things.

(viii) Remarriage of widow and widower's is allowed among themselves only. That is a widower can marry a widow only and vice-versa.

(ix) Divorce prevails. The fine of Rs. 125/- and sixty eight paise should be paid by the party seeking divorce. The minor children remain with the mother after divorce.

(x) If a man marries a widow or divorced woman having children, these children are not entitled to inherit his property though he may be addressed as father by the children.

(xi) Cremation is the usual custom for disposal of the dead excepting children below 18 months of age, who are buried.

(xii) If a pregnant woman dies, she is to be cremated, but her child or foetus should be taken out and buried.

(xiii) Wine has an important role in the life of the **Jam ātiy ās**, though all tribals are used to it. Wine is offered to the evil spirits to propitiate them and ward off their evil effects. Wine is also paid sometimes as fee for the services of a Priest in lieu of cash *daksinā*. Also it is given as fee to the village headman when he is requested to hear a complaint against somebody and award justice in the case. Wine is also to be offered to the guests as a mark of honour. Wine was a prestigious drink even in non-tribal societies of old. It was offered to important persons attending a social gathering.

(xiv) There is a custom of ceremonial friendship making among the **Jam ātiy ās** as in some non-tribal rural people. A man can make only a male friend, and a woman only a female friend by this ceremony. This is called '*bāndhavitā*' (making a *bandhava*) by the non-tribal people.

5. THE KALAI TRIBE

The Kalais are a branch of the **Hālām** tribe and they live mainly in the Amarpur Sub-division of South Tripura. They follow the Tripuris in their rites and customs. The peculiarities are noted below :—

(i) In social banquets men and women have to sit separately. No man is allowed to enter the area of women in the feast and vice versa.⁴⁶ In drinking bouts also their custom differs.

(ii) In marriage, negotiations through a third person is the usual custom. The Jam ā ikh ā ta system is also there. No other system is noted among them. The months of Chaitra and Pous and avoided for marriage.

A new house is constructed at the place of marriage for the V.I.P. of the village to sit. This house is called NAKS Ā R (New House) : Big vessels of wine are kept within this room.

The bride goes round the bridegroom in a **Kuñja**, made of bamboo and Plantain trees, scatters flowers and so on like general Hindu brides. Then the bride and the groom are tied together with a piece of cloth, handkerchief etc. by the Priest and both have to go round the Vedī seven times. This is the Bengalee custom in operation on the second day of the marriage called '**Basi Viv ā ha**' or "**Basi Biy ā**" in colloquial language.

The **Punar Y ā tr ā** ceremony is performed after a month or so. This is called "**thangar n āim āni**".

In the marriage by **J ā m ā i Kh ā t ā** system the bridegroom goes to his own house together with the bride after a month or two of the marriage. He stays there for three days. This is also known as "**th āng ā r n āim āni**". After three days he returns to the bride's house. At the expiry of the period of **J ā m ā i-Kh ā t ā** he may return to his own house with the bride permanently or if he likes, he may live in a separate house constructed by his near the house of his father-in-law. In such cases the opinion of the wife seems to play the vital role.

(iii) Farewell songs are sung at the time of departure of the bride from her parent's house after wedding. These songs

46. P. N. Bhattacharjee : **Loka vr̥tter Āloke Kalai Samprad āy.** (in Bengali), p. 33.

are more realistic in expression than emotion. A song is addressed to the bride by her relatives singing as follows.

'O girl, we do not know that kind of paddy and rice you will have to clean by the winnowing fan, only God knows'.

—This means we do not know what is store for you in your new house.

Various songs are sung at the time of Jum cultivation, during **Gadiya Pūjā** and putting the babies to sleep.

(iv) Often riddles are put for solution in small or big gatherings as in the rural non-tribal societies. Some riddles may be noted.

(a) The more the mother cries, the more the child grows. The answer is thread spun in a **Carkhā**.⁴⁷ The **Carkha** is the mother and the thread the child.

(b) No hand, no leg, yet it travels all over the world.—
The answer is letter that is sent by post.

(c) One cannot see it but can touch it.

(= One's forehead.)

(d) One can see it but can not touch it.

(= The Sky)

(e) A bird's nest in every house.

(= a bag)

(f) I do good to all but get a kick in return.

(= The husking Pedal)⁴⁸

(g) Quick to go but slow to return.

(= attending call of nature)

There are many such riddles prevalent among this tribe.

6. THE UCAI TRIBE

Some peculiar rites and customs of the Ucai Tribe are noted below :

(i) In marriage settlement the bridegroom's side has to take the initiative. They send a proposal through a **Rāybā** or

47. Spinning wheel.

48. "dheki" in Bengali. The 'dheki' is operated with pressure from the leg. This is called a kick here.

marriage broker to the bride's house. A bottle of wine and a rupee in cash should be sent with the broker. If the proposal is accepted then the **Kuk Sunga** or mangala Charana Ceremony is held at the bride's house. On the occasion the groom's party has to present as many bottles of wine and as many fowls as are members in the family of the bride. But in case of poverty or any other trouble, the rigidity is relaxed and the ceremony is performed with a bottle or two of wine, tea and Pān-supāri.

(ii) No widow or widower is allowed to participate in the marriage party of the bridegroom.

(iii) The bridegroom has to live in the house of the bride for four years from the day of marriage, but not a single day more. This custom is known as Cāmāri.⁴⁹

(iv) Sleeping in a Common room is the custom with the **Ucai**. Even a newly wedded couple has to sleep there. No separated room is provided for them. This seems to be a relic of the ancient life of primitive men in an uncivilized state. Some Bengalee visitors notes this during their night halt there as guests, and laughed among themselves at the sight of sexual enjoyments openly someyears ago. The elderly people of the family then replied why do you laugh? The boy enjoys the woman. What is there to laugh?

(v) Sometimes pān or a fee of Rs.60/- to 120/- is to be paid by the groom to the bride's father for a marriage in lieu of Cāmāri.

(vi) Divorce and remarriage are also to vogue to some extent.

(vii) Cremation and burial are in vogue for disposal of the dead. There is no fixed date for S'rāddha rites. Vegetarian diet is used for three to five days by the family and relatives of the dead.

49. 'Cāmāri' in Bengali means work of a Cāmār or Cobbler. This also may be a cause for replacing this word by 'Sevāri'.

(viii) Some **Ucais** have adopted Vaisnavism and they do not drink wine. Even these people do not think themselves of the Ucai tribe but consider them to be members of the general Vaisnava Society or sect of Tripura and elsewhere.

7. THE KUKIS

The Kukis residing in the extreme north of Tripura are practically the same tribe as the **Lusāi** or Mizo of Mozoram and the **Khāsiās** of **Khāsiā** Hills around Shillong. They are called **Kucudefa Kuki** (Khasia) and **Lucidefa Kuki** (Lusai).⁵⁰

Many of these people have adopted Christianity. Yet the Majority remains with the Hindu fold. They have scanty rites and customs. The notable among these are given below.

(i) After child birth the feeding of rice ceremony (**annaprāsana**) is held on the third or fifth day in case of female and male child respectively. The mother gives rice to baby from her own mouth in imitation of a bird feeding its young. This feeding is continued for several months.

(ii) Marriage by mutual selection is the usual custom. The guardians are informed of the selection and then they arrange the marriage ceremony.

(iii) Rarely marriage by service. **Jāmai Khāta** is also noted among them.

(iv) For marriage an amount of Rs. 8/- is to be paid as fee to the bride's family by the groom's father as confirmation of his agreement to the marriage proposal. But on payment of a higher amount, Rs. 16/- at the least, the boy is allowed to

50. At present "**Darlong**" is the popular surname of the **Kukis**. They are called **Kirāta** in Sanskrit, **Lusāi** during British regime and **Khacāk** by the rural Bengalee population. They were a ferocious people.

sleep with the girl even before the marriage.⁵¹ This means the marriage does not depend on any ceremony but on a fee only. This also seems to be the relic or a very ancient age when there was no ceremony at all for a sexual union, and the institution of marriage was still unknown.

(v) Cohabitation of unmarried boys and girls are tolerated if they marry in the long run.

(vi) Remarriage of widows is not allowed within one year of the death of the husband. The period is regarded as impure.

(vii) The **Kukis** remained naked in former times. So there is the Bengali Phrase '**nengta kuki**' (a naked Kuki). Now the practice has been abandoned owing to education and influence of other people.⁵²

(viii) The dead body is buried by the Kukis. Food, drink, dress and weapons of the deceased are placed beside the body in the grave. It is believed that the deadman has to perform a long journey in the next world, and hence he will require all these things.

(ix) At the death of a Kuki Chief,⁵³ the old custom was to bury some cut off head of other people together with the body of the Chief. His favourite servant was buried in the same pit. The servant had to ring a bell for sometime declaring the death of the Chief. Now the practice is not seen or reported. But the fact may be that the practice is dying away.

51. Ram Gopal Singh : The Kukis of Tripura. P—40

52. Even a nude or semi-nude Kuki woman is sometimes noticed in the jungles. If they wear a loin cloth the breasts remain uncovered. At the sight of an outsider, the woman formerly slips away and covers her breasts with her hands. Also vide T.D.G. p. 156

53. Called '**Lal**' (King) the word is used before the name, e.g. **Lal Chukta, Lal Deng ā** etc.

(x) Before burying the corpse of a Chief it is placed on a wooden platform and fire is lighted around it. After a time the gutted body is buried. The fire is kept burning for ninety days.

(xi) The Kukis eat the flesh of all kinds of birds and beasts. They may be called omnivorous. Persons visiting the Kuki areas of North Tripura report that there are hardly any bird or beast in the jungle. When asked why, they say all these are eaten up by the Kuki peole of the area.⁵⁴

They eat bread with the oil of monkeys. Some Bengalee visitors also have imbibed the fascination for taking bread with monkey oil on going there.

In the 'Rājma ālā',⁵⁵ it is stated that some Kuki people who visited the kingdom of Gauda in mid 15th Century along with prince Ratna Fā of Tripura ate large numbers of insects called Ghugura of Ghugrā in the month of Kārtikā (October-November) and the pāthān Nawab of Gaud criticised this habit of the peole of Tripura. This shows that the Kukis are in the habit of eating any flesh from older days.

8. OTHER TRIBES.

(i) The Kāipeng tribe⁵⁶ does not take milk. When asked why by the Bengalees, they in return ask why should we deprive the calf of its mother's milk? Does anybody deprive us of our mother's milk? Instead they drink a special wine made of numerous ingrdients, rice, chillies and leaves of a dozen trees. This drink is called Lāngi. They take big plots or land, cows etc. from the bride's side at the time of marriage.

54. They do not spare even a crow. So none can hear the cawing of a crow at day break in the Kuki lands. Also vide T.D.G. p.157

55. The Rājma ālā-I (Dānger Fā Khandā). p. 63

56. Supposed to be a branch of the Hālāms.

(ii) The Moghs have a liberal marriage policy. They allow their sons and daughters to select their own mates freely. The married son may also live separately after marriage if he likes. Mogh women enjoy great freedom. They eat all kinds of fish and flesh and have a liking for these things in a rotten state.⁵⁷

They have no class distinction among them.

(iii) The Cākṃā tribe in the interior places still eats different kinds of flesh including elephant and tiger like the Kukis. A leader of this tribe has said that he has himself eaten these meats, that elephant's flesh has a very disgusting smell spreading to a distance of one mile or so, and that all are not used to all sorts of meat. They keep the dead body in a wooden coffin for a week or so, and after that cremate it.

As regards their prayers it is observed that – Although Buddhist by religion, the Chākṃās have made a curious blending of Buddhism, Vaisnavism and even Islam in their prayer and religious couplet.⁵⁸

● Conclusion :

The above is a pen picture of the rites and customs of the tribal peoples of Tripura as collected by different research workers including the present writer. Yet one cannot be sure that these are quite exhaustive for dates are collected from accessible hill areas and by random sampling. The remote interior areas are scarcely visited by and worker for fear of danger from wild beasts as well as terrorists of recent times. However the above collection may be regarded by and large, representative and workable. Further, all tribals have many

57. Also vide T.D.G. p. 154. This is also noticed in some other hill people as well as in the Manipuri Community of Tripura and adjoining areas.

58. T. D. G. p.150

common features in their rites and customs, and the differences are gradually vanishing owing to education and mixture with the people of the plains especially the urban population. As a result aculturation is taking place and educated or urban tribals now-a-days have little difference from the local Bengalee educated men and women. The tribals are fast adopting the Bengalee rites and customs including the Bengalee costumes—dhuti, panjabi, sārī, blouse etc. Dr. S. Bhattacharjee⁵⁹ observed that "Remarkable changes have taken place in preparation and consumption of food articles, dress and ornaments, customs and manners which are all being fashioned after the Bengali model. The family organisation and social relationships have all changed both in their nature and character."

..... "Coming in contact with the non-tribals, they have now become more individualistic and the joint ownership of property and communal activities have today little role in their social behaviour."

Only the Christian tribals are imitating the Western ways of life. But their number is small. It seems that the tribal peoples of Tripura will, by degrees, turn into Bengalee gentleman and gentle woman of worth seeing type, for these people have a strong determination and tenacity for doing things. A Tripurī gentleman of Krishnanagar, Agartala has been performing Durga Pūjā of ten Mūr̥ti image every year for the last seventy three years approximately, which is rarely seen even in well to do Bengalee families.

The tribal people have now some good scholars among themselves. They study all Hindu Sāstras and write about them. This also helps in spreading general Hindu culture among the tribals and bringing about a unity of rites and

59. Dr. S. Bhattacharjee : Genesis of Tribal Extremism in Tripura, p. 57

customs. But it is curious that traditional rituals are performed by **Ocāi** (Tripuri Priest) while non-traditional rituals are performed by Brāhmin Priests.

As a matter of fact, though, most of the tribal people of Tripura in the broader sense Hindus, follow their own rites and customs.

Dr. S. Bhattacharjee says that "As regards religious beliefs and practices mention may be made that Tripura has been an arena for the expression of some of the highest qualities of the Indo-mongoloid people under Hindu inspiration."⁶⁰

According to Dr. S. K. Chatterjee, "The **Tipras** like the other Bodo Groups had their tribal religion much modified by Hinduism. But among them and under the aegis of the ruling house of Tripura a good deal of their old pre-Hindu religion and its ritual is preserved as part of the State Religion"⁶¹

60. Vide p. 11.

61. S. K. Chatterjee, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. Vol. XVI (1950), No.2, p. 218.

PRIESTHOOD, SACRED PLACES AND IMAGES

1. Priesthood :

Spiritual hankering is born in the life of the human beings which uplifted them from the state of animals. —For spiritual and social guidance priest is essential. As in each and every society there is an important role of priest, in the tribal life of Tripura also.

Early History

The **Rājmalā**, the old chronicle of the **Tripura** dynasty gives a detailed account of the origin of priesthood of the tribal people of Tripura and the images of their early deities. The earliest reference to a **Pūjā** (worship) in the **Rājmalā** is in the Tripura **Khanda**¹ The tribal people of Tripura performed worship of **sī'va** when their king Tripur was killed². and the people were living in anarchy. They performed this worship in the **Kirāta** way.

Kirāter mate save Pūjā arambhila.

They started the worship in the manner of the **Kirātas**.

But what that manner was not made clear. We may surmise that the **Pūjā** was conducted by the tribal Priest-known as **Ocāi**³, **Akcāi** or **Ojhāi**⁴

1. Vide R. M. I p. 12

2. By Sīva himself.

3. Also spelt as Ochāi, Ochay.

4. Sri J. Gonchaudhury : The Rīāngs of Tripura Ojhāi seems to be connoting with Beng and Hindi Ojhāi Skt Upadyaya (teacher) Also vide-D. P. Debārmā's Treatise on **Tripurī** community p.55, P. N. Bhattacharya : The Jamātiyās of Tripura p. 48.

This Priest performs most for the tribal rituals even today.

Another type of Priest is mentioned in the Yujhar Kha nda of the R. M. He belonged to the Dh ā m ā i clan of the Mogh tribe.

At R ā ng ā m ā t i, the then capital of Tripura, there was royal family belonging to the Lik ā tribe, supposed to be a branch of the Moghs. The Dh ā mai Priest was employed by the Lik ā King for performing worships and miraculous deeds as well. They performed river worship every year and stopped the flow of the river gomate which was of course a miracle. These priests never ate any forbidden food, but ate only praiseworthy foodstuff. They dried their washed clothes up above the ground, never on the ground for fear of contact with any dirt. They were adopts in all religious rites (**dharmete nipuntara**).

The lik ā king was defeated by king Yujh ā r F ā of the Tripur dynasty at a very early date. With the fall of the lik ā dynasty the Dh ā mai Priest also left R ā ng ā m ā t i and perhaps Tripura, and is heard nō more.

Another Priest is also recorded in the R ā ml ā l ā. He is called **Cont āi**. He performs the worship of the fourteen Deities of Tripura. He is attended with some assistants known as Deod ā i and G ā lim.⁵ These people, according to the R. M. did not originally belong to Tripura, but were brought from outside, from an island of the sea, probably the Bay of Bengal.

After the death of king Tripur without leaving behind a successor, the people of Tripura worshipped S'iva, who granted a boon to the people that a good son would be born to the queen of Tripura if she performed a worship of Madans⁶ and the people worshipped the Fourteen Deit ī es. All this was agreed to. In due course a son was born to the queen, and it was Trilocana, the next king of Tripura. When he grew up he had to perform the worship of the Fourteen Deities as desired

5. Also spelt 'Ch ā lim !



Photo of CONTAI

by Lord Śīva. Śīva has also stated that the method of worship of these deities was known only to the Priests called Contāi, Deodāi etc. and that they lived in a lonely island of the sea. They were to be invited to come to Tripura for the worship. But the king himself should be included in the invitation team.

But when Trilocana started the worship of the 14 Deities, he sent an envoy to invite the priests.⁷ The envoy placed the invitation duly before the intended Priests. But they did not dare come to Tripura for fear of the tyrant king Tripur. They did not know that Tripur was no more. They told the envoy that if the new king came personally and invited them, they would gladly comply with the request. The messenger returned to Tripura and informed king Trilocana of what had happened.⁸

On hearing this, the king started for the Island along with a minister of his court. After a long journey they reached the Island.

**bahu dinantarc rajā
se dwip, fails
Chantai deodāi save
āger badi nila⁹**

-- The king reached that island after long days. Then he received by the Contāi, Deodāi and others.

At his request, the priests Contāi, deodāi and others assistants left for Tripura with the king. On reaching the capital.¹⁰ they started the worship of the 14 deities daily. A lakh of animals were sacrificed in the Pūjā. All Gods and

6. Or Kāmā - God of love, Cupid.

7. Conāti, - Deodāi etc.

8. i. e., the refusal of the priests and their new proposal.

9. R. M. - I Trilocan Khaṇḍa.

10. At that time, the Capital was at Trivega, a town in the Kapil river Valley beyond the North Cāchār Hills.

Goddesses were present in the **Pūjā**, so goes the story in the **Rājmalā**. But **Viṣṇu** was absent. This is probably an indication that the **Vaiṣṇava** minded people avoided the **Pūjā** because of animal sacrifice in a large-scale. Later on **Viṣṇu** was brought to **Pūjā** by personal approach of the king and the High Priest **Conati**. This implies that some sort of compromise was made with the **Vaiṣṇavita** people.

The newly brought priests were employed by the king to the regular worship of the 14 deities. These **Prīests** were often called by the general term **deodāi**, which is said to be derived from Skt. '**devotā**' (from **deva**), a god-worshipped priest.

They know how to perform the worship of 14 deities. They never wrote down the rules and regulations of this **pūjā**, lest others should learn it from the writing.¹¹ This is the statement of the R. M. But the real reason may be something else, such as their ignorance of Bengali language, absence of any script in their own dialect and so on.

But a book entitled **Guptārcanacandikā** is said to contain the details of this worship in Bengali language. It is not known who wrote this book. It may be that the **Contāi** dictated and some Bengali knowing **pandit** wrote it down. Another book is found in the Royal Archives of Agartala containing this worship. In this book the topic is dealt with in a Catechism manner. King **Dharmamānikya** is the questioner and the **Contāi** is the speaker.¹² This indicates that the original author of these works was the **Contāi**, but some Bengal **Pandit** put them to writing.

As regards the **Contāi-deodāi** Priests, it is stated in the

11. R. M.-I p. 28 (Trilocal Khanda)

12. R. M.-I edited by K. P. Sen. pp. 138-139.

Rājmaḷā that they never take forbidden food.¹³ They do not take food cooked by woman-folk.

**nārīr randhan tārē
nahi kara bhak sa.**¹⁴

They bathe daily, wash clothes and dry them in the sky. i.e. on a rope or some-thing else put above the ground. They cook their own food. They are highly interested in officiating as Priests in worships.

It is also stated that an offending deodāi should not be struck with the hand as punishment, for this touch spoils his caste. He should be beaten with a bamboo stick in such cases.

The deodai caste is said to be an ascetic group (**Yati**).¹⁵ K. P. Sen says that it is now impossible to determine the exact caste or race of these Priests. They may be a brahmanical casts. But they were Yogins and were of highly religious bent of mind. Some people think – they are tribal people, but this is not correct. For they were not the inhabitants of Hill Tripura or any other hill area. They lived in an island of the sea. obviously the islands of lower Bengal. It is also to be noted here that the priests of Kāmākhyā Temple at **Gauhati** are called Deori or Deodi¹⁶. obviously deodāi and deodi are the same inhabited the Mājulichar island of the Brahmaputra in Upper Assam. If this island be, the original home of the deodai Priests of Tripura, and the deodi priests of Kāmākhyā, then they are to be regarded as belonging to the **Deodi** or **Deori Chutia** tribe of Assam.

But what about their identity as Yatī or Yogi? Probably they as also the Deodis belonged to the Yogī or Yoga practising sect of Matsyendranath who is also the founder of

13. like Porkete. But the statement of R.M.-I here is not clear. It may mean otherwise too.

14. R. M.-I p. 28

15. ibidi, p. 27

16. R. M.- I p. 136, Rājāvali, Vol, IX, Chap-III

Kām akhyā Pītha.¹⁷ of **Gauhati**. This is why the Deodis served in the Shrine of Matsyendranath. However there is no certainty about this. The **Contāi** or the Head Priest **Deodai** or the High priest of the 14 Deities of Tripura had immense power in the former times. The kings allowed them to do whatever they thought fit in religious matters. **Mamārukhan**, an army Chief of **Gauḍa**, was sacrificed before the 14 Deities at Rangamāti (Present Udaipur) by the order of the **Contāi**. **Vijamānikya** could not help it. King **Gobinda mānikya** tried to abolish animal sacrifice in the Sakta temples of Tripura. But he could not do it owing to the Vehement Protests from the **Contāi**. What is work, the king had to abdicate as a result of this move. From this we can imagine how much powerful the **Contāi** was during the early days of princely regime of Tripura. He was as powerful as the Bishop of Europe in the Middle age, who dared not defy the king's orders. This power of the **Contāi**, however, did not last long. The kings realised its evil effects and the **Contāi** gradually turned to be a normal official of the king. The post exists till today. The **Contāi** and all his assistance **deodāi**, **Galim** etc. – now live in the village of 14 Deities at old Agartala about 8 kilometres from Agartala Town.

The **Contāi** is called **Cuantai** in the **Hālām** dialect in the sense of Priest or brāhman¹⁸ K. P. Sen thinks the word **Contāi** is derived from **Cuāntai** of the **Hālām** dialect. But this is doubtful. How can a **Hālām** word be adopted in the Tripura language for a Priest, seeing that Tripuri contains another word **Ocāi** in the same sense? Further what about the other words—**deodai**, **galim** etc.? Are these also **Hālām** words? Certainly not, so we had better take all these words

17. Vide Tantra O **Āgam Sāstrer** Digdars'an by M.M. Gopinath Kaviraj.

18. R. M.-I p. 136

as imported from an external source at the time of bringing these Priests.¹⁹

2. Present Sitiatuion of Priesthood.

Now, it is to be noted that the aforesaid priestly class is solely engaged in the worship of the 14 deities. All other tribal ceremonies are performed by their traditional Priests who are usually called Ochāi and sometimes Ojhāi. As a result the Contāi group of priests are now fallen on evil days. They have very little income from the Pūjā offering of the one and only one temple of 14 Deities. They get a small salary and portions of the offerings. Some get a small fee from the worshippers for cutting the victim animals. As a result these priestly class is now living in a very poor condition. They can not make both ends meet. Something must be done for them by the government.

In this context another thing is also to be noted. In all the temples of Tripura founded by the Tripura dynastey from time to time, Brahman Priests are employed. But these brahman priests are also imported from outside. Only in rare cases Bengalee Brāhmans are employed. Other priests are brought from Orissa, Bihar, U. P., Manipur etc. The reason is obvious. The deities in all these temples are general Hindu-deities-S'ive, Kāli, Durgā, Laksmī, Jagannātha, etc. For their worship Hindu Brahmin Priests are employed. Tribal Priests are not acquainted with the worship of these deities.

At present the Jagandnāth Badi Temple near the palace of Agartala is at the hands of Gaudiya Vaisnava Math. The temple has been greatly improved in recent years by the monks of this Math.

19. Either from an island of Bay of Bengal or Mājular in Upper Assam.

The custom of engaging non-tribal Priests in tribal ceremonies in lieu of the tribal Ocāi is hung popular in modern times. In many educated tribal families Bengalee Brahman priests are engaged for performing various ceremonies and pūjās. This is a new development, though it was initiated by the Tripur Kings long ago for services in the big temples only. Now it has spread to tribal social ceremonies of individuals also.

Thus the Priesthood of the Tripura Tribes Comprises their original tribal Priest Ochāi or Ojhāi, the imported Priests Contai, deodai etc. for the worship of the 14 Deities, non-Bengalee Aryan Priests from Orissa, U. P. Bihar etc. employed in the big temples, and Bengalee Priests in a few temples and mostly in social ceremonies of educated tribal people. The Bengalee brahmins could capture the entire tribal society long ago because of their expertise in Priestly duties. But their casteism stood in the Day. They regarded the tribals almost as untouchable. Even they did not pay much respect to the Royal family itself. In the year 1880-81 a movement was launched by the then Mahārājā Bircandra Mānikya to raise the status of the tribals of Tripura in the general Hindu estimation. They were regarded as ajala caraniya, that is water touched by them was undrinkable to the Hindus. At the king's request some Brahmans of Bikrampur, Dacca, drank water touched by the Maharaja as a representative of the tribals of Tripura. The movement succeeded thus far. But the Bengalee people of Tripura and outside who were all very conservative minded resisted the movement vehemently. The Maharaja conducted the movement for several years but got no support from any quarters. Poet Nabin Chandra Sen was serving as S. D. O. at Fenny in South Tripura at that time. He also did not support the movement. He called the supporters of the movement 'water fowls'.²⁰ This shows that

20. Vide T. D. G. p.112

the great poet also was not above casteism. However, the movement subsided gradually and no further attempt was made for unification of the two communities.

But actually it was great blunder on the part of the Bengalee society, especially the Brahmin leaders. If they supported the movement, the tribals would become a caste of the Hindus, and the Bengalee Brahmins would have them as their Yajmanas.²¹ Further the difference between the tribals and the Bengalee would vanish long ago, and that would be a great political benefit as well. This apartheid policy of the Hindus has resulted in the partition of the country and it may spell danger in Tripura and other tribal areas too. The sooner the Hindu leaders realise this the better will be the consequence.

Now let us give a short account of the traditional Ochai²² Priests for the tribes of Tripura. The first thing to note here is that the office of Ochāi is not hereditary as in the Hindu society.

The Ocāi is selected by the villagers for a time from the same tribe. Anybody may be a Priest if learns he art. No woman is selected as Ochai. Some assistance are often employed by the Ochai. They are called Baruā or Badua and Khandal. They may be compared with the deodai and galim of the Contāi noted above. Among the Jamātiya tribe there is a priestly post called Kherfang which is hereditary.²³ He is required in the Goriya Pūjā.

The Ochāi recites mantras in all ceremonies in their own dialect. A mantras of marriage ceremony is as follows :

'Hengnai dangnai Nachiri Chiri
adung nusa yaduram nusa

21. Worshippers who engaged a priest for their worships and other ceremonies.

22. Also called Ochāy, Ojhāi.

23. P.N. Bhattacharyya : The Jamātiyās of Tripura, p.47

Kamlapati hamay chai tangnai 24

The sum and substance of the mantra is this, Let Jaduram and Kamalapati, the bridegroom and the bride be hardworking and happy in their married life. Let them have a long life like a river

A mantras of the Riang tribe inviting deity²⁵ is like this :

“ ācuk faidi tace faidi

mukha ṅg takedi, Kharam takedi” etc.

— O God, come, sit, wash mouth, put on sandals

This mantra resembles a prayer of the vedic Aryans as noted in the hymns of the R̥gveda addressed to Indra, Agni and such other deities. A prayer to Vayu (wind-God) is—

‘O Vayu, come, Here are the shinning some drinks.

Drink these and listen to own invocations.’²⁶

The tribal people are as free and frank in their prayers to Gods as the Vedic Aryans.

The **Och āi** acts also as a religious teacher and physician of the locality. The sacred thread is also used by some Och āis. The temple Priests of the aforesaid temples of Hindu deities Jagann āth, K ā li, Durg ā and others are not tribal Priests i.e. tribal by birth and as such they do not strictly come under this survey of tribal Priesthood. They are confined to their temples and are limited in number too. They are not concerned with special tribal worships and ceremonies, which are performed by the tribal Priests, Och āi or Oj h āi and sometimes by Bengalee Priests. So the tribal Och āi and Bengalee Priests are the major factors here.

But a difference between the Bengalee Brahmin Priest and the tribal Och āi is to be noted. The Bengalee or anyother

24. D. P. Debbarman : Treatise on Tripura Community. p. 27.

25. i.e. ā v ā hane in Hindu P Ū j ā .

26. R. V. 1, 2, 1

Aryan Hindu Priest is a Brahmin by birth, while the tribal Ochai has not Brahmin origin there being no hereditary brahman community among the tribals. He is just a tribal like other tribals. He is selected for this office by the village leaders. That is all. Thus the Priesthood among tribals is just like that of other religions— Christian, Buddhist etc., where also there is no hereditary sacerdotal class. This is well and good. If the Bengalee Brahmin Priests gradually get the upper hand among the tribals, this may lead to the extinction of the non-hereditary Priesthood of the tribals, and the tribals will have to bear the brunt of hereditary Priesthood and Casteism of the Aryan Hindus. Care should be taken by the tribals so that hereditary Priesthood may not creep in the tribal society.

Though Priesthood among the tribals here is not hereditary, yet there seems to be a solitary exception to this. The Priests of the temple of the 14 deities — Cont āi, Deod āi, and Gālim — seem to be tribals, but they are hereditary Priests there. No other than their families can perform the Priestly deities of the temple. Their caste is uncertain. Judged by their features, they seem to be tribal people but they do not admit it. About this Priestly Class of people K. P. Sen holds that these people are either brahmans or of the same status as the brahmans.²⁷

He holds that they were originally yogīs.²⁸ He has not made it clear whether they belonged to the Sect of the Yogis introduced by Mīn ān ā tha and Goraksan ātha. Their Priests marry tribal girls from long ago. because their own people number is very little. This shows that they have no right caste — restrictions.

Thus the Priesthood of the tribes and temples of Tripura is a chequered one.

27. R. M.—I p. 135

28. Adepts in Yoga (ibid p. 136)

3. SACRED PLACES

The sacred places of the tribals of Tripura are not many if the general places of pilgrimage are excluded.

(i) The main sacred place is the Temple of the Fourteen Deities²⁹ at old Agartala. Originally it was situated at Rangamati (Present Udaipur), the old Capital of Tripura. It was shifted to the present site by Mahārāj Krishnamānikya in 1716. A. D. when the capital also was shifted to this place i.e. old Agartals. When the temple was at Rāngāmāti, it was a horrible place indeed, for human sacrifices were also made before the 14 Deities of this temple. The Pāthān General Mamarak Khān was captured at Chittagong and sacrificed before this temple. King Vijaymānikya also sacrificed more than a thousand Pāthān troops here by way of courtmartial for their secret plot against the king.³⁰

Sahasra Soyār - Kartā
Pāthān Vistar
Caturdas devatāre
dila naresvar

The Ruler of the people³¹ offered³² to the 14 deities a thousand Cavaliers and a large number of pāthān footman.

Human, sacrifice has long been abolished but countless sacrifices of other animals continue in this temple. So this is avoided by the Vaisnava minded people.

The worship of the 14 Deities is held here daily as a routine work. But the great annual Pūjā is held in the month of Asadh (June - July), for a week from 'Suklāstami to Pūrnimā.' This special Pūjā is called Kharci Pūjā, which

29. Usually called Cauda Devatār Bādī (House of the fourteen deities).

30. Vide R. M. II (Vijay Mānikya Khanḍu also *ibid.* pp. 146-148

31. i. e. the king Vijay Mānikya.

32. = Sacrificed.

probably means the Pujā, of the rainy season or the annual Pūjā.³³

Hundreds of goats are sacrificed everyday during the Khārci Pūjā. Huge crowds of tribals and non-tribals visit the Pūjā. The image of the 14 Gods are kept inside the temple throughout the year. During the annual Pūjā days these images are brought out for public view.

Ruins of old palace of the Tripura kings stand near the temple.

(ii) TRIPURĀ- SUNDARI TEMPLE.

This temple is situated on small hillock about a mile to the South of the present Udaipur town. This site is believed to be one of the fifty-one Pithas of the s'ākta Sect. According to tradition the right leg of Sati fell here and hence the Goddess is here called Tripura Sundari,—

Satīr daksin pad

Pade Tripurāte

Tripurā - Sundarī Khyāti

Tripura bhūmite.³⁴

This is also corroborated in a statement of the Pīthamālā tantra—

Tripurāgāmī daksa - pādo

Devi Tripurā - Sundarī.³⁵

—In Tripura the right leg of Sati fell. So the Devi (Goddess) is called **Tripurā-Saundarī** here.

The above fact is also supported by the famous Writer W.W. Hunter³⁶ who describes "Tipperah, the country that yielded to the tide of Musalman invasion, had long been the

33. No decisive meaning of the term is yet found by any.

34. R. M. - I p. 9

35. Quoted in R. M. - I p. 9

36. W.W. Hunter : A statistical Account of Bengal. pp. 498-499.

chosen abode of Sivaism. The fact that the aboriginal religion was supplanted by Hinduism, is indicated by the Myths which describe siva destroying the Asura. Tripura, and represent Tipperah as the favourite residence of Siva, the right leg of Sati having fallen there."

The goddess is Kā li or Kā lik ā as she is popularly called. The temple is called **Māt ā b ā d ī** or **Mār B ā d ī**. (The House of the mother) in common parlance. The image is made of black stone and looks like the image of Kalighat temple of Calcutta. Some say that there is also another smaller image of the Goddess in the temple, which goes by the name Chotim ā (Mother Junior).³⁷

The bigger image is about 5 (five feet) in height and the lesser one 2' (two feet). But the lesser one is not visible to any visitor because of huge crowd and heaps of flowers and other offerings there.

Animal sacrifice is a daily affair even here. There is a big pond by the side of the temple, in which big fishes and tortoises roam about without fear for they are not to be caught or killed by anybody. They are fed with various food articles by the visitors.

Now this a contradictory behaviour. In the temple ground goats etc. are mercilessly beheaded day in day out while in the water reservoir aquatic animals are treated, with kindness. An amalgam of S'aktaism and Vaiṣṇavism or rather Bud-dhism and Jainism seems to be present here for some reason or other.³⁸ This temple is visited by people of all sects, tribals and non-tribals everyday and the place assumes the look of a mela (fair) at all time. The Tripura Sundari temple was constructed by Maharaja Dhanyamānikya in S'aka 1423 (1501-02 A. D.).

37. Vide T.D.G. pp. 397-398.

38. Maharaj Gobinda Manikya's move to abolish animal sacrifice might have an effect here.



TIRTHAMUKHI Photo of GANGA PUJA (a place of Pilgrimage)

(iii) TIRTHA MUKH

This is a place of pilgrimage in the Amarpur Sub-Division of South Tripura. It is situated at the mouth of the river Gomati near Dambur hydro-electric project. A big fair (Mela) is held here every year on the occasion of the Makar Sankrānti. Tribal people are the main visitors here. Now many Bengalee people also attend the Mela, because the Government of Tripura arranges T.R.T.C. Bus Services to this place on the occasion. There are several Kundas or deep gorges here called Rāni - Kunda (the Queen's Kunda), Kamala Kunda (Kunda of Queen Kamalā), Kācā Kunda (Kunda of nominal Queen) and so on.

(iv) **Unokoti** : This sacred place is situated in a hill between Dharamanagar Kailā-sahar towns of North Tripura. Rock cut images of Ś'iva and other deities are scattered here on the hill side. It is the Ajantā of Tripura. According to famous historian Niharranjan Roy "Numerous specimens of sculpture found scattered at Unokoti and the extant remains at Unokoti suggest the presence of a strong Saiva Pilgrimage Centre of the pala period.³⁹ The image of Ś'iva's head is a huge one. It may be called a colossus. It is about 30 feet high and 15 feet broad from ear to ear. Figures of Ś'ivas bull and Ganesa are also very big. A big mela is held here every year on the occasion of Ś'iva Caturdasi day or Asokāstamī in the month of Caitra (March-April). Both tribals and non-tribals attend the festival. At present there is no temple Unokoti. Only a large number of images are lying there. But it is supposed by many authorities that at one time there was a temple here. Ruins are little found at the top of the hill there. Bricks, stones and such of her ingredients are still visible. From this it is easily understandable that there was a Shrine here made stone and bricks. But it can not be said who

39. Niharanjan Roy : Bengalir Itihas, Adi Parba. p. 673. Quoted by Dr. K. Lahiri in his book Tripura Temples.

founded the temple and when and at what time the temple fell into ruins. From the Rājmaḷā we come to know that king Subdai or Trilocana founded a matha or temple of Ś'iva at Chambalnagar which is supposed to be a place near the modern Kailāsaḥar town. The place may be Ūnokoti itself and its surroundings.⁴⁰ The Tripura kings were great lovers of temples. So it is quite likely that an early Tripur King, whether he is Trilocana or anyone else, founded a temple at Unokoti, the ruins of which are lying scattered till today.

Further, Ś'aivism was an early religion of the Tripur Kings, and the construction of a Ś'aivite temple in the early days of Tripura is quite reasonable.

Another thing — There are a large number of images of various deities here, mostly in a broken state now. From this, it may be assumed that not one single temple but number of temples existed here in ancient times.

The images were not properly looked after by any authority for long days and as a result the number of images have greatly come down with the advance of time. It is reported that a Prime Minister of Tripura, Dhananjoy Thakur by name visited Ūnokoti in the year 1892 and found the following images there —

**Kalabhairava, Vāsudeva, Viṣṇu-Pada,
five faced Ś'iva, Ganes, Candra, Sūrya,
Rama, Lakṣmana, Hanumana, Lakṣmi, Ś'iva-
Linga, Rakasas and Raksasi.**

Beside he found also many other images which he failed to identify because they grew indistinct due to erosion. Many of these images have since disappeared or suffered further damage.

As so many images were collected here, it may not be out of place to surmise that Ūnokoti was a sacred place of high

40. K. P. Sen : R. M.—II p. 113

order where all Hindu religious sects were harmonised. It was a meeting place of all Hindu religions like Kasi. Ūnokoti was the Kasi of Tripura at one time. As there is a **Utter Kāsī** in the north, so it was perhaps the **Pūrba-Kasī** of India.

The decay of this old, popular temple town probably began with the shifting of the capital from north to south Tripura. It was not possible to take proper care of this sacred place by the king from the distant capital Udaipur in the south of the State. That Ūnokoti was a famous place of Pilgrimage in days of old is clear from the recorded visits of the Mahārājas of Tripura to this holy site. Vijaymānikya visited it. Then Amarmānikya's son and successor Rājdharmānikya did it. These were events of the 10th Century. In the modern age Rādha Kishoremānikya visited the site probably in the early days of the present century, for he ruled from 1897 to 1909 A.D. Then the last great Mahārāja Bir Bikram Mānikya also is said to have visited it. About the visit of Vijay Mānikya to it, the R. M. Says —

Kato din pare Rājā
Ūnokoti gela
ek Ūnokoti linga
tathā te dekhila⁴¹

After some days the king repaired The Ūnokoti. He saw there Phallic symbols (Linga) numbering one crore minus one. From the Statement "ek Ūnokotilinga", it is obvious that the place was replete with linga mūrtis of Ś'iva all of which however, are not extant at present. The place was obviously a Ś'aivite Tirtha in the main, where other sects also were welcome to have their own temples and images.

About Rājdharmānikya's visit we have the following record in the same work —

41. R. M.—11 p. 59

Rajdhar Calila
 Dulāli grām patha
 Itā grām haiya gela
 Ūnokoti tirtha.⁴²

— Rājdhār proceeded by the road leading to Dulāli grām. Then he started for Ūnokoti tirtha via Ita gram.

The site attracted the attention of that Prince. He stopped there and performed ceremonial bath and made gifts to deserving persons and temples there. This is stated in the R. M. line—

Snāndān Kare tatha
 Rājdhār Nārāyan.

As to the origin of this sacred site ancient Indian texts hold that it was the place of Penance of the ancient sage Kapila, who founded the original linga image of Śiva there. This is clearly stated in the following verses of the Ūnokoti Tīrtha Mahatmya.⁴³

Vindhyā dresh pāda Sambhūta
 Vara Vakrah Suponyadah
 Dakṣinsyam nada-syā sya
 Punyā Manu-nadi Smṛtā
 Anayor autora rājan
 Ūnokoti girīr mahān
 Yatratepe tapah Pūrbam
 Sumahat Kapilo munih
 Tantra Vai Kapilam tirtham
 Kapilena Prakāśitam
 Lingamca Kapilam tatra
 Sarva Siddhi Pradam nirṇā m.

42. *ibid* – III (Amar Māñikya Khaṇḍa)

43. Quoted in R. M. II pp. 107–108

— Rising in the foothills of the Vindhya Mountain and giving rise to great virtues is the river Varavakra. To the South of this great river is the virtuous river Manu according to ancient tradition. In between these two, O king, is the great mountain Ūnokoti, where in ancient times, the sage Kapila performed a very great penance. There lies Kapil tirtha inaugurated by Kapila. The linga image too was founded by the same sage and it is conducive to all success desired by mankind.

It is fact that Ūnokoti hills stand between the rivers Varavakra (Modern Barāk) and Manu. But the statement that the Varavakra rises in the Vindya hills is a baffling question. Probably the name Vindya was also applied to the hills of Cachar District at one time. The present name Ūdhārband of that region may be a relic of the old name 'Vindhya'. Be that as it may, our main point is that the Ūnokoti tirtha is regarded as a s'aivite place of old founded by the ancient sage Kapila. It is also admitted by the same authority that the Phallic symbol of S'iva was the original deity here, thus establishing it that it was S'aiva tirtha originally. The other images of other deities are therefore later additions in course of time.

K. P. Sen holds the view that the Ūnokoti Hills comprise a big area from Kailāshahar in Tripura to the hills of Cāchār District. This whole area was called Ūnokoti or Kapil Tirtha.⁴⁴

From other source it is known that the sage Manu also performed penance in this sacred place situated in the vicinity of the river Manu.

The name of the river Manu is probably derived from the name of the sage of that name (Manu) says Yogini Tantra.⁴⁵

44. R. M - II p.109

45. Vide Sanskrit Rājmalā and R.M.—II P. 109

Purā Krta Yoge rājan
 Manunā Pūjitah S'ivah
 Tatraiva Virale Sthāne
 Manu nāma nadi-tate.

—O king, in the Satya Yoga Lord S'iva was adored by Manu at that very direlict spot on the bank of the river called Manu.

The lonely spot on the bank of the river Manu where the sage Manu performed the worship of S'iva cannot be any other than the Ūnokoti tirtha where a S'iva linga was already established by Kapila.

As regards the image of Ūnokoti and it's great fame we have much important information in the Vārālu Tantra.⁴⁶

According to it, Ūnokoti is a Pitha or famous place of pilgrimage, Not only this. It is the foremost among all pithas Ūnokoti Pitha madhya Pradhānam). Here all deities (i.e. images) including ten Bhairavas are installed. There the great linga called Unokotis'vara is the main. By visiting it one attains to heaven. There is also Kunda or Gorge which is equal to Manikarnikā Ghāt of Varānasi in greatness. By taking bath there one gets the fruit of visiting all thirthas. The term "Linga-Kāsa" is used with regard to this place. Obviously it is so-called because of the existence of innumerable Lingas there. This name Linga Kāsa is an important fact here. This name is now forgotten by the people. But there was a time when the site was also called by this name.

From the above statements of the Vārāha Tantra and other texts it is clear that Ūnokoti was a very famous place of pilgrimage and was one of the most important sacred places of India. Later on it fell on evil days. Some say the site was the victim of reckless ravages by Kālāpahād, the ruthless iconoclast of the 16th Century, However it remains saivite place of pilgrimage. But now-a-days all sects of people visit

46. Vide verses of this Tantra quoted in R.M.—II p. 110—11

this place. Not only the Bengalees but all tribal people also visit it. The site is surrounded by hills and tribal villages, and it is the tribal people who are the next door neighbours of this holy place.

The images are of two types (a) male on stone slabs (b) carved on rocky hill sides.

From the variety of images at Ūnokoti, it may be assumed that all were not of the same date, but are the result of successive generations of artists. At some distance from the main site are found carvings of Dasa Mahāvidya, a scene of **Pa ūtan ā Vadha** (killing of the demoness—Putna) by Kṛṣṇa and a battle scene of Rāma and Rāvana. The images of the ten Mahāvidyās indicate that the place was also a great S'akta Pīṭha. The scene of **Putan ā-Vadha** belong to Kṛṣṇa lila and is a Vaiṣṇava affair. So is the battle scene of Rāma and Rāvana. If we admit S'aivism as the original religion here, the images of other sects, S'akta, Vaiṣṇava etc. are to be regarded as later additions in course of time.

The main image in this sacred site is called Ūnokotis' vara S'iva. He is regarded as the lord of this thirtha. This is a huge image, as stated above, and is the main attraction of the place now.

It is also reported that there was a, Tunges' ver S'iva image, and a Bhuvana-Svara Tirtha⁴⁷ nearby. But these cannot be traced now.

(v) The Buddhist tribals visit the Buddha Temple at Agartala. This is known as the Benuvan Bihar. Recently a Buddha temple is constructed at Abhoynagar, Agartala, Another Buddha Temple is at Pecherthal in North Tripura.

(vi) The Christian Tribals visit the Churches at Mar-
imnagar near Agartala, at Arundhutinagar, Agartala and those in the Jampui Hill.

47. R. M. - II p. 112

(vii) **Kasbā kalibādi**

This is another sacred place of Tripura visited by tribals and non-tribals both. Some discussions of this has already been made. But a detailed account of this place should be given in this section. As regards this temple the Bengali *Rajmālā* is silent but the Sanskrit *Rajmala* is vocal. It has the following verse in the context of king *Kalāyan Mānikya*—

rāja san kasbā grāme
Kṛtva Kalyana—sāgaram
tadante durgā-madhye ca
Sthā payā īmāsa kālikām.⁴⁸

—That king excavated a pond named *Kalayān Sāgar* (The sea of *Kalyanmanikya*) in the village of *Kasba*. After this he founded the goddess *Kālikā* inside a fort (or an inaccessible spot).

The Codex of the work entitled *Srenimalā* also refers to this temple at *Kasbā* thus—

Kalyān Mānikya nāme
haila bhūpatī
Kasbāte āpan name
Sāgar Khanila
Upar killāte Kālikā
Sthāpan Karila.

He excavated a sea (= pond) in his own name at *Kasba*. In the castle above the hillock, he founded a temple to the goddess *Kāli* there —

Senāpatī duijan
dila pāthāiyā
Kasba Jay Kāli pare
Bandha ek ghar

48. Quoted in R.M.—III P. 171

Killa madhya ache Devī
Pravā t Sikhār.

— He sent two army chiefs there with the instruction 'you have to construct a house over goddess Jay Kā li at Kasba. The Devi is inside the Castle at the top of the hill.

From this it becomes clear that the Kā li temple was originally built by Vijaymā nīkya and later on it was repaired or replaced by a better one by Kalyā n m ā nīkya.

The temple contains a ten-handed image of the goddess. The image is referred to in a later section of the Bengali Rāj m ā l ā in connection with Ratna m ā nīkya II (Late 17th Century).

Kasbā te Kalimūrtī
Karila sthāpan.
dasa bhujā Bhagavatī
Patita-pāvan.

Ratna m ā nīkya II founded an image of Kā li at Kasbā. It was the ten-handed goddess Bhagavati, the saviour of the fallen manmind.

From this it is obvious that the present ten-handed image was founded by **Ratna manikya**. II. It is not known how many handed was the earlier image there. The Kā liba d ī of Kasba is often called Jay Kali Badi. It is engraved in a slab of black stone. The height is about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet. It is ten-handed as noted above, placed on a lion, with an image of the traditional demon below and on another side, another image of a buffalo's head. Thus it is also a S'iva-linga and a faint drawing of a bull. The demon (asura) seems to be in a submissive mood, at least not in an offensive attitude. He is in kneeling posture. The lion has fixed his claws on the right elbow of the **asura**.

It is to be noted that the goddess of Kasba is known as Jay Kali or Kālikā but she is mounted on a lion and demon is there. Further the complexion of the goddess is black, This is a mixture of Kali and Durga concepts. Kali is black but Durgā is fair. Kālī is not mounted on lion's back as the Kasba Kālī is. Kālī is not ten-handed too. So the deity at Kasbā Kālibādi can not be called Kali or Durga, Pure and simple traits of both deities are here mixed. But somehow the name Kālibādi has come to be attached to this temple. It is also to be noted here that in ancient texts cited above, the name Kālikā⁴⁹ is used for the goddess. Only in one case the term dasa bhujā Bhagavati is used. But that is of a later date. So it may be taken that originally it was a Kali temple with the image of the goddess Kali and from the days of Ratna māṅkyā II. The ten-handed image was instituted, but the name remained Kālibādi as before. From modern point of view, the image is neither Kālī nor Durga but curious amalgam of the two images.

The temple is said to be a "Jagrata" (alive) one, and hence all people, tribal and non-tribal, visit it to have their wishes fulfilled by the grace of the goddess.

There may be other sacred places in the interior areas of less note or of local importance only. It is not possible to recount them exhaustively, nor is it necessary here, for what has been stated in the foregoing pages, presents the Chief sacred places of Tripura visited by the tribals as also by others. There is hardly any sacred place now which is exclusively means for or visited by the tribals.

4. IMAGES

The images of the tribal deities of Tripura are in many respects peculiar. Most of them have no image at all. Some

49. Or Kali, Jay Kālī



Photo of 14 DETTIES (at old Agartala)

have only a Skeleton image made of bamboo. But the most important 14 Deities have only 'the head' as image like the purānic Rāhu. Let us give some details of each.

(i) Images of the fourteen Deities.

It is said in the Rājmaḷā that only the places of the fourteen Gods and Goddess were made during the reign of King Trilocana—

Caturdas devatār
Caturdas mukh
nirālyā dila S'ive
āpanā Samukh⁵⁰

—Fourteen faces of the fourteen deities were made by the order of S'iva in his presence.

These faces i.e. heads exists till today in the temple of these deities. The heads are said to be made of eight kinds of metals—gold, silver, etc. The head of S'iva is white because it is covered with a silver coating. Other heads are golden because of gold coating.

Now a question arises—why this head image only, not full body image in the case of the 14 Gods of Tripura ? Here some are of the opinion that originally there were full images, in the capital at Triveg, when king Daksin, son of Trilocana, left that capital, he brought with him the heads of the Gods.⁵¹ That may or may not be. The Rājmaḷā does not hold this opinion. On the contrary it states that the original images were the heads only, as noted above.⁵²

What is the reason behind making the head image ? No other answer is yet available. But we should like to point out some similar facts in Hindu iconography. The S'iva image at Unokoni is also huge head. It is not known whether it was

50. R. M. - I. P-16 (Tripura Khanda).

51. Vide - R. M. - I, pp-132-133.

52. *ibid*, p - 16 (Tripura Khanda)

originally otherwise. Again we have the Phallic image i.e. The S'iva-linga, which is also a part of the body. In Manasa Puja people use a head image called Catal. Dr. S. Bhattacharjee opines, that "it is importaant to note that the use of heads only, in lieu of full images is something unique in Hindu ritual and this thing is also found elsewhere in Tripura e.g. heads carved on rock at Unākoti near Kailasahar of North Tripura District and in south Bengal in the cult of Dakshina Raja, the God of Tigers probably an Austric cult in origin."⁵³

Thus the head image of the 14 Gods is not totally a novel affair. It is quite in tune with the Hindu ways of icon making. But there is a difference yet. The general Hindus use both part images and full images, while the Tripuris have only the part image i.e. the head image in the case of the 14 deities. The real reason may be the absence of artisans among the tribals and the general poverty of the people who can not get two square meals a day. How can they engage in making costly image. A time may come when artistic images may appear among the tribal society also.

The Tripur kings could make the full body images of 14 deities. But probably the conservative minded contāi and his associates, deodāi etc stood in the way. In the case of other Gods and Goddess of the Hindu Pantheon however, the kings made full body images.

Now another perplexing question is there in connection with the fourteen Deities. There is a crescent like ornament placed on the back side of the heads. The front side is covered with a crown. S'ivas crown is tapering, while the rest are like flatcaps. The crescents often give the impression of horns. This is a new Phenomenon. In Hindu images this is not seen anywhere in this part of the country. Then what is the source of this feature of tribal images of Tripura ?

53. Dr. S. Bhattacharjee—genesis of Tribal extremism in Tripura,

The idea of a crescent on S'iva's forehead as noted in Hinduism might have some effect of the crescent in case of all the deities included in 14 deities, only they put this crescent behind the back. This may be a hypothesis in solving this tangle.

Another hypothesis may be—the deities wear a helmet. The tribals have always been warlike people and they probably used this type of helmets on their heads in battle fields.

Another hypothesis may be that this is a purely tribal fashion of headgear.

(ii) **Images of other deities.**

Images of traditional tribal deities, **Godiyā, Lāmprā, mamitā, Matāi Katār** etc. are made with bamboo. Thus these images are just some bamboo frames. There is no definite form or shape of these deities. They may be regarded as semi nirakara image or better a symbol of the deity concerned. Hence the bamboo frames may be made according to the choice of the maker. There is no fixed rule or custom in this regard. Only the bare outlines of a human figure are somehow produced in these images, Only a few bamboo pieces may be sufficient to make an image. Rarely stone slabs⁵⁴ are used if these are available. This is obviously in imitation of the S'iva linga or the S'alagramā of the general Hindu society. Sometimes only a stone is used as symbol of the deity.⁵⁵ In making bamboo images, only the green bamboo is used, not the dry and whitish one. Again, all kinds of bamboo are not used. Only the variety called Muli is to be used. This is the custom. This is obviously due to the abundant growth of Muli bamboo in the hills of Tripura. However, the Ochai priest guides the Pūjā activities and he may make any alternative suggestion if needed.

54. D. P. Debbarma—op. cit, P—55.

55. Loc, cit.

A bamboo platform is made as the alter of the worship. On this platform the bamboo image of the deity is erected. The platform is called wāthap.⁵⁶

In some ceremonies the wāthap itself is also worshipped. Now some images may be described here.

Goriyā or Gadiya

The deity called Godīyā has two images. One is called 'Biyakwrwy' Godīyā and other Biyagwnag Godīyā. (a) The image of the former is a single piece of bamboo only. But it does not look alone, for a spacious screen is put up just behind the image and the whole looks like a Kāthēm⁵⁷ of Durga.

(b) The image of the other Godīyā is more complex. It is constructed with a number of bamboo poles both calls it a three tier bamboo structure and the parts are the limbs of the image.⁵⁸

(c) Nāgrai or Nāgri or Iākri

A muli bamboo with hand made design is erected on the ground. It is covered with cotton excluding a little portion at the top. Threads of particular colours are used for binding work.

(d) Since all are made with bamboo, and the images are not images but rather symbols, therefore it is not easy for outsiders to discern a particular bamboo image as this or that deity. Therefore it is useless to describe the images further. The differences between images are only minor and evasive. It is some flowery designs that make the difference. The number of flowers are different in different images. Another

56. Wa=bamboo, thap=nest.

57. Frame work.

58. P. N. Bhattacharya—The Jamātyās of Tripura. P—47.

difference is that the bamboo poles are put up differently in different images.⁵⁹ That is all.

It may not be out of place to discuss some other images, which are not common and are less known to all. Some of these images are found in far off corners of the state and some are not to be found at all anywhere except in the Museum. All these were once worshipped by the public at large of Tripura irrespective of tribal and non-tribal population though some were exclusively worshipped by the tribals.

In earlier days Tripura's boundary was far more extensive than it is today. In those days a great part of modern Bāngladesh was within the State of Tripura. So many images of Tripura of earlier dates have now fallen outside the frontiers of Modern Tripura.

But all these were obviously made at the initiative of the Tripur kings and they were therefore, the objects of worship to all people of Tripura including tribals, non-tribals and the members of the Royal Families. Some of these images may be described here for the sake of making the survey by and large exhaustive.

Images of Vārālī

An image of Vārālī, obviously a S'ākta deity, was found at the village Bhanurāi in the district was under the princely called Bhuhiyā when it was under the princely state of Tripura. It is said that the image was found under water by one Visvs'ambhar S'ur, the local chief and was installed in a temple in the above noted village (Bhānurāi) in the year 1203 A.D.⁶⁰

It was on the coast of the Bay of Bengal and not far from Chittagong Hills. The name of the village Bhānurāi with the ending rāi indicates that it was a tribal place name. Such

59. P. N. Bhattacharjee—Kalaāi Sampraday. P—45.

60. R. M. —III, pp 121—122.

places names are there even in modern Tripura. The image found in water by the Bengalee Chief Vis'vambar S'ur might have been made some earlier sculptor of the locality, probably a tribal Buddhist because the image shows traces of Buddhism in it.

The image found at Bhānurāi, Noakhali is eight handed and carved out of black stone. It is standing in posture of the image. This resembles the lotus associated with the image of the Buddha in meditation. Fire engravings of—the Buddha are also there in another board. This fact seems to connect the image with Buddhism too and many people called this image a Buddhist image called Mārici, while others called it Hindu Goddess Vārāhī. The Buddhists admit the image of Mārīci with different number of hands — four, six and eight but Vārāhi is always eight handed.⁶¹

It may be that the image of the Goddess of Bhānurāi, was originally that or the Buddhist deity Mārici which was worshipped by the tribal Buddhists of Tripura and Chittagong, and with the decline of Buddhism here at the arrival of the Pathan conquerors led by Bakhtiyar Khalgi, the image was abandoned and sometime after it was recovered by a Hindu King and founded as the deity Vārāhī.

Marici

A stone image of the Buddhist Goddess Mārici is actually worshipped even now in a temple in South Tripura. The temple is known as Vāsudev badī. It is situated in the village of Muhuripur in Belonia Sub-division of South Tripura. The Goddess is three faced and six handed. There are various weapons in her different hands. In her right hands she holds arrow, vajre (Thunder bolt) and axe (Pares'u) and in the left group of hands a bow and two other things not clearly understood, for the image is badly damaged in some places.

61. R. M. —III, P—135.

From a dhyāna mantra of Mārici, it is noted a left hand of the deity catches a branch or twig of As'oka tree⁶². The image was found at Pilāk⁶³, which is another important site in Tripura where countless images are discovered like those of Ūnakoti. So there is no doubt that the image was a Buddhist one and was worshipped by the adherents of Buddhism at Pilāk in older days (8th — 9th Century). Pilāk is situated in the hills terrāins of South Tripura. So the tribals of that region doubtless embraced Buddhism and worshipped the deity and other deities accepted in Buddhism. A picture of this deity may be seen in the Journal of the Asiatic Society, Vol — 18, Photo No. 25.

The name mārici is explained by some⁶⁴ as mārājayi (conqueror or Māra or the God of love). The Goddess is in a battle pose. It may be assumed that she fighting māra (cupid). The Hindu Goddess also fights a demon.

Cundā (Candī)

In another temple at Rājēsvari Ash'ram, Muhuripur in the Belonic Sub-division of South Tripura, an image of a Buddhist deity called Cunda is worshipped. It was also found at Pilāk, the famous archaeological site of Tripura. The image is that of a female deity. It is made of sand stone but is in a badly damaged state assumed to be a variation of Candī. The deity is eighteen handed. It is not standing like the Marici image, but is seated in a particular āsane (sitting) called the Vaājaparyan Kāsana. of the eighteen hands, the two normal ones hold dharma-cakra mudra. Obviously she is represented as a meditating and preaching Buddhist nun. Other Buddhist accessories are also carved on the upper sides

62. Vide Sadhānam āla (Quoted in R. M. — III, P — 137).

63. P. B. Bhattacharjee's Paper in J. Gonchaudhury, P—67.

64. K. P. Sen—R. M. —III, P—135.

of the state, such as vajna-Settva, Dhyāni Buddhas etc. The complex Mangal Caṇḍī image of Amarpur may be compared with this image, though the former is without The Journal of the Asiatic Society Vol—18 contains traces of Buddhism in the present state. a Portrait of the Goddess Cundā (Photo No. 10).

Mahisa ā—Mardinī

In the same Āsram at Muhuripur, Belonia Sub-division. There is a fine image of the Hindu deity Durgā called Mahisa mardini by scholars. The deity is in a standing position, called the cālidha pose, Her right leg is placed on the head of the demon Mahisa. (buffalo) and the left leg is on a simple pedestal. In her four right hand. She holds weapons—asi or Khaḍga (a carved sword), Cakra (discus), an arrow and a trident (trisula). In the right hands are held a bow (dhana), a snake, the tail of the demon Mahisa and some other object. Probably a conch shell in one hand. The deity is eight handed.

Sarvāni

A similar eight handed image of the Goddess is seen at Hrisyamukh in the Belonia—Sabroom border area of Tripura. The image is known as the Goddess Sarvānī. The image is in a standing (Sihunaka) position. It stands on a lotus shaped pedestal. The pedestal is full of designs including a lion with on paw raised. The hands hold the traditional weapons, khaḍga etc but some of the hands are damaged and missing).

The Deity Vaisnavi

Another eight armed image of the deity was found at Amarpur, South Tripura. It is called Vaisnavi because of the existence of a Garūḍa image below the pedestal of the deity. The image of the deity is made of good sand stone. The Goddess is seated in pose called "Lalitasane (a beautiful sitting posture). The deity holds in hands both Śaktā and

Vaiṣṇava accessories, such as sword, bow and arrow and **Sankha** (Conch-Shell) **Cakra** (discus) and **gadā** (macē). This seems to be a synthesis of Ś'akta and Vaiṣṇava—ideas. In the Mārkaṇḍeya Candi also the Goddess (Durgā) is said to have Vaiṣṇavi form as also many other forms, all of which are ultimately regarded as various forms of the **Devi** or her vibhūtis. The various forms of the **Devi** are described in the Candi, Chapter — 8 Verses 15—21 and in chapter 10, Verses 5—10. These forms are stated to be bibhūtis of the **Devi Durgā**.

**Aham Vibhūtya bahubhir
iha rupair yad āsthita
tat samhrtan⁶⁵.**

I am endowed with a number of different forms (Kālī, Vaiṣṇavī etc.). But now I withdraw all these forms into my body.

Though scholars call the goddess by different names, Vaiṣṇavi, Sarvāni etc. The common people use no such scholarly names but the common term Kālī or Durgā or simply Mā (Mother) and the temples are usually called Kālībādi or Mārba di (Mother's house). This shows that the common people admit the ultimate unity on all diversities of names and terms.

A rare Durga image

At ūnokoti, a rare two handed image of the deity **Durga** is found. She is standing on a **lion's** back. A necklace is there around her neck. She wears a **Sari** which is held **tightly** by a decorated belt put around **her** waist. Such a **simple** image of **Durga** is not noted elsewhere in this region of the **Śakta** sect. Only in Western India where other sects prevail. The

65. Candi, Chap—10, Verses—8

Durgā image is often made in a such like manner. One such may be found in the Viswanāth Temple in Benaras Hindu University. To the Bengalees who are accustomed to seeing Durgā image with ten hands and many other accompaniments, such a simple image gives the painful idea that the goddess is utterly neglected in this area, people being more interested in other deities or other forms of worship.

Images of S'urya and Ganes'a of a number of images of the sun-god (S'urya) two deserve special mention here, one of them is kept in the aforesaid Rājesvari Ās'rama at Muhiripur in the Belonia sub-division of South Tripura and is worshipped there.⁶⁶ The image is a complex thing like that of Goddess Durgā. The deity is placed in a chariot drawn by seven horses,⁶⁷ as the popular tradition in the Hindu religion as well as secular texts. One of the horses is at the front side and on the left and the right sides, the other horses are placed three or each side. The traditional attendant deity Aruna is placed in front of the main deity Surya. There are also two other figures carved on the two sides. The body of the Sun god is half visible, the half being hidden by the Chariot. The whole is placed on a semi-circular stele. The image is supposed to be of the Pala style of Bengal.

Another image of the Sun-God made of sand stone non preserved in Private house at Agartala.⁶⁸ A Chariot drawn by seven horses in present in this case also. But some more figures are noticed in this. There are two swords, one on each side of the image **Usā**, **Pratyūsa** and **Chāyā** regarded as the consorts of the Sungod are also there. Of these the first two are in a Kneeling posture as if engaged in shooting arrows. A female figure called '**Mahāsvetā**' is placed between the Sun god and Aruna. Two other figures are there

66. Gon-chaudhury, op. cit—P—63.

67. The Seven horses represent the seven rays of the Sun (BIOGYOR).

68. In the house of Maharaj Kumar Sahadebkishore Deb Barman.

called **Pingala** and **Dandin** one in the right and another in the left side of the Sungod. Thus this is very complex image. Probably this was conceived on the model of the complex Durga Pratima of ten figures.

These images of the Sungod found in the soil of Tripura provide important clue to the study to religion of the state. It seems that the Sun worship was practised here at least by some sections of the people otherwise how can such complex images of this deity (Sūrya) are precious assests of Tripura iconography.

Ganes'a

Several images of the deity Ganes'a are found at ūnakoti, of these two are of special note, for they have more than the usual sitting posture (Sth āruka). One image (six handed) has three tusks and the other four tusks. The images hold various weapons and other things such as **Khada**, (Sword), **trisūla** (trident), **Gada** (mace), **Pāsā** (Snare), a skull, a rosary of **Rudrākṣa** beads and so on.

A four armed image of Ganes'a in a sitting posture is also found there. It is made of sand stone. It holds an axe (**Parasu**) a conch shell (**San'kha**) and some other things.

Another four armed icon of the same deity obtained from Pilāk hold some new things. **Kalpalata**, **Modakā** (Sweet meat etc.)

A vehicle drawn by rats is also visible below the seat of the image. The trunk is big and long and is hanging over the chest and the belly with the tip (of the trunk) turned to the right.

Viṣṇu images

There are some images of viṣṇu worth mention one is collected from ūnakoti. This is in a sitting posture (Sthānuka) Another was discovered at **Bādharghāt**, Agartala. It is made of black stone. A ten handed image of

Viṣṇu in Sthanuka posture was found in recent times at a village called Noāgāin. It has Laxmi and Saraswati by its sides. Another image of the Viṣṇu Group is found at ūnakoti and it is the Man-lion (**Narasingha**) form of Viṣṇu. The face is that of a lion. There is crown on the head and necklace, sacred thread etc. are also noticed in the body. An image of the Kūrma Avatara of Viṣṇu is also found at ūnakoti. It is just a big tortoise, not a man-cum-tortoise as the Narasingha image is.

Siva and Phallic images

At ūnakoti several Phallic images of **S'ivā** or **S'iva liṅgas** are found. In some the face of S'iva is carved on the four sides of the **Liṅga**. These are called four Lingas. There is also a one faced **Liṅga** with the face of S'iva carved on one side of the Linga. An image of Natarāja S'iva was collected from Khowai, Tripurā West. It is twelve handed. **Gaṅga** and **Gauri** are on two sides. There are also other S'iva icons.

● Concluding Remarks

The tribal deities having no image proper except the aforesaid bamboo **poles** with or without cross pieces, it is better to treat them as symbol-worshipper like the Hindu Sects worshipping **Liṅga** and **Salagrāma**. This is true of the general Tribal community. But the worshippers of the fourteen deities use the head figures, which are of course, images, though not full body images and they were the persons of the royal family from the beginning. They founded also temples of other Hindu deities at Udaipur, Agartala and some other places in the Hindu fashion, that is with full body images of the deities. This shows that there is a marked difference between the general tribal people and the people belonging to the Raj family as regards images of deities. The

Rāj family always preferred images half or full, while the general tribals preferred bamboo symbols.

A racial distinction may also be made here. The Royal family belongs to the Lunar dynasty of old according to a tradition prevailing in the royal house of Tripura as also in the Rājmaḷā. Later scholars call them Tripuri or Tipra, which is the dominant tribe in Tripura. Therefore it may be observed that the principal race i. e. Tripura⁶⁹ to which the Tripura royal family and the families⁷⁰ related to it, to also belong, prefer images while other tribes prefer symbols i. e. the bamboo made frame.

The bamboo frames of some deities resemble halfdone bamboo houses, and as such this system of worship may be compared with the shrine worship of some other people. A complex, house like bamboo made frame can not really be called an image or a symbol of a deity. It is rather to be viewed as a form of Shrine worship, some regard the bamboo frame to be a seat for the deity.⁷¹ This also corroborates our view.

Love of images is growing and the other form of worship⁷² prevailing only in the hills. Even the Christian tribals have kept an image of virgin Mary in the Catholic Church at Mariamnagar near Agartala.

69. or the branch of Aryan of Lunar dynasty migrating to Tripura.

70. Usually called Thakur's families e.g. Bhagavan Thakur's house.

71. J. Gonchaudhury—The Riāngs of Tripura, P-71.

72. The use of bamboo frames.

CONCLUSION

In chapter—I, we have sought to give a penpicture of the tribes of Tripura and their religion from prehistoric days down to the present day. There are as many as nineteen tribes in Tripura, of whom the Tripuri is the dominant one having the greatest numerical strength. These tribes of Tripura profess Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity in addition to their tribalism which consists of some peculiar rites and customs and belief in various spirits. Hinduism is by far the biggest religion here. Next comes Buddhism and last of all christianity.

Moghs and Chakmas are Buddhists, many Kukis and all Lusāis are christians. Some people of other tribes also profess christianity. But the total number of christians is not great. Of the total population of Tripura, only 1.21% are christians as per Census of 1981. Though the census reports of 1991 have been out, still these are incomplete. As per census reports of 1981, only 267% are Buddhists and 8934% are Hindus.

All Hindu tribals have preserved their original tribalism peculiar rites and customs and worship of many deities or rather spirits not admitted in Hinduism. Sacrifice of pigs and fowls to deities, not allowed in Hinduism, is widely prevalent among the tribals. Animal sacrifice is a major factor in all tribal rituals.

Special tribal deities are Matāi Katār and his consort Matāi Katārmā, Mamitā, Godiyā, Ker, Naksu Matāis Nagra and a host of others. These special deities are worshipped in tribal village in interior areas. But all Hindu deities are also worshipped, by the tribals including Kālī, Durgā, Laksmī, S'ani, Mahādev etc. The major Hindu deities are worshipped

by the tribals in the worship of the 14 deities. They are also worshipped separately.

Big temples of Tripura are dedicated to those major Hindu deities by the kings of Tripura, who belonged to the Tripuri tribe. There is also a temple dedicated to the 14 deities at old Agartala. But there is no famous temple dedicated to any of the special tribal deities. This shows the tribal kings leaning towards the Hindu deities. Only a few small shrines are noted, where a tribal deity is worshipped.

A peculiarity of the tribal worship is that the tribals do not use earthen images, but some bamboo symbols. The images of the 14 deities are, however, made of gold. But these are not full body images, but only the heads. This is also a peculiarity. This may be compared with the Phallic symbol of Lord Ś'iva in Hinduism. If a phallus can be a symbol a head can very well be so.

The lack of images proper in tribal worship perhaps indicates the love of *nirākāra upāsanā*. Their bamboo images, are actually symbols not images, like Ś'ivalinga, Sālagrama, Indradhvaja etc.

Another peculiarity of the tribal conception of Gods is that it is almost wholesale male in character. Most of the deities are of the male sex. Only a few of them are said to be female, the chief one (female) being Naksamwatāi. This is perhaps a trait of the early Vedic worship in which no image and no temple had a place. The tribal people, perhaps, have inherited this characteristic of the Vedic Aryans.

Apart from countless animal sacrifices, a lot of human sacrifices also prevailed in Tripura. Human Victims were offered to 14 deities. But it is noticeable that out of the 14 deities of this group only one deity Uma is a Ś'akta deity and all the rest are Ś'aiva, Vaiṣṇava etc. So animal sacrifice is not allowed in Hinduism before these non-Ś'akta deities. Yet the tribal system allows animal sacrifice even in such a milieu.

This is due to the tribal people's excessive love of animal slaughter in every ritual.

Vedic sacrifices were also performed at one time by the king of Tripura by importing Brahman priests from different quarters of the country. This shows their great love for Hinduism and ancient Aryan civilization.

With the passage of time tribal people of Tripura and their kings have joined various Hindu sects, specially Vaisnavism. The Jamātiyās have the largest number of Vaisnavas among them. In modern times, many tribal people have received initiation from various Bengalee Hindu religious preachers of West Bengal, Rāmākṛṣṇa, Ramthakur, Swarupananda, and others. Thus the tribal people are gradually being assimilated to the Bengalee race in respect of religion and culture.

In chapter-II, the tribal Christianity of Tripura is dealt with only a small minority of the tribals of Tripura have embraced Christianity. Further it remains a modern religion here being introduced in the last part of the 19th century. The upsurge of Christianity came in 1920 when a good number of Lusāis and Kukis embraced Christianity. Earlier traces are, of course, noticeable, but the people of Tripura were not concerned at that state. The portuguese soldiers of Tripura were the first members of this religion in the 16th century. That does not matter. These Portuguese regiment of Tripura eventually settled in Tripura in a village called Mariamnagar, about 5 Kilo-metres from Agartala. This village exists till today. The decendants of the old portuguese army men live there and they have kept to their old faith. They have established a beautiful church there, which is a Catholic Church. It is run by a staff of sisters and a Father recruited from different parts of the country. The sisters are all tribal girls of Tripura and adjacent areas. Regular prayers are held in the church under the guidance of the father. It is an interesting site to see. All recite the prayers with rapt attention. There is no private conversation, no laughing, no

noise whatever. They complete the service without any break, get some **Prasad**, locally called **Krsta-prasad**, from the Father and then leave the hall in silence and strict discipline one by one.

But an image of Mother Mary is kept on the dais there. It is a full-body image dressed like a Bengalee woman. One gets the impression that it is an image of Sarasvati. This seems to be Indian edition of Christianity. Indians, i. e. Hindus, are lovers of image, and are not accustomed to **nirakara upasana**, so far as the generality is concerned. The image of Mary serves to satisfy the craving for image worship of the Indian recruits to Christianity. Time may come when Indian Christianity will assume newer forms.

Christianity in Tripura remains confined to the tribal people only, and even among the tribals, to the Mogs and Kukis¹ chiefly. Only a small number of people from other tribes have adopted Christianity.

A number of other Churches were established in Tripura during the early years of the present century. Most of these are among the Lusāi and Kuki people of North Tripura, chiefly in the Jampui Hills. At least a dozen of Churches exist there. Two famous places of the Jampui Hill where christian activities are most conspicuous are vangmoon and Fuldangsai. Most of the Churches are founded by the Newzealand Baptist Mission. The Government of Newzealand, England, U.S.A. and Canada provide these churches with huge financial assistance every year. With this big monetary power at their hands, the churches spend lavishly for the uplift of the tribal people who are generally poverty-stricken. The Missionaries provide free English education, clothing, Medicine etc. to the poor tribals who have adopted christianity. By all this they show that charity is a great virtue and that service to man is service to God. They have also translated the Bible into

1. Ramgopal Sinha—The Kukis of Tripura P—49.

Bengali and some tribal dialects for preaching the message of the New Testament to the local people. They distribute these translations at a nominal price.

In some churches prayers are held thrice a week on Sunday, Wednesday and Thursday. This is another novel feature of tribal christianity in Tripura. The influence of Hindu religious-mindedness may be at the root of it. Western Christianity has given top priority to work and relegated religion to a day of no work only. The tribal christians of Tripura have given much more importance to religion than their western brethren. This is doubtless due to the Hindu system of deity worship or Thakur-Puja.

Another novelty introduced by the Lusai christians of Tripura is their sacrifice of pigs and buffaloes² on the occasion of Christmas Day every year. This is not prescribed in christian liturgy. But the Lusais do it. This is also obviously due to the Hindu influence. In Hindu worships sometime a buffalo is sacrificed, specially on the **Mahastami** day during the Durga Puja. This seems to be the main impetus behind the Lusai christians here. They have the strong support of the Hindu Sakta worship in this matter.

The Lusai christians invoke Jesus Christ as the Supreme God for the welfare of all. This is another novelty and is certainly due to the Hindu conception of God manifesting Himself in Guru (teacher) and Avatara (Incarnation, prophet). So **Guru Puja** and Avatar-Puja, e.g. Worship of Rama, Kṛṣṇa and others prevail in Hinduism and they may have led the Lusai christian to have the same view about the Christian Prophet Jesus. The Lusais were originally semi-Hindus and their close juxtaposition to the Hindu population cannot fail to have some remarks on their minds about good points of Hinduism.

The Gāro and Riāng tribes also have many converts to Christianity. Other tribes have only a few converts. In all only about 4% of the tribals have swiched over to christianity.

Inspite of the hectic activities of the Missionaries, Christianity has not made much headway in the state and the trend seems to be towards Hinduism.

In chapter-III, the Philosophical thoughts of the tribals of Tripura are discussed. These are in a rudimentary stage as yet. A potent cause is for this retarded growth of Philosophy is the absence of any written literature among the tribals. Such thoughts are to be gathered from diverse sources—The Rājmaḷā, several epigraphic records, the folk literature including folk songs of the tribals very secretly collected and published under the auspices of the Government of Tripura and recent writings of the few tribal writers of the state.

In an Incription of Dhanyamānikya, it is stated that Goddess Ambika or Durgā is nothing but a form of Murari or Viṣṇu (Maya Murarer iyam Ambikā-yā). Hence the philosophical view is the ultimate unity in all diversity. God is one but he may have different names or forms.

With the above inscription the Goddess is established in the famous—Temple of Udaipur. So it is evident that the Supremacy of the Sakta Goddess is admitted here; so the philosophy is S'akta-Vis'ista dvaitavāda, because ultimate unity in diversity is admitted.

In another Inscription of Katāyan—mānikya, Lord Gopinatha is eulogised as the supreme Deity. The Philosophy is qualified monism with a difference in the name of the Supreme Being. Here it is Lord Gopinatha or Viṣṇu, while it was Devi Tripura Sundari in the previous verse.

There are also some other epigraphic verses containing the same philosophical view. The verses were, of course, composed by Bengalee Pandits, and the Philosophy is mainly to be

attributed to them. But the kings had the sanction thereto. The verses were readout to them and when they were satisfied, the verses were passed for engravement. There the Philosophy was ultimately attributable to the Tripuri kings and their tribal subjects.

The idea of God, soul, deities and other spirits of the tribal people of Tripura are available from their modern writings, songs, folk literature, folk tales etc. Though these ideas are not fully developed as yet. The Hindu tribals who have entered into any Hindu religious sect, old or modern, are accepting the Hindu ideas on these questions. They worship any major Hindu deity Vishnu, Kali, Kṛṣṇa or Śīva and accept that deity as Supreme God of all Gods, as the general Hindus do. But those tribals who have not yet joined any Hindu religious sect retain their traditional tribal beliefs. According to them they have a deity named Mat āi Kat ār who is said to be the Supreme Deity or God. But it is doubtful for this is a fact, for none are heard to recite the name Matai-Katar in prayer or in the time of danger. This great figure is not included in the group of fourteen Deities too. Probably the supreme God is a very recent view but it has no strong foundation behind it.

The concepts of soul, afterward fruit of action, heaven, hell and rebirth are also there among the tribals. They also believe in Fate as an irresistible force or unseen potency in human life. In a number of songs cited above (Chapter-III) their fatalistic attitude is clear.

The soul is called "Fala"³ in the Tripuri language. It is an imperishable entity. The tribals have a belief that the Soul goes out of the body for a time during sleep and returns to it after sometime. The soul enjoys or suffers in the life after death according to its good or bad action.

3. D. P. Deb Barma—Treatise on Tripuri Community P—57.

But there is no concept of liberation or Mukti among the tribals. They have not gone beyond heaven and hell in the afterward. So, they worship their deities not for any liberation but for some worldly gains. Such as recovery from illness, escaping a danger and so on. This is true only of the traditional tribalism. But those who have entered a Hindu Sect, such as Vaishnavism, of course admit liberation to be the highest goal of the human soul like other Hindus.

A Tripuri folk song gives the following picture of life and death and the immortality of soul—(Birth and death are in evitable. The soul is undying. Birth is followed by death, and death by rebirth. Why should one be afraid of travelling along the path of life.

This seems to be an echo of the Bhagavad Gita Chapter-II (“**Jātasya he dhruva mrdyur dhruvam jama mrtasya ca.....natvam socitum arhate**”).

In Chapter-IV, the rites and customs prevailing among the tribals of Tripura are discussed. Like all other peoples the tribals of the State also have their own peculiar rites and customs relating to religions as well as secular matters. The secular rites concern the sacraments, marriage, birth, death etc. and the religions rites related to the worships of various deities and spirits of the tribal pantheon.

Animal sacrifice is almost universal in the tribal rites. Even for knowing the future of a man or an affair an animal is to be sacrificed and its entrails examined. They believe that the entrails of the slaughtered animal can reveal the good or evil in the matter. What occurs more probable is that the tribals like to kill an animal for food on any pretext. How can the entrails of a pig or fowl contain the future of man?

Some important rites and customs may be noted here. A Priest is needed in all rites. The Tribal Priest is called Ochai. Some tribals call him Ojhai or Akcāi. Sometimes a Bengalee Priest is engaged by them. This occurs in the urban areas and educated tribal families. The Ochāi may take an assistant

called *Badua*. The *Ochāi* is not a hereditary post. He is selected from the villagers by the village council.

Of the various of marriage, one is quite singular because here the selected bridegroom has to work in the house of his father in law for a certain period usually two to three years by way of test of his ability and nature. This system of marriage is called *Chāmāri Kāmāni* (Marriage by service). Some call it "*Jāmāi Khātā* (Physical labour of the *Jamai* or son-in-law). After the expiry of the agreed period, the marriage is solemnised by negotiation between the two parties. A marriage requires a lot of rituals animal sacrifice, drinking of wine and so on. Dowry system is there but it is not as heavy as in some Bengalee societies. Gift of land is also allowed to gather with a little money. For merely bride price had to be paid to the father of the bride by the father of the bridegroom. But this custom is fast changing for the other custom prevailing among all other societies where a dowry is to be paid by the bride's party. The mother cannot witness the daughter's marriage.

Fowls are sacrificed in large numbers in a marriage. Also pigs. There is a proverb that pigs get a thinking as soon as a marriage is settled. This means that a marriage will involve sacrifice of pigs.

Widow marriage and divorce are also in vogue. A widow can marry only a widow man. A divorce case is to be placed before the village council. If the council is satisfied, the divorce is allowed, —But in some tribes the person seeking divorce has to pay the expenses of the marriage to the other party.

The period of a sauce or unclean state is eight days in birth and twelve days in the case of death among the Tripuri people, other tribes have different figures reaching upto thirty days.

When a person dies, a Chicken is struck dead at his feet. It is believed that the soul of the chicken will accompany the departed soul of the person to the next world as a helping hand.

In constructing a house one has to sacrifice a chicken to some deity and the Ochai then looks into the entrails of the chicken. They believe that the future good or evil of the house may be read in this entrails.

In order to prevent the evil eyes of invisible spirits, the tribals hang up earthen pot marked with some peculiar signs on the front door of the house.

For protection of the house from enemies the tribals derive four nails into the four corners of the house wall. The nails are sacrificed with spells uttered by the Ochāi (Priest)

Pigs and fowls are sacrificed and their entrails examined by an Ochai in order to know the future good or evil of a person or family—

The tribals have a great faith in occult practices as known as “abhicirakarma” in Hindu Sastras spells, amulets, herbs, hair, nail and many other things are used in such rites. In order to kill an enemy, the expert in these rites has to make a human figure on the ground and then it is pierced with an arrow with necessary incantation.

The Kukis are in the habit of taking the flesh of all kinds of birds and beasts. So the Kuki-inhabited hills are devoid of animals with the result that one can not hope to rise early in the morning by the cawing of crow for the crows are already eaten up by the Kuki people.

There are many other rites and customs among the tribal people of Tripura. But gradually all quixotic practices are going out of fashion as a result of education and contact with Bengalee population.

In Chapter-V some discussions are hold about the Priesthood, the sacred places of Tripura visited by the tribals, and the images of tribal deities.

The original Priest of Tripura Royal family was called Contāi. He had assistants called Deodai and Gālīm. They are brought from outside the state by king Trilocana. They were

engaged in the worship of the 14 Deities, which duty they are performing even to-day. Their origin is uncertain.

Another class of Priests is mentioned in the Rājmaḷā. They have Priests belonging to the Dhāmāi Clan of the Mogh tribe. They were employed for worship in the royal family when the capital of Tripura was at Rāṅāmāti (Modern Udaipur) with the fall of their dynasty the Dhāmāi Priests also disappeared from the scene.

Contai, Dhāmāi and their associates were highclass clergymen employed in the services of the kings in a few big temples only. But the general tribal people had their own Priest called Ochāi or Ojhai. These Priests perform Pūjā in tribal houses till today. They are tribal people and selected for the post by the village headman. The post is not hereditary. Usually a man of same tribe is selected for the post of Ochāi.

Now-a-days Bengalee Brāhman Priests are also engaged by the educated tribals. The ancient kings of Tripura had felt the need of expert priests and so they imported master Priests from other parts of the country—Kanya Kubja, Mithila, Utkal etc. some of the imported Priests performed Vedic sacrifices in the state and were rewarded with big land grants. Others were engaged in the temples of various deities in the state. Their descendants continue the sacerdotal task in the temples today. They are non-Bengalee in origin.

So, we see there is a large variety of Priests in Tripura Contai of unknown origin, tribal Ochai, Bengalee, Hindusthani and Oriya Brāhmin Priests.

As to sacred places there are only a few old temples founded by the ancient kings of Tripura.

The temples are situated in the capitals—Udaipur, old Agartala and Agartala. The famous Tripura Sundari temple is situated in the old capital Udaipur. This temple is regarded as one of the 51 celebrated Pithas of India. It is visited by hundreds of visitors everyday. Both tribals and non-tribals go

to this temple to have a darsan of the Devi and offer a Pūjā according to one's capacity. It is popularly called Mār Bādī or Mātā Bādī (house of the Mother). There are several other temples at this place.

At old Agartala there is the famous temple of the 14 deities. The annual Pūjā is held here in the month of Āsadha (June-July) for a week. Thousands of people both tribals and non-tribals visit the site during this period. The fourteen deities are Hare, Umā, Hari, Mā (Laksmi) etc. Countless animal sacrifice is a painful characteristic of this festival. But animal sacrifice is daily affair in this temple.

At the present capital town Agartala, there are quite a few temples which are visited by all. But on special occasions huge crowds assemble in each. The main or most frequented shrines here are Jagannath Bādī, Laksmi Nārāyan Bādī, Durgābādī and S'iva Bādī of these the most upto date is the Jagannath Bādī Temple where a big Guest House is constructed recently. This is run by the Caitanya Gaudīya Math of Calcutta.

The Kālī Bādī at Kasbā near Kamalā Sāgar rail station is also a famous sacred spot of Tripura. In North Tripura ūnokotī is a famous sacred place on high hill. The huge image of S'iva is the main attraction here, though many other images are visible there. At Amarpur, Sābroom and Kalyānpur there are temples of Goddess, Kālī. All other Hindu tirthas Gayā, Kāsi, Vrdavan ect. are also visited by tribals.

The Buddhist tribals have a few monasteries, the biggest one is at Agartala, which is known as "Benuvan-Vihār" (the monastery in the bamboo brake).

The Christian tribals have Churches at Agartala and some other places, notably in Jampui Hills.

These are the sacred places visited by the tribals of Tripura.

As regards images of deities—worshipped by the tribals it should be noted that their images are not full fledged image like those of other Hindus. The famous 14 deities of the temples of old Agartala have only the heads. These head images are made of eight metals including, gold and silver. The heads of Śīva is of silver.

The images of traditional tribal deities are made of bamboo poles. These are not images proper, but some symbols so to say. There is an exception to this in the case of the deity Gaḍiyā. Some tribals use a head image of Gaḍiyā, which is supposed to be made of Gold. It is said to be brought from the neighbouring Kuki land. All other tribals use bamboo image for Gaudiya too.

There are the full fledged images of Kālī, Durgā ect. in the big temples which are also visited by the tribals. Many stone image of various Hindu and Buddhist deities are also found in different places of Tripura.

PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICAITONS

There is no philosophy worth the name in the tribal religion of Tripura or any other religion. The religion itself is vague. This holds good more with regard to the religion of the tribes of North east India, of the Khāsia Hills, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. The tribals of these regions almost feel that they have got no religion, and they are switching over to the christian religion en bloc. Such a vacuum has been created there owing to the fact that Hindu religious—preachers scarcely visit these difficult hill areas. This is rather unfortunate. R. K. Mission, ISKCON, Bharat Sevasram Sangha ect. should visit and found religious centres in these areas. Then the sense of no religion and craving for a foreign religion would subside.

But the situation is a bit different in Tripura. The Tripuri tribals have no sense of dearth of a religion. They are

surrounded by the Hindus and most of them are Hindus themselves⁴. So the Hindu ideas of religion and philosophy are usually put forward in support of the tribal religion. Yet no real tribal Philosophy can be assumed. There is no such tribal literature as yet with Philosophical probes, so at this stage, one can not expect much in the name of Philosophy of the tribals of Tripura. The idea of a number of gods and goddess, or good and evil spirits is there. Then there is the belief in a great God called Matāi Katār. Human soul is admitted under the name Fala. Rebirth is also admitted. This is obviously due to the fact that both the Hindus and the Buddhists have the same belief. The philosophical implication of the recently published Tripuri Poetry is discussed already. That of the conception of the Fourteen Deities is also hinted at. It is probably syncretised⁵ or harmonising all Gods or looking upon all Gods as equal and the same. Some may call it henotheism. The trend is towards monotheism or a one single great God. The entire tribal Philosophical view may be interpreted in the light of this.

SYMBOLISM

As we have already pointed out the tribals of Tripura never make a full image of their deities, but construct some bamboo frames, which can not be looked upon as an image resembling a human figure, male or female are rather to be regarded as symbols of the deities.

A philosophical implication of this symbolism of the tribals may be assumed. Perhaps the ancient tribals assumed their deities to be formless (*nirā kāra*) and hence no human form

4. N. Hasnain—Tribal India Today P—60. Today almost 90 per cent of Indian tribes follow Hindu religion in one form or other.

5. B. K. Deb Barma—The Tribes of Tripura—P-3 (The Tripuri)

could be attributed to them, so they liked to worship the deities in their nirākāra form. Thus they came to have the nirākāra Upāsana without any proper image. But it is difficult for ordinary people to form a good conception of the nirākāra or avyakta Brahman as the Bhagvad-gita has pointed out in the verses.

Kles'ādhika taraste sām
avyakta'sākta—cetasam etc.

Much more troubles befall those whose minds are devoted to the avyakta or unmanifest Brahman.

Owing to the extreme difficulty of conceiving and worshipping the nirākāra and nirguna Brahman the system of saguna and Sākāra conception and worship have come into vogue among the Hindus and that long long ago.

This system has prevailed among the tribals. But the Saguna Upāsana is preceded by a semi-nirguna and semi Saguna stage in which no full apotheosis is made and no full fledged images are made. Some material objects are used to represent the formless Brahman. The ancient Hindus have used stones for this purpose, such as Sālagrām—S'iva linga etc. ghata (earthen jar)—these are called **pratikas** or symbols of Brahman or a deity. The tribal bamboo frames are also nothing but symbols of this type. The difference is that the tribal symbols are made of perishable materials and are not durable and can not be preserved in temples for permanent worship.

Whatever the nature of symbols in tribal worship, the Philosophical implication remains the same. It is that the tribals have the nirākāra conception of Brahman and this nirākāra Upāsana are implied by the system of bamboo symbol worship of the tribals. Some educated tribals also admit the fact to some extent saying that there are no

anthropomorphic traits in their deities. But the real fact is their ancient conception of a *nirākārā* Deity and this conception may have been derived from the early Aryan Society of India of the *Upānisadic* age saturated with *Upānisadic* conception of Brahman or *Ātman*, chiefly the *nirguṇa—nirākārā* conception and the symbolism of the day-worship in stone symbols.

Yo Yonim Yonim adhitisthati edkah⁶—Brahman that exists in all Yonis in the form of a Phallus.

Undoubtedly and blending of Hinduism and animism is the religion of the majority of tribal people of Tripura. The old tribal Gods are worshipped along with the Hindu ones. Since the Hindu tribals are Hindus from time immemorial, it is quite likely that Hindu philosophical conceptions have found this way to tribal society long long ago at least to some extent. The *Vartyas* of the vedic society probably refer to the tribals of the community.

PSYCHOLOGY OF TRIBAL RELIGION

Very little can be said on this head for the tribals of Tripura have no peculiar mind different from that of the rest of the population. This question is more pertinent with the tribals of other parts of north-east India, such as the Nagas, Garos, Khasis etc. who have a sense of nothingness in their mind as regards religion. A case cited by Bani Prasanna Mishra of such a feeling of nothingness is that of one Mr. Omed, a Garo.⁷

Omed says—

'We Garos have no religion. But it is certainly necessary

6. *Svetāsvatara Upānisad*, 4, 11

7. *Vide—Rev. William Carey, The Garo Jungle Book (reprint) Tura, 1966, P—69, Sujata Miri (ed) Religion and Society of North East India, P—91.*

for us to seek some way of obtaining good after death.'—such a sense of nothingness characterises some tribal youngsters of Tripura now-a-days obviously due to secret missionary activities.

Inferiority complex and a feeling of deprivation also are noticed among some of them. Writings of educated tribals in Newspapers and periodicals betray these sentiments. They think themselves a depressed class among the Hindus. The Gāros and Khāsias adopt christianity in a largescale, but do not like to be Hindus for fear of Hindu caste system. They say if they adopt Hinduism, the Hindus will throw them into a low caste which they can not accept. A casteless Hinduism is necessary to have these masses within the Hindu fold. However these people are quite akin to the general Hindus as to their truth-speaking, easily mixing with the non-tribals, even having matrimonial relations with them. Their women are more attractive than men-folk in demeanour and activities. The NEHU (= North Eastern Hill University) at Shillong is manned mostly by tribal women and they manage matters excellently. In Tripura also the tribal men and women in Government Service in various departments are regarded as more active and helpful than their Bengalee counterparts.

E T H I C S

Each and every religion has a set of moral principles of its own. The more ethical a religion is, the more reliable it is as a form of religion. In fact, Ethics is the basis of all essential forms of religion. In all the great religions of the world, namely, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, etc. moral teachings are predominant. Some form of moral code, however crude it may be is

essentially connected with every religion, even with the primitive religion of the ab-original people. A religion not based upon some basic moral principles is not acceptable to a modern man. So, it is desirable that the moral aspect of the tribal religion of Tripura must be brought to the fore. The tribal religion is, for the most part that of the general Hindus. Generally tribal ethics agrees with that of others. But the tribal sense of guilt is often very acute, and one has to pay the penalty for an offence with severe consequences. There is a village council which may penalise a serious offender even with death. Adultery, theft, murder etc. are such offences. Many cases of death sentences are reported from the interior hill areas for such offences. Owing to the violent nature of the tribals, non-tribals avoid entering a tribal village for fear of losing life for any petty offence such as a casual look at a semi nude woman in the house. Tribal women of many families remain half-nude in jungle areas. This is not prohibited in their ethics. But this practice is fast disappearing owing to spread of education. The older generation of tribals is honest, truthful and religious minded. The younger generation is changing and growing to be a mixed character as a result of acculturation with the non-tribals. The older people study The Rāmayāna and The Mahābhārata and highly appreciate the moral values set therein. Some of the Tribals have adopted Vaiṣṇavism specially the Jamātiyās.⁸

IMPACT ON SOCIETY

The impact of tribalism on society at large may detain our attention for a shortwhile. Though tribalism practically

8. P. N. Bhattacharjee — The Jamātiyās—P—45.

fades into insignificance by the side of highly developed Hinduism of the Bengalee population of the State of Tripura and even tribal people are being more and more Hinduised day by day adopting the most popular Hindu forms of religion, yet it can not be said that tribalism has got no impact at all on society.

The most important factor here is the absence of idols i.e. full fledged images in tribal form of worship. This serves to discourage idol worship among the Bengalees too. In making Durga Pratiam now-a-days in various places of Tripura earthen images are not invariably made, some make bamboo images too and also of such stuff e. g. lightwood.

The name "**Caudda devata**" (The 14 deities) like "**Caudda Purusa**" (Fourteen generations) has become a popular and powerful term here, so that often people swear by the name of "Caudda devata" in addition to Mā Kālī (Mother Kali).

The festivals of Tripura draw both tribals and non-tribals closer and give them a feast of Joy and pleasure for a number of days. Goria Puja, though it is observed by the Ādivasis, it is now patronised by all sects of the people. Kharchi is the national festival of Tripura. In this festival the fourteen Gods and Goddesses are worshipped by different tribes and communities, people of all sects embrace together and exchange wish, success and happiness. It paves the way for unity among tribals and non-tribals of Tripura.

Folk literature, Folk songs and sweet tales of the tribals play an important role to preach moral principles or home worship rituals.

The tribals of Tripura show a staunch adherence to

Hinduism including their original tribalism. *vaisnavīsm* and other modern forms of Hinduism preached by various Thakurs.⁹ This has acted as a brake to the wave of Christianity in the state brought in by foreign missionaries. Christianity has made some dent in the remote border areas in the north¹⁰ only.

This is a significant impact.

Even the tribal Hinduism has made an impact on the local Christianity in several ways. (1) Introduction of buffalo sacrifice on Christmas Day. (2) weekly prayer is held on Thursdays in addition to the usual Sunday. This is a clear impact of Hinduism, (3) Introduction of an image of Mother Mary in the Mariamnagar Church, Agartala. The image looks like a goddess. It is fact that the tribals of interior areas still follow their own traditional culture. With regard to dress, ornaments, customs and manners, food habit, performance of dance, folk songs and festivities etc. – they remain till date as their own.

But coming in contact with the neighbouring Bangalee a little bit impact of Bengali culture and society is penetrating in it. As for the traditional ladies garment, the female folk wears *pachra* and *Richa* all the time. In this case a change is noticed to certain extent among the young girls. Now-a-days at the time of visiting a village market or a town area many of them wear *sari* and *blouse*. The young boys have also been accustomed to wear trousers whenever they come to any urban area. Even at the time of weaving their garments they use woollen tread with modern design. As a result of acculturation the young

9. Ramkrishna, *Svar Ūp ānada*, *R ām āth ākur* etc.

10. The Jampui Hill areas.

generation shows great interest in Bengali and Hindi songs. Sometimes they compose their songs imitating the tune of Bengali and Hindi songs.¹¹

Prof. S. Bhattacharjee observed that "Apart from the tribal religious rites and practices, the tribal communities have adopted many elements of popular Brahmanism including the worship of some prominent Brahmanical deities like Durga, Chandi, Saraswati, Luxmi, Mahadeva etc. Those who adopted such worships of the Hindu deities have gone to the extent of having individual family worship of some minor deities like Saraswati, Luxmi and others. These images are purchased from the local markets and even the non-tribal Brahmin Priests are being engaged to officiate."¹²

On account of modern transport facilities and easy ways of communication the hill people of the interior areas have got the scope to mix freely with the non-tribal people. The Govt. of Tripura has extended all possible facilities to them. As a result almost all tribals are in a position to adopt themselves with many elements of other cultures. Now-a-days the tribal behaviour patterns have changed. Previously a tribal woman had liberty in respect of domestic activities, marital separation, visit to parents etc. But at present a tribal woman does not enjoy such a liberty rather she has to obey her husband's directions as in a Bengalee family.

Though the cultural advancement of the tribals have achieved but due to infiltration of non-tribal their sufferings

11. Vide - D. Deb Barmā - *Treatise on Traditional Social Institutions of the Tripuri Community*, p-103

12. Dr.S. Bhattacharjee - *Tribal Extremism in Tripura*. p-59

know no bounds. Many of them has become landless and can not make both ends meet. Dr. S. Bhattacharjee observed that "Even a few years ago, the tribals living in isolation had little knowledge about money as the medium, of exchange. It only in recent times that they have become conversant with the money economy."¹³

In encouraging loyalty to the ancestral spirits, or to the God from whom the tribe is descended, tribal religion made for solidarity and sense of common obligations.

In rudimentary form we have here the idea of a norm for human wills which all accept for the good of all. Tribal religion, in so far as it led in this direction was sub-serving the cause of spiritual progress. Moreover, in the tribal conception of a blood bond uniting all the members of the primitive group, there appears the rudimentary basis out of which was to develop the idea of the spiritual brotherhood of the religious society."¹⁴

FUTURE PROSPECT

As to the future prospect of the tribal religion of Tripura, it may be said that there is a strong tendency towards assimilation with the general Hindu Stream. The process of assimilation may make some reshuffling in the rites and customs of the tribal people. Some of their minor deities and some peculiar rites and practices may go out of fashion. This change has already begun in urban areas. What will remain of their original tribalism will be looked upon in future as "desacara" (Local usage).

13. Dr. S. Bhattacharjee - *ibid* - P-62

14. George Galloway - *The Philosophy of Religion* - P - 109

The Moghs¹⁵ and the Cakmas have cling to Buddhism and it is hoped they will preserve this great faith of Lord Buddha of our country for ever. This adherence to Buddhism has checked the advance of Christianity. This is regarded as a blessing in disguise.

The tribal christians, chiefly the Lusai or Mizo people, added to the diversity of the State in respect of religion. This is a consolation to the manifold missionary people of England, Newzealand etc. who worked hard in this state for the propogation of Christianity.

It is expected that Mizo people will cling to this faith, but at the same time will and something to it from native sources. Already they have done something in this regard as noted above.

Prof. Kanito Sema observed that if the tribal peoples of North East India believe under Christian atmosphere their society can progress, my argument to prove the wrong would itself be fatal. The cessation of even a mock christianity in the North East religion would amount to anti-religion - an emergence of an unethical society. In my personal view Jesus offers a socialism with God which is in theory (to some extent in practice also) different from Socialism without God. Socialism with God may have affinity with the tribal people, and perhaps it may be quite suitable for them in their march towards future.¹⁶

15. Dr. P. N. Bhattacharjee comments that "Buddhism is the traditional religion of the Moghs. About 99% of the Moghs of Tripura returned themselves as Buddhist by religion

They have clear concept of heaven and hell

TUI - A Quarterly Research Journal on Tribal life and culture, March-May, VOL-2.

16. Sujata Miri - ibid - p-76.

Mr. L. P. Singh, I. C. S., the ex-governor of North Eastern States of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura said in his inaugural address in a seminar on the subject "Religion and society of North East India" conducted by the Department of Philosophy, North Eastern Hill University that "There have been marked changes also in the sphere of religion. There has been a progressive decrease since 1951, not to go further back, in the proportion of the tribal people professing what may be broadly called traditional tribal religions. For example in Assam the decrease between 1951 and 1961 was about 7 per cent ; and in Manipur about 22 per cent ; and between 61-71 the decrease in Meghalaya was about 4 per cent and in Nagaland about 21 per cent. It is obvious that the tribal religions have been increasingly giving place to one or another of the organised major world religions, all of which - Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam - are represented in this religion."¹⁷

In fine, let us hope that tribalism and greater Hinduism of Tripura will combine and assimilate to the great benefit of either side and make the state a real *pithats thāna*. Indian religion, especially is a novel form of Hinduism. The tribal Scholars may bring about this regeneration of Hinduism here by their writings in Newspapers, periodicals and book form. It is they who can supply further information on tribal religion and Philosophy from every nook and corner of the tribal habitations. This will help further thinking on the subjects and pave the way to tribal renaissance of a greater multilingual religion in Tripura. To quote Dr. S. Radhakrishnan - "without laying stress on the external

17. S. Miri - *ibid* - page -2.

rituals of religion, if we can realise the central idea of it then we can understand that all religion are identical and all people are the manifestations of one Absolute Reality. Relation between Man to Man is the relation of Spirituality.¹⁸

Let us hope that the tribal religion of Tripura will gradually develop the idea of the spiritual brotherhood of the religious society and will try to transform itself into a form of universal religion in future.

18. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan – Religion and Society. P-45.

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MAP OF TRIPURA

Scale 45 Miles to an inch

