

Democratic Heritage Of Tribes Of Tripura

জয় বায় গড়িয়া

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ত্রিপুরা রাজ্য

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Tribal Heritage of Tripura
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FORWARD

The tribal communities of Tripura have their age-old long colourful heritage, traditions, custom, rules of self-governance and in built democratic system continuing from generation to generation.

2. The present book written by Dr. Chandrika Basu Majumder mainly deals with the in built democratic norms of the tribal society and absorption of modern democratic principles in it to some extent.

3. I hope the researchers, interested readers and persons working in various fields may find the book very useful.

S Saha

Director

Tribal Research Institute

Government of Tripura

Agartala.

A project Report on

' Democratic Aspects of Tribal Societies of Tripura with special reference to Jamatia'.

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Preface

Tripura is a small hilly state on the North-Eastern India which represents admixture of races and culture as there were contacts between various ethnic groups in the resultant process of migration and settlement. Yet, the tribes of this state more or less preserved their distinctive identity. Although the traditional self-governing institution of the tribals of Tripura has never been democratic in Western terms, there was a sense in which the whole body of villagers took their part in the village affairs. So the idea of people's participation in administration was not foreign to the people of Tripura.

The object of this project report is to discuss the democratic aspects of tribal societies of Tripura with especial reference to Jamatiya. To find out the democratic ideas in tribal society of Tripura some aspects of their own administrative system have been discussed. The history of Tripura as an administrative unit dates back to the days of the Rajas when the territory was a native state. Although a native state, Tripura enjoyed a special status among the Princely States because there was no treaty obligations between the king and the British - India Government. In the nineteenth century, the British Company indirectly accepted Rajs's right over the hills of Tripura. During the time of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur in mid-twenties various measures were taken for the improvement of administration in all its branches. His Highness could foresee that unless there is gradual decentralisation and responsible officers are given freedom in their areas of responsibility the administration cannot run efficiently. The constitution of (1) Mantrana Sabha or the Advisory Council (2) Byabasthapak Sabha or the Legislative Council and (3) the Mantri Parishad or the Executive Council can be termed as an attempt of democratisation of administration.

During the time of Maharaja also, each Tripuri village was self - governing. Prior to the introduction of statutory Panchayat in 1962, there was informal Panchayat in the hills and plains of Tripura. The king ruled in the Capital and the village chief in every villages. Each community had their own elementary social and administrative organisation starting from the village level going upto the Chieftainship of the whole tribe.

There were age-old systems, the ramnents of which may be found even today. Now a days also the whole Jamatiya Community is socially controlled by their hada (The Supreme Council). But there is hardly any scope on the part of hada to exercise his power arbitrarily. The mechanism of democratic control is present in the village administrative system of Jamatiya.

In this project report, it has been noted that the idea of democracy was not unalien to the tribal people of Tripura even before independence. Unlike, the hereditary feudal system of Bengal the tribal had the democratic set-up where all villagers took part in the decision making process. The Tribal Areas Autonomous District Councils are showing interest in formation of village committee's to up-hold the cultural heritage of tribal people of Tripura. Actually local self-government in modern democracy is essentially designed to fulfill the demands of the local people. In that sense the traditional village council of Tripura fulfilled the basic essence of local self-Government. It involves the tribal masses in active participation of public life. In most of the village council decisions are taken by the people in general in meetings held regularly which may be compared with the Greek City State which is the classical example of Direct Democracy.

While some studies about the traditional social administrative system of the tribal people of Tripura have been made but

a comprehensive study on the democratic aspects of the tribal society of Tripura especially of the Jamatiya has not been done. This project report is an humble attempt to justify the observation of Verrier Elwin Committee on Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks :

"The Tribal Councils have great potentialities established in history and tradition, supported by social and religious sanctions, expression of a genuine democracy representing the co-operative and comunal temperament of the people, they can be used not only to support law and order but also to further the progress of development throughout the tribal areas." The methods adopted in preparing the Project are participation, observation conversation with the people of Tribal Society and Hada Okras and the employees of Jamatiya Society visit to some Jamatiya, dominated village and consultation of books, Journals, records and reports.

In completing this report, I acknowledge my indebtedness to my husband Dr. Nilratan Majumder who encouraged me at each step of the work. I am also grateful to my parents and Mr. Nara Narayan Jamatiya, Chitra Kumar Jamatiya, Brahmananda Jamatiya. Shibapada Jamatiya. Dr. Chandan Chakraborty, Debesh Roy, Swapan Kumar Das, Ramapada Jamatiya, Mr B Reang, Director, Tribal Reserch, Mr. Amarendra Debbarama, Librarian, Tribal Reasearch Institute and to all those who have rendered their help and co-operation.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge my indebtedness to my house hold assistant 'Sumitra' who looked after my two kids 'Tutul' & 'Bubul'.

Chapter— I

Introducing Tribal Society of Tripura

Tripura is a small hilly state on the North - East India containing an area of 1086 sq.km.(source : 1991 Census publication). North-East India is an important tribal belt of India covering seven states, Assam, Manipur and Tripura with sizeable tribal population and the tribal states of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The region is an admixture of races and culture as there were contacts between various ethnic groups in the resultant process of migration and settlement. Yet the tribes of each state more or less preserved their distinctive identity. Thus the North-East India has emerged as a distinctive regional identity in India's national life. When the British came to India, Tribal Societies were in quasi-feudal stage capable of maintaining themselves. But " it was the colonial market which made the quasi-feudal system difficult to reproduce themselves. They were to an extent restructured to meet the colonial interest. Land was made alienable and the labour was made mobile in the pre-capitalist sense. In the process the tribal people as well the non-tribals got the dispossessed by the merchant's and usurers 'capital'.¹ However '....the British rules were quick to recognise the significance of the tribal chiefs and aristocracy for their dominance. They treated them as accomplices to their rule and hence abetted every crime perpetrated by these quasi-feudals.....colonialism not only allowed persistence of traditional quasi-feudal potentates but also enhanced their juridical, political and economic control over their subjects. This precisely was the reason for their subservience to colonial interests. ²

The Rajas of Tripura came in contact with the British here as a result of the cession of Chittagong by Nawab Mir - Quasim to

the East-India company. Earlier, by virtue of a secret treaty with the East-India Company. Mir Qusim agreed among other things to cede the three districts of Burdwan, Midnapore and Chittagong. Accordingly, '1760, the year of Companies gaining revenue right over Chittagong, marks the beginning of a new phase in the history of British contacts with the rulers of Tripura'³. Regarding the status of Tripura Rajya it is mentioned in the Treaties of Atichsion "The British Government has no treaty with Tipperah. The Raja of Tipperah stands in a peculiar position in as much as in addition to the hill territory known as 'Independent Tipperah', he is the holder of a considerable Zamindary in the District of Tipperah plains, he receives his investiture from British Government required to pay the annual nazarana. Independent Tipperah is not held by gift from British Government or his predecessors or under any title derived from it on them never having subjected by Moghal"⁴. After the British conquest, the tribes of Tripura came under their colonial policy which aimed at the extension of the British empire, collection of revenues. maintenance of law and order, adjudication of disputes, exploitation of natural resources for capitalist enterprises etc.

Thus the new British administrative policy reduced the former tribal kingdoms into districts or smaller administrative units, destroying the political and social status of the traditional tribal rulers and elite which supported them. At the same time, new tribes who were hitherto unadministered during the previous regime, were conquered and brought under regular administration. They started clubbing the tribes under major groups for administrative measures which produced both exogenous and endogenous impact on the tribes themselves ; for the first time, the tribes were confronted with a technologically superior civilization, who intended to enforce their standard law and

administration, their ethical and moral values and to exploit the tribal natural wealth for their own benefit and profit. The tribal contact with the colonial administration was the beginning of their exposure to the outside world. At the same time, the colonial authorities took the burden of ensuring the moral welfare of the tribes which they called a "Civilising mission". Even the nature of the ownership of land in the tribal areas was decided to sustain the colonial interest or design to deal with chiefs rather than the community or the clan."⁴

The History of Tripura as an Administrative unit

To find out the democratic ideas in tribal society of Tripura we should know some aspects of their own administrative system. The history of Tripura as an administrative unit dates back to the days of the Rajas when the territory was a native state. Although a native state, Tripura enjoyed a special status among the princely states because there was no treaty obligations between the king and the British - India Govt. W W Hunter in his **Statistical Account of the State of Hill Tipperah** significantly noted that although Tripura was conquered by force of arms in 1761, no political agent was appointed in the state till 1871 - a gap of 110 years, and this formally was necessitated not as a matter of routine but as an unpleasant consequence of predatory raids by violent kukis who used the Raja's dominion as their sanctuary ⁵.

In the nineteenth century, the British Company indirectly accepted Raja's right over the hills of Tripura. The position was finally settled in a letter of the Deputy Governor of Bengal dated December 27, 1838 in which it was accepted that 'the Raja has an independent hill territory'. Thus the independent status of Tripura was recognised though this independence was qualified by the British as being subject to the recognition of the British

as the paramount power by each successive ruler. Still, even during the British rule, Tripura became an independent administrative unit under the Maharaja. Hunter wrote : -- " When the administration of Bengal passed into the hands of the British, the East India Company contented itself with receiving a tribute (nazard) on the accession of every new prince, sending him a deed (sanad) of acknowledgment and a robe of honour in return. Untill recently, at least, the Rajas of Hill Tipperah enjoyed a greater share of independence than the chiefs of most other Native states of a simillar description." ⁷. Hunter also described about the administration of the then Tripura. He wrote - " The administration of Hill Tipperah has been much improved since the appointment in 1873 of Babu Nilmani Das, formerly an officer under the Government of Bengal to the post of diwan under the Raja. Justice is administered more rapidly and systematically than formerly; the revenue has increased, and there are many other signs of progress in the Government of the State. The effect of appointing, as chief minister of the Raja, an officer trained under the British Government, has been most clearly shown in the administration of justice. Untill the year 1873-74 the courts of Hill Tipperah dispensed justice according to a primitive system of equity and good conscience, and there was no regular judicial procedure. In that year, however, the law prevailing in Hill Tipperah was suddenly and rapidly developed by the adoption of the modern practice of legislation ; in imitation of the Acts of the Indian Legislative council, nine enactments were passed, including, besides others, a criminal procedure code, a civil procedure code, a Police Guide, and a Limitaton Act." ⁸

During the time of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur in mid-twenties various measures were taken for the improvement of administration in all its branches. His Highness

could foresee that unless there is gradual decentralization and responsible officers are given freedom in their areas of responsibility the administration cannot run efficiently. With this motto in mind, the Maharaja constituted efficiently council and several committee each consisting of experienced members of the state. Even the help and co-operation of outsiders were enlisted. Another significant step taken by Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya was separation of the department as far as practicable. An Executive council was constituted, each member being placed in charge of particular portfolios. More over, the constitution of (1) Mantrana Sabha or the Advisory Council (2) Byabasthapak Sabha or the Legislative Council and (3) the Matri Parishad or the Executive Council can be termed as an attempt of democratisation of administration.

Merger with Indian Union :

On the eve of India's independence there were a number of proposals for the future political and administrative system of North- East India. Some tribes e.g. Naga, Khasi and Garo raised the demand for independent hill state. But Tripura could not raise separate demand for their future. The then ruler of Tripura Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya seriously tried to democratise the state administration. He has always kept a close eye upon India's freedom movement, and activity associated with the Chamber of Princes and the Council of Rulers for Eastern states. In the mid-forties the political situation of India was analysed in the following words ; "As the people of the state grew more and more politically-minded in the unavoidable contact with the neighbouring people of British India, internal trouble is sure to develop and trouble from outside also may be expected in different shapes, It is possible that the crown will permanently keep a Military Reserve to assist the state confed-

eration, and the detached geographical position of the State must make suitable defensive arrangement by the confederation almost impossible. It will, all things considered, be therefore expedient to join an All India federation with safeguards."⁸

When the transfer of power became a certainty, the Maharaja expressed his strong decision in favour of joining the Indian Union. He could clearly visualize that 'Paramountcy must revert to Individual States when the British leave India and the supervisory powers that the Centre must necessarily surrender exercise in the interests of the general body have to be contributed by the constituent state themselves by voluntarily surrender of a part of their sovereignty.'¹⁰ Thus Tripura merged with the India Union on October 15, 1949. During the post independence period, the Government of India have devised autonomy both at the District level and State level to fulfill the aspirations of the tribes of the region who had tasted the fruits of democracy and participated in the political life of the country.

Tribal population in Tripura :

There are nineteen scheduled tribes in Tripura who constitute about one-third of the total population of the State. The tribal population has increased from 5,83,920 in 1981 Census to 8,53,345 in 1991 Census and in terms of percentage, it has gone up from 28.44 in 1981 Census to 30.95 in 1991 Census. The census report 'is a turning point and highly significant because the percentage of tribal population in the State has been declining gradually and some times steeply from 1931 Census onwards till 1981 Census.'¹¹ Table -1 shows the name and numerical strength of each tribe .

Sl.No.	Tribe	1961	1971	1981	1991
1.	Tipra	1,89,799	2,50,382	3,31,191	
2.	Reang	56,597	64,722	83,476	
3.	Jamatin	24,359	34,192	44,554	
4.	Chakma	22,386	28,622	35,079	
5.	Halam	16,298	19,076	29,040	
6.	Noatia	16,010	10,297	7,073	
7.	Mag	10,524	13,273	18,291	
8.	Kuki	5,532	7,775	5,432	
9.	Munda	4,409	5,347	7,917	
10.	Garo	5,484	5,559	7,311	
11.	Lushai	2,988	3,672	3,778	
12.	Orang	2,875	3,428	5,306	
13.	Santal	1,562	3,428	2,709	
14.	Uchai	766	1,061	1,295	
15.	Khasia	349	491	458	
16.	Bhil	69	169	791	
17.	Lepcha	7	177	103	
18.	Bhutia	7	3	19	
19.	Chaimal	50	-	11	

It is clear from table - I that the 19 (nineteen) tribes in Tripura vary in numerical strength.

Social Organisation of the Tribes :

In order to meet the needs of life, food and shelter men form into associations, build institutions through which such needs are satisfied. As the population increases, the institutions or arrangement for the distribution of both economic and political power between groups or classes also changes all the time. Tripura is also not an exception. Here also the life of tribal communities altered as a result of confrontation with more populous communities practising more efficient methods of production. Interaction between the two sets of people developed and as a result, the structure and function of the institutions of each group also became modified.

Tripura had a fendalistic pattern of society. The tribes lived in interior villages of the hills under respective chiefs. For any social economic and ploitical decision, the villagers had to depend upon the advice and decision of their chiefs. Villages disputes were settled in community trials where the chief of the villages presided. Here Mr. Nalini Ranjan Roy Choudhury wrote : " The tribes were very strongly united through their village organisations. Co-operation and fellow-feeling among the co-villagers, collective worships of gods and goddesses and observation of certain rituals by the whole village and the joint ownership of forest lands for Jhuming (shift cultivation) had made the village the most social organisation."¹²

The family is the first institution which is formed through marriage and each tribe or community has its own rules regarding the choice of mates. There are rules of preference and of avoidance, whom to marry and whom not to marry. And the rules vary from one tribe to another in a variety of ways.

Marriage System :

Shri Debapriya Deb Barman in his " Treatise on Traditional Social Institutions of the Tripuri Community" broadly discusses the marriage system of Tripuri Community.¹³

Hamjuk Tubui Kaimani :

In this system of marriage, the negotiation between two families is made by a marriage broker. In finalising or settling up a marriage the guardian of the either side plays the sole role. The bride or the groom has no choice.

Marriage by Exchange :

(Nakkaisa Kaimung)

Some times marriage is arranged between two families by exchange a boy and a girl and thus avoiding the payment of dowry or bride-price. This type of marriage is, of course, rare among the Tripuris.

Marriage by elopement :

(Kharlaioi Kaijakmani)

This type of marriage occurs by mutual contact between two individuals when they become fond of each other. A boy and a girl fall in love in the ignorance of their guardians and eventually do not get the approval of their guardians to get married. The boy elopes with the girl to certain place and marry her.

Marriage by love

(Hakjaklaiai Kailaimani)

This form of marriage among the Tribal Community is now very common and in the increase. When a boy and a girl fall in love with each other and decide to marry, they bring it to their guardian's knowledge and the marriage takes place with the guardian's initiative.¹² Though the separation or divorce is permitted among the Tripuris it is a fact that in the community

divorce is not a socially repected institution as yet.

Among all the social units of the Reang community family is the closest one. Prof.J Gan Chaudhuri wrote " It is the real working unit for all socio-ecoomic activities. It is exogamous and partriarchal. But the size, structure and type vary from family to family. Traditionally and generally a family consists of a man and his wife. unmarried sons and daughters, married sons with their wives and children. Married daughter also continue to live in the parental home with their husbands for a few years."¹⁴ The Reang marriage is known as kailai. The scope for selecting a mate is much wider amongst the Reangs than among the Tipras. Although the case of polygamy is not a rare case., still it has been found that monogamy is the most prevalant type of marriage.

There are two type of marriage current among the Jamatias. The first type is marriage by service, a system in which the groom lives at his father in laws house. It is known as Chawmrwy nahamng/nahamani. According to their custom, after marriage the bride groom has to stay for a minimum period of two years in his father in law's house. Generally, the father in law gives him a separate house and land for this purpose. The second type of marriage is known as hqnjwk nahomani or hanjwk nahomwng and hanjwk rohomani or rohmwng. Under this system, the marriage ceremony is performed in the bride groom's house. In this system, the marriage proposal is initiated by the groom's side.¹⁵ Now a days, Dr. P. N. Bhattacharjee observes that due to the influence of modern education, urbanization etc. a new trend has also been developed in Jamatiya sociwty In this system, the marriage is held in the bride's house and on the next day the groom returns home with his newly married wife.

The practice of dowry in Jamatiya Community is seldom

found. If dowry is given in any marriage, the concerned party is severely criticised by the village head and even social boycott is made in such occasion. In the annual conference of Hoda-Okra (Head of Jamatiya Community) all the members are made conscious not to introduce the practice of dowry. Among a few urbanized and educated Jamatiya this evil practice of dowry is still gaining ground.

Monogamy is the common practice of the Noatia tribals but polygamy is also permitted. Choice of the bride is the general profile of the society. 'Marriage by negotiation' is the commonly accepted form of marriage. However other forms of marriage such as 'marriage by service' which is locally known as 'Jamai Khata' is also prevalent along the Noatias. In modern times, marriage as a result of love is also met with among the people of this tribe.¹⁶

The marriage system of the Jhumias is unique in the sense that the prospective bridegroom has to remain a probationer for three to five years in the prospective bride's family where he has to perform all sorts of work including the ones related to jhuming. If during the period of probation the bride and the groom fail to come to an understanding with each other they can seek and have separation from each other. This system of marriage known as jamai khata has a special significance in training up the young men and women in the art of jhuming and all its ancillary activities. Jhuming, such as, weaving baskets, building tong ghars, processing of crops, preservation of seeds, lying of traps for wild animals and birds- all require special training and these can be learned only by absolute devotion and ceaseless practice. A young man of fifteen or sixteen becomes just fit for becoming a probationer for jhum activities. This is the most trying time in the life of jhumia; this is also the time when

the chance is the highest for the adolescents becoming delinquents. To overcome such a danger and for training up the young, the institution of jamai khata might have been created. (Ganguly, 1969, p.49).

It has been found that the institution of marriage among the tribes is undergoing significant changes as a result of cultural contact with the non-tribal people of the state for years. Marriages by mutual consent are gradually taking places of marriage by service, by purchase and by elopement. Inter-community marriage also are not a rare phenomenon which causes anguishment among the elderly members of the society. However, the system of polyandry i.e. one wife having several husbands is absent in the tribal communities of Tripura. The same custom was prevalent among the Todas of the Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu and among some tribes in the Himalayas. Their shortage of women was formerly due to the custom of female infanticide. That custom no longer obtains there also.

Religion : One of the universal features of tribal faiths in India is that all beings are supposed to be endowed with a living spirit. Animals and plants, rivers and mountains are no exception to this rule. What is significant in the tribal religion is that the whole world peopled by spirits is thus rendered holy. Regarding the religious practice of Hill Tribes Hunter wrote long long ago : " The Tipperahs are all of the same religion, and speak the same language, differing only in minor local peculiarities. They worship the elements, such as the god of water, the god of fire, the god of forests, the god of earth, etc. Sacrifices form an important part of their religion: buffaloes, pigs, goats and fowls being the animals ordinarily used for the purpose. At the present day, they are showing some symptoms of a tendency to conform in many respects to the religious

observances of the Hindus, espically with regard to caste."¹⁶

In Tripura today also religion is so interoven in tribal life that it is impossible to separete it from his other field of activities. From the cradle to the grave every important occasion of his life is connected with some rituals. Even today, his religion consists of nature worship and offering to the ghosts of his ancestors and his rites are more numerous. The Hindus constitute the major religions groups in Tripura. Most of the tribal people have their own tribal customs and beliefs, but in the broader sense of religion they are believed to be the followers of Hinduism. The Mogs and Chakmas are Buddhists. The Christianity is also fast taking roots among the Lushais and some people of the kuki and Garo Communities. Hence Dr. Sunity kumar Chatterrji observes, "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 Tripur a good deal of their old pre-Hindu religion and its rituals is preserved as part of the state religion. For a number of centuries, the Tipra Comtawas (as the Assamese writer have called them in 1724) or Cantais (as they are now called) or high priests, and the Tipra Deodhais or Deodharis (Deoris) have ministered to the old gods, holding a position in society almost as exalted as that of the Brahmins. Cantais and Deodhais on the one hand, and Brahmins on the other-the former preserving the old gods (though sometimes under new names) and the old rites-these are the customians of Tipra religion; a dual arrangement which is still in vogue."¹⁸ The following table shows the distribution of the population according to various religions.

Table 1.2
CRI (Tripura)

Religion	1961	1971	1981	1991
Hindus	8,67,998	13,93,689	18,34,218	23,84,934
Muslims	2,30,002	1,03,962	1,38,529	1,96,595
Buddhists	33,716	42,285	54,806	1,28, 260
Christians	10,039	15,713	24,872	46,472

Although the religion of the majority of the tribal people is termed as Hinduism, it is a curious mixture of Hinduism and animism, the old Gods are being worshipped side by side with those of the Hindus by tribal priests. It is however, interesting to note that the people of all communities are found to take part in all sorts of rituals and festivals organised by one ethnic group or the other. At the same time it has been found that while the elderly people are trying to maintain their traditional religious ceremonies and return their animistic belief and worship the evil or ghostly evils, the younger generation shows little interest in this respect.

Jhuming : In the traditional tribal society, the predominant mode of productive activity is jhuming, that is, shifting cultivation. This process of shifting cultivation. This process of shifting the area of cultivation has many names. In Assam, it is known as jhum or jum; in Orissa as podu, dahi or Kamana; penda in Madhya Pradesh, and so on. In the English language, it is described as slash-and-burn or swidden or simply as shifting cultivation. Those who practise this form of cultivation do not themselves move from place to place to form new settlements. What they do is, every family goes on adding a fresh patch of forest every year, while a patch which has been used several

times is left free to recuperate. The villages themselves remain in the same place, generation after generation.¹⁹

The method of jhum cultivations was as follows : Each family selected a piece of bamboo Jungle for cultivation. Jungles were cut down and cleared in the month of December and set fire in the month of March. After the first fall of rain, they began to drop seeds of cotton, paddy and chilly into the holes. The paddy was generally reaped in September. To protect the jhum crops from being damaged by animals the jhum cultivators had to keep a watch on their jhums which they did by building watch-houses in the jhum and living there day and night. Actually, the social cultural life pattern of the tribal communitie is woven with jhum cultivation in such a way that social as well as religious pursuits are performed centering the operation of jhum. All the stage of jhuming operations are celebrated with songs and dances along with socio-religion rites to ensure good harvest. In the jhumia society, women are directly and integrally associated with the running of the system of production. Therefore they are not economically dependent on men. Now-a-days in Tripura the tribal village have been going through the phase of transition from the shifting type, where the villagers entirely depend on jhuming as the main source of livelihood, to the settled type where permanent plough cultivation forms the mainstay of the economy.

" Such system cannot survive, in the long run, correctly observed Dr. Suchintya Bhattacharjee in his book 'From Jhuming to Tapping' because of the fact that the increase of population in the absence of abundant supply of land is bound to shorten the cycle of jhuming, bringing about continuous deterioration in soil fertility and ecological changes."²⁰ The want of fresh jhum land was severaly felt in some parts of Tripura even in the 19th century. This want was, the Political Agent reported in 1874,

brought prominently to his notice during a journey across country from Udaipur to Agartala :

" I passed through Riang, Jamatiya and Rajbansi villages, the hills round which had been jhumed over and over again. Jhuming is a most exhaustible method of agriculture; three or four crops grows at the same time on the same soil, consequently a second crop will not be a fallow one. If possible, the land is allowed to lie fallow for ten years, when the jungle which has grown up in the meantime is felled and burnt, the ashes serving as manure. But the fear of Lushais prevents the jhumias from moving eastwards, the only direction where fresh virgin jhum land is available. The hills near the villages have, therefore, to be jhumed every three years or so, the consequences of which are short crops, and recourse to the Mahajan or money-lender."²¹

In course of time it has been proved that the population sustaining capacity of land under shifting cultivation is incredibly low. Dr. Bhattacharya also mentioned about the studies conducted in the Philippines, Gambia, Malawi and Zambia including a few in India (Bose 1967. Ganguly 1969 and Saha 1970) reveal that land-carrying capacity under jhuming is very low. All these studies point out the urgency of replacing this wasteful practice by settled cultivation. It is hopeful to notice that a new look has been given in the administrative set up to ensure proper rehabilitation of Jhumias.

Status of Women in Tribal Society of Tripura

The tribal society of Tripura is mainly patriarchal and the father being the head of all in a family controls the family in all matters and his decision in any matter is supreme and final. The female counterpart, as a matter of fact, has no voice in such decisions though they are consulted usually. Generally in all matters of girl's marriage in a family the decision of the oldest

male member in supreme and final. In the absence of father, the other elderly male members in the family are the authority. In most of the tribal society, when a father dies before any of his sons have got married, the mother will not act as head the family temporarily. The son who gets married first will automatically become head of the family.

Women in general are socialized from early childhood not to desire too much education. The girls are trained to do house hold work and to marry a man to settle down in the family. Although the trend of female literacy among the tribal women is on the increase over the decades, considerable disparity in the rates of literacy between tribal and non-tribal women exists in the society.

Table -3
Tribal Literacy as compared to non-tribal Literacy in Tripura.

Year	Percentage of literate in Tripura			Percentage of literate the tribal 1population			Percentage of literate to the total non- tribal popula tion.		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
1961	29.61	10.19	20.24	17.37	2.31	10.01	35.40	13.88	25.00
1971	40.20	30.98	30.98	23.60	6.04	15.03	46.90	33.72	37.47
1981	51.70	32.00	42.12	33.46	12.27	23.07	57.53	39.93	49.6
1991									

In spite of the fact that tribal women constitute the back-bone of tribal economy, in tribal ploicy the women are not given any role to play. They are debarred from participating in the society's

decision making process. The women is treated as intellectually inferior and incapable of taking wise decisions. Still it is evident that the wife of a village head man gets to some extent the regard from women folk as the wife of a Sarder . No women can be a chief nor a priest. The participation of women in village council is also not expected by the male folk of the society. However, as tribal women are becoming literate and educated they are getting themselves organised by joining women's organisation - both political and social.

In the jhumia society women are directly or integrally associated with the running of the system of production. Therefore they are not economically dependent on men. Dr. J. B. Ganguly studied the status of tribal women in the post jhuming stage of tribal economy in Tripura. He observed : "The division of work between men and women in the system has been well defined. While jhumcutting, setting fire to jhum and adopting fire protective measures, basket- weaving, house building and hunting activities are the exclusive domain of men, husking rice, pressing oil seeds for extracting oil, collecting firewood, banana leaves used as eating plates, fetching water feeding pigs and poultry carding cotton, spinning yarn, weaving cloth, cooking food, brewing rice, beer and cleaning house, etc. are exclusively the tasks of women. Work done by both men and women jointly or seperately are sowing of seeds, weeding, watching jhum, harvesting crops, threshing paddy, shelling sesamum, ginning cotton, cutting and processing of jute (that is, seperating fibre from stalk), transporting jhum products to the market, selling jhum products and purchasing goods from the market, fishing etc.

In such a milieu, women are not just confined to the kitchen even as they only do the cooking. They freely move about

collecting forest products and performing jhuming activities without using any veil or any escort." ²²

Thus in the economic field in the Tribal society of Tripura women folk are terrible, industrious, while they are placed either at den or in the field. They are directly and integrally associated with the running of the system of production. Hence women are not economically dependent on men. In almost all tribal society of Tripura, the women are by and large more active and industrious and careful about meeting the needs of the family members. One common characteristic of almost all the tribes of Tripura is absence of demarcation of work between man and women regarding house hold work. Like Bengali society women are not assigned exclusive responsibility regarding house hold duties. Whenever, the women is busy in field work, the men prepares food and take care of the children which reveals the democratic and enriched cultural heritage of tribal community.

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Chapter - II

Traditional Local -Self Governing Institution of Tribals **The Concept of Democracy and Local-self Government**

The concept if democracy has undergone vast change from time to time over the last few decades, but democracy has been universally accepted as the normal and natural form of Government. The word "Democracy" was derived from the Greek word "Democratos " (demo, the people and kratos, rule). Aristotle wrote of democracy in his 'Politics' as a state where freedmen and the poor, being in the majority are invested with the power of the state. The idea of democracy acquired some definable form in a real sense step by step, with the civil war and 1688 Revolution England, the American Revolution and the Russian Revolution, for which the way had been prepared by several political thinkers. In ancient India there were republics and the normal concept of Dharma guided the rulers themselves. Even before that, democracy was a way life in the liberal sense. Although Indian village government has never been 'democratic' in Westren terms, there was a sense in which the whole body of villegers took their part in the village affairs. So the idea of people's participation in administration was not foreign to India. Dr. Radha kumud Mokerji rightly observed "the culture of the ancient Indian races was conserved and promoted through the indigenous machinery of appropriate institutions handed down from time immemorial, which embraced the manifold spheres of national life, economic and educational, social and religious. Thus the genius of the places was never in danger of being choked and stifed, for it was never in want of the adequate means of its self expression."¹ Thus through the indigenous machinary, Indians excercised their right of self expression democracy in the Government of the people. A democratic

government requires active participation of people at all stages. But local govt. and democracy are not synonym. Local government may exist in a non-democratic state also. Still local self Government is part and parcel of democratic tradition.

Village Administration among some Tribes in North - East

During the long princely period also the North-East Frontier had indigenous institution of rural government at the grass root level. The management of the internal affairs of the village or clan and its relations with the neighbours is vested in the village council which consisted of the elders of the village. The practices and procedures varied from tribes to tribes in North-Eastern states, but the underlying principle of self government was obeyed.

"In the centre of village administration in Khasi society is the 'headmen'. Headmen may mean a Mantri, a Syiem Raid, a Basan, a Lyngdoh Raid, Matabor, Rangbah Shnong and an elder. A village always had a Durbar headed by headman. Duty of the Durbar was to maintain peace, improving the roads, markets and collection of market revenue. Village Durbars also arranged festivals and sent their offerings to syiems during state level ceremonies. In their judicial capacity, however, these Durbars acted as village courts."¹ It was also noticed that the headman alone did not exercise his power autocratically. A long discussion was held before a consensus was arrived at. Thus the village council gave importance to the tribal customary laws.

Robinson is the first writer on Jaintia law and judicial systems. Robinson (Quoted by pakam, 1985) observed that a day before the day of fixed for the sitting of the judicial Durbar an announcement was made in the evening all adult male members must stop going to their daily work to attend the durbar. The

proceedings are opened by a headman and witnesses raised and the chief at the close summerized the evidence of both sides and with the decision of the durbar pronounced the judgement." (Pakem, 1985).

The same picture is seen in every Garo village. Each Garo village has traditionally been "an independent political unit and therefore, all the quarrels and disputes were settled by covening the meeting of all the heads of families of the village. By tradition and custom, the head of the clan called as Nokma conducted the proceedings of such meetings. There was no question of appeal to higher courts as there was none" (Sangam, 1985). Thus in Garo society also the democratic tradition of discussion maintained as the President of a council, the Nokma will do much of the questioning but he would heavily lean on council members for their comments. After, all have reached a consensus the decision is pronounced.

Mr. M. L. Bose in his British Ploicy in the North-East frontier Agency described about the political organisation of tribe of the North-East frontier in details;

The tribes of the North-East frontier know no kingdom or king; but each tribe or clan or village has its own head styled as Gam or Gaonbura, that is the village head, who is some times known as Sat Raja, as is the case with the Mompas and Sher dukpens, or Raja as the case with the Aka chiefs. But the management of the internal affairs of the village or clan and its relations with the neighbours is vested in the village council which consists of the elders of village. In such a village council all members have equal powers and each such council is independent of all external influences.

The most conspicuous of these village councils is the Adi Kebang. Its members, known as Kebang Abus, are chosen for

7their experience, ability and capacity to present and decide cases according to the traditional customs and conventions of the tribe. The Kebang controls the entire village activities and punishes those who deviate from the right path. The allocation of plots out of the jhum land of the tribe to each family, including plots for residential house, and settlement of the village disputes are all discussed and decided in the meetings of the Kebang. In settling dispute the view points of both the parties are taken into account after a careful hearing. Inter village disputes are composed in the meetings of the inter village council known as Bangos.³

The Author observed that although the composition and functioning of the village council differ from tribe to tribe, it is the main administrative, judicial and political institution throughout the North - East Frontier. Among some tribes, like the Wanchos, and the Noctes of Tirap the chief of the tribe or clan is hereditary and possesses more power and influence over their tribemen. The Dafla chiefs are less influential as they are divided into innumerable petty divisions. But the Tagin chiefs seem to be little more influential than their fellow Daflas. Among these tribes, inter-village disputes and political decisions are within the jurisdiction of the chiefs.

Thus the practice of village council were not uncommon among the tribes of other parts of India e.g. Orissa, Bihar etc. All the tribal groups were living in villages with a village council of elders wielding traditional authority and enforcing law and order within the village. 'A few tribes like the Santal, Ho, Munda and Oraon had organised even inter village democratic councils to look after their common interests and to present a common front against the outside organised political or armed forces of the invading kingdoms or empires'.⁴

Tripura Traditional Local-Self Governing Institutions :

During the time of Maharaja also, each Tripuri village was self governing. Prior to the introduction of statutory panchayet in 1962, there were informal panchayat in the hills and plains of Tripura. The king ruled in the capital and the village chief in every village. Each community had its own elementary social and administrative organisation starting from the village level going upto the chieftainship of the whole tribe. The designation of the chief varied from village to village. Some times he was called Chaudhui, sometimes Gaon Bura and in certain areas he was called Sardar. The formation of village council of any tribe was simple consisting of four or five male people selected by the villagers in a meeting held at the beginning of year. But the designation of the office bearers would vary from tribe to tribe.

The assignments of the council members were as given below :

(a) Choudhury : The village head. He was empowered to make norms and rules in consultation with the members and he controlled the activities of the council. The residence of the Choudhury was treated as the office of the council. (b) Karbari : The Secretary to the Chief of the village council who maintained the records and collected information to brief the chief. (c) Khandal : The messenger who circulated the council's judgement or decision among the villagers. The village council was formed in a meeting attended by all the adult villagers. Through discussion an old and efficient man of good reputation and dynamic personality was selected for the honourable post of chief or village headman.⁵

Within their own social system the Reangs are a very disciplined community. The head of the community enjoys the title Rai. The Reangs look up to him as their own monarch whose

word is supreme in all matters of internal dispute. However, the Rai was assisted by a number of persons while performing his duty.

The creation of Sub-Division and District as an administrative set up is not very old phenomenon. But it is interesting to note that in the Reang community after village level organisation came the zonal Council for administrative convenience. They made an artificial division of the territory of Tripura on the basis of three famous rivers, namely the Muhuri in the South, the Gomti in the Centre and the Khowai in the North-East. Three chiefs used to be selected for three zones. These chiefs would be called Huklal Chaudhuri : He would maintain inter-village communication and unity within his jurisdiction. The post of district Magistrate of today's administrative system has resemblance with this post of Huklal Chaudhuri, as has been observed by Prof. J Ganchoudhuri. ⁶

Jamatiyas are the third largest tribe of Tripura. The traditional administrative system of the Jamatiyas is democratic in nature. The mechanism of their social control is so well organised that the violation of their customary law is seldom found in their community.⁷ Any kind of difficulty or problem is met with joint decision taken by them. The whole Jamatiya community is socially controlled by their hoda (the supreme council). But there is hardly any scope on the part of hoda to exercise his power arbitrarily. The mechanism of democratic control is present in the traditional political system of Jamatiya. Even today, the village administrative system of Jamatiya is socially controlled by their hoda. For the decentralization power of the hoda, it is divided into three district separate units. These are —

i) Luku (village level Council)

ii) Moyol (Regional level Council)

iii) Hoda (community level Supreme Council).

The Uchai community of Tripura also has the system of village council which has more affinity with the Tripuri system. The village head man is known as Chowdhury who is assisted by Karbari. The Kukis, Halams and other sub-Tribes of North Tripura also enjoyed freedom on under their age-old administrative system. As late as 1808, the report of the special commissioner quoted by Alexander Machkenzie in his '**History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of North- East Frontier of Bengal**' described : ' The persons composing the government or possessing the chief Management of the Country are the Hindus. Among the Kuki vassals, however, as well as among the Hindu inhabitants a distinction of rank prevails. The chief man among the Kukis called Roys, Ghalims, Chuppias and Gaboors those of the Hindus are called Senapatty and Burroahs. The power or influence of these chiefs over the Vassels within their respective jurisdiction is of the strongest kind'⁸.

The social discipline of the Chakma community as a whole is very strict and the leader is known as "Dewan". At the village level, the leader is known as Karbari, whose main fuction is to collect rent and serve summons issued by the Dawan or the Raja. Generally Communal Disputes and minor offences are settled by the village leader.

The Mughls appears to have migrated from the Arakan Hills. They also have their village council and the headman is called Bomarang, Chowdhury or Tahsilder. These functioneries are elected, generally on the basis of their wealth and social status. The Chowdury or Bonarang presides over the meeting of the council and can levy a fine varying from Rs. 5/- to Rs. 100.

The Lushais of Tripura maninly occupy the villages on the

ridges of the Jampui and Sakhan Hills. The village council controls the political and economic life of the Lushai village. The village council has five to ten members the number varying from the village varying from the village to village though the two key functionaries are the president and the Secretary. As a matter of fact, 'The ecological setting, the nature of jhum economy, young dormitories and the overall type of social structure of the Lushai tribe were important factors which helped to determine the pattern of power of the chiefs. Infact, a particular pattern of chieftainship was created within a particular socio economic and cultural setup and the values shared commonly by the Chief and his followers in that set up provided a common link between them. With the Maharaja of Tripura at the apex and the Chief in the village, the Lushai is used to have social hierarchy in which obedience to their age-old customary laws concerning all walks of life was a must. The administrative power, concerning almost all the cases of Lushai life was exercised by the chiefs, recognised by the Maharajs of Tripura.⁵

But later on due to the spread of modern education and communication as well as Christianity the traditional pattern of leadership among the Lushai people faced a great challenge from the emergent forces. Thus the hereditary chieftainship was ultimately abolished in 1955-56.

Functions of the Village Council

Professor J Gan Chowdhuri in his *An Anthology of Tripura* describes the manifold functions of village council.

On the administrative side, the council would look after construction and maintenance of paths and bridges, site selection for new villages allotment of house sites to individual families, sanitation and water supply etc.

The economic activities of the council included site selection for shifting cultivation, allotment, of jhoom plots to each family organisation of co-operative labour for jhoom operational organisation of fishing, hunting, gathering and numbering etc.

On the judicial side, the council used to settle intra village and inter-village disputes, cases of adultery elopment, fights, theft, quarrel, forgery, witchcraft, vengeance and the like.

Safety and security of the village in the context of head hunting raid, communal vengeance and depredations by wild animals were the primary tasks of defence by the council.

Functions under the socio-religious head included observation of festivals, looking after the disabled, discussed and poor persons, disposal of deaths, regulation of marriage, helping pilgrimage, maintenance of peace, preservation of social customs and promotion of moral values.¹⁰

In course of the functioning of village council it has been noticed that the principle of democracy is honoured in almost all the social system. The members of the council were selected by the villagers themselves through discussion.

The posts are not hereditary. In selecting the office bearers, emphasis is given on efficiency in understanding the social problem. Moreover in selecting the leader of the village council, the principle of honesty and good moral character is taken into granted. If the members prove them faithful and dutiful, their term of office will be renewed. The same can be terminated also in the case of corruption and forgery. Another important characteristic of the village council is the complete absence of women section in its functioning. Even today they are not welcome to participate in the decision making process.

Tribal Social change in India

Society can be looked upon as a process, a service of interactions between human beings. The whole human society and each group in the society can be viewed as the manifestation of the social process between the interacting members. Social change takes place when there is a structural change in society. With technological and institutional innovations there are changes in economy as well as in the aspirations of the people. When cultural changes as well as changes in social norms take place in response to the new situation, social change may take place smoothly, otherwise there may be rebellion and social disorder. As Talcott Parsons has said social systems have to be conceived as open systems engaged in complicated, process of inter change with the environing systems. So it is an undeviable fact that the social system changes in response to changing conditions within and without internal as well as external.

In developing countries like India, the pace of social change has rapidly accelerated in the recent past. The tradition bound tribal society, which prior to the independence of India was almost a closed system, suddenly became exposed to the forces, released by the community development programme. Movement, urbanization, education and technology in short are the product of the process of modernization. This brought the tribal society in contract with wider society. Historically the tribals were treated in a number of ways by the Government. The approaches to the tribes mostly varied at the two extremes one was the policy of segregation or isolation and the other was total assimilation. While the British policy was mainly that of consolidation of tribal separatism along with limited welfare measures within the administrative frame work of the British Government of India, independent of India professed a policy of

phased intergration of tribes in the body-politic in India along with the massive welfare activities. After independence the levels of literacy and education and industrial development in the tribal areas had come up. Along with these greater involvement of the growing tribal middle class of elite is noted form new tribal political association or parties. While these parties have widely participated in the Natonal Process of Democracy through involvement in provisional and national election, there also have been occasional outburst of violence.

Social Change and its impact on the Traditional indigenous institutions :

After the British conquest, the tribes of Tripura came under their colonial policy which aimed at the extension of the British Empire, collection of revenues, maintenance of law and order , adjudication of disputes, exploitation of Natural resources for capitalist enterprises etc. The British adopted the policy of lightly administering those areas. The local custom was honoured and there was judicious intervention only when it was considered inevitable. The British way of administering tribal areas before Independence is best summed up by B.D. Sharma in the following words :

They (the British) adopted the ploicy of lightly adminstering these areas. The normal administration of the provinces in which the tribal areas were located, was not extended to them. In many regions, single line administration was established where all authority was entrusted in one individual who was the chief representative of the government in that area. The local custom was honoured and there was judicious intervention only when it was considered inevitable.⁷

In course of time, the chief of the Tripuri tribe established his

authority over other tribes and it was one of such Chiefs, who became the monarch with the title of Manikya. Long rule of the Tripuri tribes extending to the modern period created higher classes living in the Capital and urban areas. A large number of ordinary Tripuris were connected with the works of royal palace and the personal services of the king, his officer and the royal household. The village administration had no authority over them. The Princes belonging to the royal family and the Thakurs related to the royal house became powerful and influential classes in the society. The old customs lost their values to them. The village administration became weak in most cases and social indiscipline prevailed particularly among the Tripuris. Under these circumstances, some of the Tripuris prayed to Maharaj Bir Bikram for reforms and development of the Tripuri society. In response to their appeal, the Maharaja granted some rules for the reorganisation of the Tripur Kshatriya Samaj on the 26th Ashar, 1339 T.E (July, 1929 A.D.). According to these rules the areas inhabited by Tripuri tribes were divided into 25 mandals, in each of which a Mandal Samiti was formed with 5 to 9 members.⁸ Even during the abnormal situation of 1947-48 the Regent queen Kanchan prava Davi patronised the Gramya Mandali over the entire kingdom irrespective of caste and community,

However after the merger with the Indian Union on 15th August, 1949 with the change of the political areas, the traditional self governing institutions of the tribes of Tripura were disintegrating. The tribal traditional institutions lost its importance to modern social life which is not only concerned in village life or community interest in the field of socio-economic life. To cope with this transitional situation on Panchayat Raj Act was introduced in Tripura in 1955. The newly emerged leadership formed expression in Panchayat, Block Development Committee and State Assembly. Meanwhile, the Balvantry Mehta Com-

mittee (1957) recommended the introduction of statutory Panchayatiraj as laid down in Part IV of the Indian Constitution as a means of achieving people's participation in solving people's problems. But at the same time (1959) the Verrier Elwin committee on Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks recommended the recognition of strong and aloive Tribal councils and revival of the tribal Councils which had virtually falen into disuse. The committee was of opinion that_

The tribal councils have great potentialities, established in history and tradition, supported by social and religions sanctions, expression of a genuine democracy representing the co-operative and communal temperament of the people, they can be used not only to support law and order but also to further the progress of development throughout the tribal areas.

Evaluation : Each community of the tribals of Tripura had its own elementary social and administrative organisation starting from village level going upto the Chieftainship of the whole tribe. These werre age-old systems, the remnants of which may be found even tday. In a seminar on **Local self Government in Tripura**. Prof Pradip Chowdhury made some important observation about the significance of these self governing institution. He observed : The main functions of the village council were to administer justice, collect taxes. perform community worship and to solve the common problems of villagers. Decision and verdict of the Council was binding on all residing in the villages. There was rare or almost no case of defiance of the verdict given by the council. The village life was corporate, It was like a city state of the Aegean civilization.

Justice was quick, perceptable and cheap. In some community a fee was required to lodge a complain but it was very nominal. It was unlike modern law courts where justice is

always delayed. And a delayed justice is a justice denied. An accused had full right to prove himself not guilty in an open trial. It was never a one man's court. Jury system was part and parcel of the village court. Sometimes an oath was administered to the witness. In some communities (like the Jamatias, the Reangs etc) there were courts of appeal as well. So on one in the community could feel that justice was ever denied.

The village councils were always hundred percent democratic. There was no provision of imposition or of an official by the Chief or the Raja. Selection of the officials of the village council was through consensus. The organisations of the Upper strata had to come always from the root that is from the village councils. For example Hoda Okra of the Jamatias and the Regional Council of the Reangs were organised from the village councils on wards up to the Supreme Council.

The village councils of all the tribes of Tripura used to have definite qualifications for the officials of the Council. They must be residents of the village, must have property and family i.e. wife and children. These essential qualifications indicate that the Council officers must be responsible members of the village. To discharge their duties as executives they must be humane and considerate.

Local government is essentially a method of getting various things done for the benefit of the community. It is a practical business. The local self government institutions in Tripura resulted in the education of the masses and in their active

participation in public life. In most of the village councils decisions were taken by the people in general in meetings held regularly which may be compared with city state....of the Greece.⁹

Even today also the traditional self governing institutions have not become obsolete. There can not be any doubt about considerable admixture and cultural intermingling of tribes but the individuality of each tribe is well demonstrated each tribe has its own head styled as Gam or Gaonbura, that is the village head. In such a village council all members have equal powers and each such council is independent of all external influences.

So it is interesting to note that the idea of democracy was not alien to the tribal people of Tripura even before independence. Unlike, the hereditary feudal system of Bengal the tribal had the democratic set-up where all villagers took part in the decision making process. The tribal areas autonomous district councils are showing interest in information of village committee's to uphold the cultural heritage of tribal people of Tripura. Actually local self government in modern democracy is essentially designed to fulfil the demands of the local people. In that sense the traditional village council of Tripura fulfilled the basic essence of local self Govt. It involves the tribal masses in active participation of public life. In most of the village council decisions are taken by the people in general in meetings held regularly which may be compared with the Greek city state which is the classical example of direct democracy.

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CHAPTER - III

March of Democracy since Independence

Concept of Democracy

The concept of democracy has undergone vast changes from time to time over the last few decades. Searching for the idea as to what is the best form of govt. one mode of governance which has ultimately found acceptance in most of countries, is the democratic set up. Although democracy is not free from its defects, it is still the most acceptable form of Government. Lord Bryce rightly commented that the most significant change in the last hundred years was the universal acceptance of democracy as the normal and natural form of government. One of the positive advantage or specific value of a democratic system of government is that it provides for the peaceful voluntary adjustment of dispute and since it recognises political expression of such conflicts as legitimate and provides for their peaceful adjustment. through the negotiation of politics. It contains essential safeguards against arbitrariness and provide affective machinery for redress of grievances. The democratic theory therefore lays stress upon the right of people to share in the work of admimistration.

If participation of people in running administration is taken as pre-condition of democracy then the people of Tripura got the taste of democratic system only after the attainment of independence. For a long period, the tribes of Tripura led an solated life. Hunter wrote about the Political Constitution of Tripura. "The form of Government as described by political agent in 1873 is despotic and patriarchal. The Raja's word is law and it is sufficient to annual the decrees of the courts whether the matter is brought up in final appeal or otherwise."¹ From this condition of administration it was modernised in the courts of hundred

years. However, it should be kept in mind that the idea of modernisation is not only always synonymous with the idea of democratisation. Lucian pye correctly pointed out that modernisation is a sociological fact which differs from country and also from time to time due to the variation of social forces and operative movements plus methods. Still diffusion of power is thought to be a modern outlook for concentration of power may lead to tyrannical atmosphere which is not congenial for democratic atmosphere.

Rule of Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya - a great leap towards modernisation :

The rule of Bir Chandra Manikya (1862-96) is of historical significance in the history of Tripura as the period indicates a transition from the primitive form of administration to the modern one. He deserves credit for devising an efficient administration and some reforms in the judicial matters. Maharaja introduced many important reforms in the Civil and Executive administration of the country following the British administrative system. It was during his time that Excise Department stamp duty & rules was introduced for the registration of documents. The whole territory was sub-divided for convenience of administration. He also created the Udaipur Division for the development of the Southern portion of Hill Tipperah. Thus introduction of regional administration in the pattern of district administration made an increase in the number posts in the administration and trained officials were appointed to those posts as far as practicable. A hierarchical bond of allegiance stood in the way of growing an impersonal character of administration. Under this prevailing circumstance Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya made good attempts to introduce modern usages and idioms into the State Administration. After attainment of independence a

system of bureaucratic administration was introduced long before that Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya passed a number of legislations most of which were adopted after the similar enactments passed by the Indian Legislative Council. Mention may be made of the Criminil Procedure Code, Civil Procedure Code, Police Guide, stamps Act, Excise Act. Tenancy Act etc. "In 1879, Maharaja Bir chandra Manikya introduced a measure of far reaching importance and abolished slavery from the Tripura Territory."

Of all types of human bondages, slavery serfdon and enslavement of individuals of any type or in any form is the worst bondage. Article 23 in our constitution abolishes all type of serfdon. It protects the individual not only against the state but also against other citizens, even if there is a cover of contract to perform service. The reason is pure and simple , viz, that it offends against human diginity to compel a person to serve against his will or under a forced will. In India slavery was abolished by the Act-V of 1843. It is in 1879, the then progressive ruler of Tripura Maharja Bir Chandra Manikya adopted legal measure to abolish slavery from the Tripura Territory."²

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territory. latter on, we see that the bonded labour system (abolition) Act. of 1976 was passed by the Indian parliament on 9th February, 1976 to provide for the abolition of bonded labour system and thus to prevent the economic and physical exploitation of the weaker sectiona of the population.

Judiciary plays a vital role in preserving democratic right of the people. Earlier, the primitive system of administering justice on the basis of equity and good conscience prevailed in Tripura. All judicial matters used to come before the Maharaja for final disposal. But Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya abolished this system and deligated this task to a supreme judicial body, Khas Appeal Adalat. presided by two judges. The indigenous Pahari Adalat was also abolished to bring tribal subjects under the jurisdiction of a single judiciary.

On the eve of India's independence, there were a number of proposals for the future political and administrative system of North East India. The hill tribes were affected. The Naga National Council raised the demand for independence and made a nine -point agreement with Governor Akbar Hydari of Assam in 1946. The Shillong based Khasi and Garo leaders raised the demand for hill state to be carved out of Assam Hills. Tribes of Manipur and Tripura could not raise separate demands for their future and they were involved in the politics of the two princely states.

With the rapid changes of political scene of the country, when the transfer of power became a certainty the then ruler of Tripura Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya did not hesitate to express his decision in favour of joining the Indian Union unlike many wavering native rulers of India. In a letter to His Excellency, Victory of India, Simle dated the 10th July, 1939, Maharaja expressed his view on the subject of accession of

Tripura State to the Federation of India.

SAVOY HOTEL
London, the 10th july, 1939.

My ESTEEM FRIEND.

I address your Excellency with reference to your Excellency's letter of the 27th January, 1939 on the subject of accession of my State to the All-India federation as contemplated in the Government of India Act of 1935.

2. Your Excellency has been pleased to enquire whether I am prepared to execute an instrument of accession on behalf of the Tripura State within the terms indicated in documents (1) and (2 annexed) to the letter under reply, and I may say that I am grateful for the time that your Excellency has graciously allowed and for the discretion that your Excellency has very kindly left to me in arriving at a decision in a matter of such vital importance.

3. I can assure your Excellency that have given the question my most serious and earnest consideration in view of the grave responsibility that lies on me as the mouthpiece of my state, my Dynasty, and my people and of the solemn obligations that I owe to the crown as well as to India as whole, and I may be permitted to state frankly that my anxiety has been all the greater as the terms offered now are desired to be regarded in all essentials incapable of further relaxation.

4. For some time past the political atmosphere in India has been changing and there is now a tendency on the part of dominant political parties in British India to regard the Ruling Princes as unwelcome partners in the Federation, and even to have resorted to coercive steps to interfere with the status, sovereignty and integrity of the States. Your Excellency will

kindly pardon me if I say that this changed aspect of things cannot but affect the aodour and enthusiasm with which the idea of All-India Federation was originally received by the Princely order.

5. I hope your Excellency will understand the anxious concern of the Ruling Dynastics in formulating a decision under the changed circumstances. Alives as every Ruler has to be the dangers that stare his State in the face, he naturally turns to your Excellency for protection and if he evinces a desire to have his position adequately sefeguarded I can assure your Excellency that it is purely from the instinct of self preservation.

6. I have, in common perhaps with my brother Princes, tried to get all available advice to come to a proper decision and to have the position of my state carefully scrutinised in the light of the terms offered. I may assure your Excellency that my intention has been not only to secure the integrity of my state but to be of every assistance in the realisation of the ideal of an All-India Federation. Two important conference of Ruling Princes and Ministers , recently have carefully examined the documents received with your Excellency's letter and have come to the conclusion that some of the terms are detrimental to the interests of Indian states. I refer to the reports of Hydari Committee and the Gwalior Conference of Minster's which I had the advantage of examining and which I believe are already before Your Excellency. I may be permitted with the views expressed in this reports and while willing to urge these views on my own behalf Eager as I am however to join the Federation I would crave."³

In this letter of His Highness Maharaja Manikya Sri Bir Bikram Kishore Deb Barman (on the subject of accession of Tripura State to the Federation of India) expressed his anxious concern of the Ruling Dynasties in formulating a decision on

under the changing circumstances. Maharaja assured that his intention was not only to secure the integrity of the state but to help in the realisation of the ideal of an All-India Federation too.

After the sudden and untimely demise of Maharaja Bir Bikram kishore Manikya the Regent Maharani signed the instrument of Accession on August 13, 1947, giving voice to the last desire of the late Maharaja and its accession to the Indian Union was formally solemnised. Tripura ceased to be a princely state from the 15th October, 1949. With the coming of the Constitution into force in 1950, Tripura was placed under the part-C State in the new polity and ruled by a Chief commissioner on behalf of the President of India. Thus Tripura began a new career in its march towards democracy.

Tribal People's Participation in development

After independence, Tripura became increasingly exposed to the winds of changes that swept across all over India. Before then, there were wide disparities in the level of economic development in the hills and plain of Tripura. Development are designed for the betterment of socio-economic conditions of people. People's participation in development therefore simply means involvement of people in plan formulation, valuation and implementation that concerns or affects them. After getting independence, tribal people of Tripura was also asked to participate in development for genuine development and self reliant development. They were urged to take control of the situation and seek their own original paths of development on the basis or analysis of their own problems and difficulties, potentials and limitations, conditions and constraints. But some factors made the participation of the tribal people either difficult or impossible e.g.

(1) Lack of expert knowledge and skills in analysing problems and perceiving a range of possibilities of solving them on a scientific basis, poor formal communication skills and mobility to articulate and present both problems and solutions lack of committed leaders. These minimum participation of tribal people slowly and gradually led to estrangement, alienation and isolation which are one of the main problems of tribal society. To a great extent non-participation leads to non-development which in turn leads to further non-participation. The leaders realize the truth that an effective participation implies education motivation, organization, During the post independence period through trial and error, the Government of India have devised autonomy both at the district level and the state level to fulfil the aspiration of the tribes of the region who must had tasted the fruits of democracy, participated in the political life of the country. Economic development, education, new technology, new found political and civil rights have made the tribes march towards modernization. They had become more conscious of their rights over their land, their traditional social institutions.

The tribes were subjected to oppressions associated with feudal rule. The practice of 'Taitum' was such type of system which was very much anti-democratic in nature. This system made it obligatory for the tribals to render free services to the state officials, high or low, while they were on tour. It was arduous because of transportation of heavy articles and goods from one hills to another hill through slippery and risky ravines. In the decade of forty the prologged discontentment burst into fiery revolt against the then feudal rule. The tribals agitated to abolish this obnoxious practice. Ultimately on the face of violent resistance the Taitum system had to be abandoned.

In the economic aspect also, the tribal economy was victims

of the 'Mahajans' mainly from 'Bangali Class' The ' Soaiya Soa movement was largely successful in putting checks upon the Mahajans who used to advance loans to the poor tribals on terms that were never specified and as a result the unfortunate borrowers remained perpetually in debt for generations. The movement decreed that the rate of interest should in no case exceed 2.5%¹⁴

Although the problem of indebtedness of the tribals to Mahajans has not yet been fully removed in remote areas, a notable improvement has been noticed in procuring Banking Credit for economic upliftment of the weaker sections of the society. Banking system occupies an important place in a nation's economy. It plays a pivotal role in the economic development of the country. In Tripura though the money market is still characterised by the existence of both the organised and the un-organized segments institutions in the organised money market have grown significantly and are playing an increasingly important role. The unorganized sector comprising the money lenders and indigenous bankers, caters to the credit needs of a large number of persons especially in the country side. In the meantime the demand for nationalisation of the commercial banks has been vehemently raised. As the financial institutions are amongs the most important levers for the achievements of his social objectives, the nationalisation of major banks was left a significant step in the process of public ownership over the principal institutions for the mobilisation of people's savings and canalising them towards productive purposes. Ultimately, the ordinance to nationalise the fourteen major banks was issued on 16th july, 1969 to serve better for the development of economy in conformity with national objectives.

In Tripura also, a notable improvement has been noticed in procuring banking credit for economic upliftment of the weaker

sections of the society. At present 312 branches of commercial Banks (April, 1994) are functioning in different parts of Tripura (Source- Tripura at a Glance 1992-93 by Directorate of Statistics, Govt. of Tripura Agartala) Credit like crop loans, short term loans, integrated Rural Development Programme etc are extended mostly to rural and semi-urban areas.

To study the democratic ideas in Tribal Society of Tripura, the simultaneous development in the political consciousness among the tribes's people should be noted because for a long period the tribes of Tripura led an isolated life. From this condition of the administration it was modernised in the course of hundred years to bring as per with other States of the Indian Union. The changing political system of Tripura again proves that the process of modernisation, particularly in administration is evolving in nature. The needs of Tribal society of Tripura influence the changes in the mode of rules and character of the institution of the State.

Before independence the majority of the Tribal population lived in a State of Socio-Cultural as well as political isolation. While the hill tribes were conscious of the freedom struggle going in the plains of India they did not fully participate in the movement. In Tripura, education was confined to the upper class people i.e. the Thakurs residing at Agartala. Meanwhile, a group of educated tribal youth built up a movement for mass education in the hills under the banner of 'Jana Sikhsha Samity'. It was formed for the spreading of mass education among the mass tribal people and to awaken consciousness against exploitation and oppression. Its first plenary session was held on 17th December, 1945 They approached Bir Bikram and sought his help in opening primary school in the hills. The king gave a patient hearing and at once agreed to their proposal and

remarked : 'It is too late'.The Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya was not against the setting up of primary school. But perhaps he was not in favour of their enormous increase due to the increased financial liability of the king and the feudal nature of the king. In spite of these limitations, the king had to accord grant to the majority of the schools. The activity of the Jana Shiksha samity increased considerably from 1945 and the Samity had built more than 300 primary schools in Tripura in a span of three years. After then, a new chapter in the history of educational administration in Tripura seems to have started from its decision of accession to Indian Union. The important members of the Samity began to take part in other socio-political movements. Thus the propaganda work of the Samiti against the feudal system gave birth to the nationalism of Tribal people. It created the scope for their self development.⁵

The Constituent Assembly of India was fully conscious of the ethnic aspirations of the tribes of Assam hills and devised district level autonomy in the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution. The tribal people of Tripura fought for long for the introduction of the Autonomous District Council and ultimately got it in 1985. So "during the post independence period, through trial and error, the Government of India have devised autonomy both at the district level and State level to fulfill the aspirations of the tribes of the region who had tasted the fruits of democracy, participated in the policy-making ligrong the country and in the process of nation building tasks of their respective states. Economic development, education, new technology, new found political and civil rights have made the tribes march towards modernization. They had become more conscious of their rights over their land, their traditional, social institutions. It is satisfy-

ing to see that in the tribal states of North East, the tribals are now well protected. But in the non-tribal majority states of Assam, Tripura and Manipur tribal struggle for autonomy either in the form of separate states or autonomous state within a state continues.⁶

1. Hunter Op. cit Page -
2. Bhattacharya, A.C. Progressive, Tripura, Delhi, 1930,p/38.
3. Trends of Changes in the Tribal Societies of Tripura since independence : by Dr. H.K. Sur.
4. Mahadev Chakraborty ' Administration Reports of Tripura State, vol.IV Gyan Punishing House Page- 2239-40.
5. J Gan Chowdhuri, A political History of Tripura, Page- 51.
6. Buddhadeb Chaudhuri, Edited -Tribal Transformation in India Inter-India Publications, New Delhi, Page/211.

CHAPTER - IV

Democratic Movements of Tribal People of Tripura

Tribal Movements :- Indian Tribals have been in general a peace loving people. Traditionally living in their ancestral habitat dependent on nature and having meagre wants, they were satisfied with their living standard. However, as and when the atrocities made on them reached unbearable heights they reacted at times violently against the vested interest. So Tribal movement for the preservation of democratic rights are not a new phenomenon in our country. S. G. Deogaonkar gives an account of some tribal movements past and present. He argues : "Even during the historical past tribal chiefs, warriors and individuals have been active in various parts of the country. The name of the Bhils figures in many such episodes. The names of Umed Vasava, A Bhil from the Panchadongri District was associated with the unrest around the Rajpipla state between 1873 to 1882. During the 1857 war, many Bhils helped Tatya Tope. In Bihar such tribal uprisings can be traced back from 1782, when there was movement in Rajmahal Hills. In 1832 the Santhals started a movement called Bhumij Movement under the leadership of Ganga Narayan Santhal. This was continued by Kandou and Siddha Santhal, who during 1850 stood very firm against the tribal exploitation by landlords and traders. The name of Birsa Bhagwan Munda is well known for his leadership in the movement against tribal exploitation in 1897. The Oraons, under the leadership of Nana Bhagat started a non-violent movement against the British in 1914, for getting equal justice.

In Orissa, during 1819 the tribals from the Kohan area started a social movement against the exploitation from the British. This was a violent movement and the British had to yield and frame rules for giving legal protection to tribals. The Khonds from Orissa and the Koyas as well as the Saprass started movements as early as 1879 and 1890 for getting their rights.

In Madhya Pradesh the Baster tribals demanded an autonomous state for which there were movements in 1910, but they proved to be abortive.

In Andhra Pradesh also, the Pahadi Reddy tribals started a movement in 1879, for getting the ownership rights of their lands. During 1940 the Gonds started a movement under the leadership of Bhima Kumra Gond, while the Koyas agitated under Aluri Sitaram Raj.

The latest significant movement in Andhra Pradesh was at Inderveli under the Mutnur Utnur Panchayat Samiti area tahsil of Adilabad district. The lands of the tribals were grabbed by non-tribals and the tribals organised themselves and decided to take back their lands. On 20th of April 1981, they decided to call a meeting at Inderveli with a motto learn to die if you want to live, and to launch an agitation. The police decided not to allow the meeting. Thousands of tribals poured into Inderveli and the police opened fire. As per the Government report thirteen tribals were killed, but as per popular reports the deaths were sixty. Ultimately, the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Shri T. Anjaiya reached the spot and brought peace and granted Rupees ten thousand each to the relatives of the dead and Rs. five thousand to those who

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1. S. G. Deogaonkar - in his article Tribal movements in Buddhadeb Chaudhuri, Edited - Tribal Transformation in India, Inter-India Publication 1993 - Page - 289-90.

were wounded. The tribals got back their land also”¹.

Meaning of Autonomy :- The Tribal people of Tripura has a rich heritage of struggle for autonomy. It is accepted by the political scientist of the present era that movement for autonomy is linked with the right to self-rule. But the word, self-rule means the rule of a nation. It is a belief that makes a identity clear and separate from the neighbouring community. When a group of people feels that they are having a common identity and if they feel that they are deprived, or exploited by any other community or group they feel oneness and fight for self-government. This right of self government of self-rule is a very recent phenomenon of history, which can be traced in the 18th century, Europe. After the industrial revolution of 1658 and the French Revolution right of self-determination on the basis of racial national identity came into the surface of human history. It is only in the second half of 19th century in India such demand for self-rule was raised as a result of the extension of British Colonial education and British Political culture.

Although Tripura was experiencing the rule of monarchy when the Nation got independence on 1947, the struggle of tribal people of Tripura against some tyrannical attitude of the ruler has a long history. The uprisings of Magh, Tripuri and Kuki against the king can be marked as an autonomy movement. Some historians hesitate to mark the movements as movements of autonomy. To them, autonomy is a relative concept. When a relatively small community awkwardly feels the presence of the engulfing culture of a big community, the small one tries to maintain a distance. Such a feeling may give rise to autonomy movement. However, an account of the history of uprisings of the tribal people of Tripura against the despotic ruler will reveal that they fought more or

Preface

Tripura is a small hilly state on the North-Eastern India which represents admixture of races and culture as there were contacts between various ethnic groups in the resultant process of migration and settlement. Yet, the tribes of this state more or less preserved their distinctive identity. Although the traditional self-governing institution of the tribals of Tripura has never been democratic in Western terms, there was a sense in which the whole body of villagers took their part in the village affairs. So the idea of people's participation in administration was not foreign to the people of Tripura.

The object of this project report is to discuss the democratic aspects of tribal societies of Tripura with especial reference to Jamatiya. To find out the democratic ideas in tribal society of Tripura some aspects of their own administrative system have been discussed. The history of Tripura as an administrative unit dates back to the days of the Rajas when the territory was a native state. Although a native state, Tripura enjoyed a special status among the Princely States because there was no treaty obligations between the king and the British - India Government. In the nineteenth century, the British Company indirectly accepted Rajs's right over the hills of Tripura. During the time of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur in mid-twenties various measures were taken for the improvement of administration in all its branches. His Highness could foresee that unless there is gradual decentralisation and responsible officers are given freedom in their areas of responsibility the administration cannot run efficiently. The constitution of (1) Mantrana Sabha or the Advisory Council (2) Byabasthapak Sabha or the Legislative Council and (3) the Mantri Parishad or the Executive Council can be termed as an attempt of democratisation of administration.

hills and jungles by the way they came. It was at first supposed that this extended movement on the part of these tribes was directed by certain near relatives of the Tipperah Raja and was intended to involve the chief in trouble with the English Government. But it was afterwards ascertained, with considerable certainty, that the main investigators of invasion were three or four Hill Tiperrah refugees, thakurs, who had lived some time among the Kukis and who took advantage of the ill-feeling caused by an attack made by the Raja's subjects, to excite a rising that unfortunately because diverted to British territory. Driven by the Raja from the dominions, these men had formed alliances among the various Kuki tribes of the interior ; and year by year villages, supposed to be friendly to the Raja, had been attacked and plundered. Some of the Raja's own subjects, moreover exasperated by his constant exactions were believed to have invited the Kukis to ravage his territories. The hillmen who had perpetrated this attack in Tipperah District, were reported from the first to be the followings of Rattan Puiya, whose clan was known to live far up between the upper sources of the Pheni and Karnaphuli"¹.

Apart from this certain positive factors contributed to the uprisings of Kukis. During the later years of the reign of Ishan Chandra Manikya, Tripura was in a very distributed state. Because the king did not nominate the Jubaraj or heir for the throne which resulted in the creation of palace intrigue of the various candidates for the throne. As the army was disbanded to recover from financial crisis, the king's defence power decreased. Moreover, many of the people in the hills suffered much from the king's misgovernments and their rents were enormously enhanced. The Reangs who were

1. Hunter W. W. op. cit. Page - 467-68.

extravagant by nature, used to take money as loans from the Mahajans of the Khandal pargana. It is stated in the Rajmala of Kailas Chandra Singha that there was no rains for two or three years in the hills. The result was that their debts increased. The Mahajans (money lenders) began to harass those people for money. To free themselves from these harassment the Reangs joined the Kukis.

Thus we find that the Kuki invasion of 1860 was not purely raids made by the Kukis only. The objectives behind these invasion was much wider in the sense that it got moral support from other sections of tribal society also. Much before the advent of democratic social system, the Kukis of Tripura dared to rose into revolt against the tyrannical rule of the feudal authority. From this view point it can be remarked that 'It was a wider movement in which certain sections of the dissatisfied subjects of the king took part. It was a rebellion against the feudal authority and misrule of the Tripura king'¹.

The Jamatiya Revolt of 1863 :- The Jamatiya Revolt of 1863 can be termed as a democratic movement of the jamatiya people against the autocratic administration of the feudal lords. To understand the nature and origin of this revolt, we must have some idea about the political condition of the Tripura at that time. Bir Chandra Manikya succeeded his brother Ishan Chandra Manikya in 1862. His succession to the throne was subsequently challenged by his brothers. The state plunged in bitter quarrels of succession. Prof. Hirendra Kr. Sur observed :- "It was the nothing short of a tragedy that during this crucial period of Tripura's history when unity was the supreme need of the hour, bitter succession disputes continued unabated to sap the vitality of the state

1. N. Roy Choudhury, op. cit. - Page - 47.

and considerably reduced her capability to resist all British inroads on her independence and territorial integrity.”¹ In the midst of this internal quarrel among the members of the Royal Family the king did not take proper supervision over the affairs of the State. Hence the Megistrate of Tripura District remarked - “It appears from enquiries which I have hold,” remarked the Magistrate of Tripura District, “that since the romoval of the Gooroo from power, on method or arrangement of any kind exists in the administration at Agartala, and that the Raja, leaving all matters in the hands of a number of irresponsible and rapacious dependants, excercises no supervision whatever in his own affairs.”²

So long as the dispute about about the succession to the throne remained unsettled, the people hasitated to pay revenue due to uncertainty. In this situation, the king sent Oakhirai Hazari an officer to collect revenue from his subjects. It was stated that while he was engaged in tax collection at some Jamatiya villages, he tried to exerciser from them some undue privileges, espennally forced coolie labour. The jamatias protested because previously they were exampted from forced coolie labour. The Jamatiyas even refused to pay tax. The kind sent an army to collect taxes from the Jamatiyas by force. “As a natural consequence of sending out a number of armed ruffians under no command or discipline whatever, an affray very soon occured, in which three of the Raja’s men were wounded by spears, and two of the jamatiyas short ; the heads of those were cut off and are

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1. Dr. H. K. Sur, *British Relations with State of Tripura 1760-1947*, Saraswati Book Depot, 1986, P/65.
 2. Mackenzie, Sir Alexander, *Memorandum on the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, 1869, p.67.
 3. Mackenzie, Sir Alexander ; *op.cit*, p.67.

now hanging up in terrorem at Agartala.”³ After this incident, the Jamatias started revolt against the king. This revolt is known as Revolt of 1863. The king sought the help of the Kukis to suppress the revolt. It was reported in Rajmala by Kailas Chandra Singha that two hundred heads of the Jamatias were brought to Agartala by the Kukis as token of their best to maintain their democratic rights against forced coolie labour but were defeated finally. In this meantime the king realised that the revolt of Jamatiya was against oppressive activities of the officers.

The Jamatiya revolt of 1863 shook the very basis of the unconditional support to the feudal lords. The essence of democratic movement i.e. to protest against the tyrannical attitude of the ruler was present in this rebellion. May be due to the indirect impact of Jamatiya revolt of 1863, the then ruler of Tripura Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya introduced many important reforms in the executive and judicial administration of the state. The primitive system of administering justice on the basis of equity and good conscience was replaced by the regular judicial matters before the Rajah for final disposal. In order to run state administration efficiently, the Ministerial office was composed of several departments. Another appreciable practice introduced during the period of Bir Chandra Manikya was the practice of the budgetary system. Dr. Jyotish Chandra Datta rightly observed : “The salutary effect of the introduction of the budget was that the Rajah was made to ascertain the limit within which he must confine his expenditure and also to feel that any excess over the budgetary estimates would involve and additional tax upon his people. Heads of the Departments were often instructed to limit the expenditure within the budgetary provisions of their Departments. Thus Tripura was

poised for modernisation in administration during the reign of Bir Chandra Manikya".¹

The Reang Revolt of 1942-43 :- The Reang revolt of 1942-43 was one of the most important political incident in the reign of Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya. This movement was also an anti-feudal movement - a protest against the existing oppressive tendency of the ruler. To know the Reang unrest of 1942-43, one should have some idea about the social system of the Reang as well as the political situation of the state. Because both these factors were responsible behind Reang unrest.

Like all other tribal societies in Tripura the Reang Society was dominated by the village head man who were known as Chowdhuris. This head of these Chowdhuris was called Rai. In any village affairs of social, economic and political nature, the people depended upon the advice and deviation of their Chowdhuris. The Chowdhuris would maintain inter-village communication and unity within his respective jurisdiction. Actually he acted as a link between the king and the villagers.

During the time of Maharaja Bir Bikram, there were differential rates of house tax for each tribe. The Reangs were required to pay at a higher rate. From a statement made by Shri Umakanta Das in 1903 we learn that the Reangs were already over-taxed. They not only had to give the highest House Tax but also bamboo and cane taxes. They protested against these inequalities but without any effect. Tripura Chandra Sen narrates the political situation of the state of Tripura at that time.

The political situation of the State had been so tense at

1. Dr. Jyotish Chandra Dutta - An introduction to The History of Tripura, Book Home, 1984, p-30.

that time that it took no time to give a political turn to a so-called messianic movement amongst a section of the Reangs, a schedule tribe, and to rouse them against the administration of the Maharaja. The movement was launched by one Ratanmani Noatia who hailed from Chittagong Hill Tracts. A criminal case was launched against Ratanmani and his associates in the court of the Sadar Magistrate. Tripura under different sections but Ratanmani and his six followers fled to Chittagong Hill Tracts wherein they were arrested by the police and put to Ratanmani jail. A request was made by the Chief Minister, Tripura to the Political Agent, Bengal States on November 29, 1943 to issue extradition warrants for the arrest and prosecution of the accused persons before the Sadar Megistrate, Agartala. The warrant was accordingly, issued in December, 1943. Ratanmani is reported to have expired while under detention in Along (special prison where prisoners were remanded at the order of the Maharaja at Agratala. Some of his followers were tried by a special court under a special judge and convicted in July, 1944.

According to another version the followers of Ratanmani, a religious leader, actually against the Chowdhuris or Sardars in protest of their long exploitation and oppression. The Maharaja of Tripura who ordered his newly appointed Rai or the headman of Reangs to raise a band of soldiers from among the Reangs, was informed that Ratanmani and his followers were propagating against such recruitment. Subsequently reports were also received from Udaipur, Bagafa, Amarpur, Belonia that Reangs under the leadership of Ratanmani revolted against the administration. The Maharaja is reported to have ordered to burn the houses of the rebel Reangs and arrest them. The arrested followers of Ratanmani, mostly famine stricken due to acute shortage of

food prevailing over the areas in the wake of the Second World War, were however, released after shaving off the heads of all male members and compelling them to wear sacred thread (paita) and to adopt vaishnavism instead of saivism as their religion. Ratanmani arrested by the British Police while he was crossing over Indian border was 'handed over to Agartala Central Jail authority'. After a few hours he is alleged to have been shifted from the central jail to the Maharaja's house where he met with unnatural death'.¹

In 1945 Maharaj Bir Bikram Manikya formed an enquiry commission consisting of four Royal officials with a view to find out the reason behind Reang unrest. It has been reported that famine was one of the main factor behind the Reang revolt as an out burst of food crisis. From the information given by the retired Royal employees and the concerned section of people who was involved in the rebellion directly or indirectly, he came to the conclusion that through this revolt the Reangs wanted to rescue their social freedom. Although this movement for self determination by the Reang had no direct link with the freedom movement of India still, the motive behind both these movement were same. The Reangs revolted only when their heartiest appeal to the king failed. The people of Tripura named this movement as 'Swadeshi Movement'. Here Mr. Das Gupta remarked that the importance of Reang revolt was not less in any case than the 'Bardouli Satyagraha Movement' or the 'Champaran Satyagraha Movement'.² The Reang people wanted to changed their traditional democratic set-up. Whatever the

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1. Sen. T. C., *Tripura In Transition (1927-37 A.D.)* (Agartala December, 1970) p. 14-18.
 2. Tarit Mohan Das Gupta - 'Bidroyhi Reang Neta, Ratanmani' (in Bengali), Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Tripura, p. 36.

cause of the movement, the fact was that the movement created a great shake in the Reang Community in particular and in the history of the democratic movement in general.

The Social Reform Movement of the Lushais of Tripura

(1946-49) :- Almost all the tribes of Tripura have their own traditional self-governing institutions. The Lushai is not exception. Since 1912 when the first batch of Lushais migrated into the State the Lushai region of Tripura was reigned by the Chiefs, not bound by the laws of the State. The condition remained same even in 1948 when by the Dewan of Tripura State confirms in a letter dated 8 September, 1948 that —

“The position of Lushai areas in Tripura State is somewhat peculiar. Due to inaccessibility of the areas from the State capital, the Lushai Chiefs had been allowed a considerable number of autonomy by Tripura Government for a long time past. Except for a loose allegiance to the Ruler and a nominal Ghar Chukti tax (household tax) levied on households, the State has never derived any land revenue from the area. Even the collection of Ghar Chukti tax realised through Lushai Chiefs, and not directly has always been merely a token of collection.”

As the Lushai Chiefs were left to themselves without any control from the Darbar and as their powers and privileges were not defined, abuses of powers and privilege naturally took place. But whenever there was the slightest resistance by the Lushais, the Darbar came forward to protect the Chiefs.

As the Lushai Chiefs were free from the control of State laws, in administering the Lushai region sometimes they turned autocratic. Abuses of power and privileges were not unnatural. The Chiefs sometimes exploited the general

Lushai people by dint of their power and prerogatives as Chiefs. The people living in Lushai hills started movement against this traditional feudal bondage. In 22nd February, 1947 they formed a Union under the banner of 'Tripura Lushai Union'.

The object of the Union was clearly stated by the Chairman of the Union, Ch. P. Thanga, in his letter to the Dewan dated 18th October, 1948 :-

"The object of the Union is to introduce with full approval of the State certain improvements which should apply only to our community.

1. We seek, first of all, that the power, privileges, and duties of Chiefs be defined so that all may be aware of them.
2. We request that a central court be formed to judge all cases of disputes of a serious nature among us. At present there is no control over ruling authority in Jampui, the Chiefs are above the law. The members of the Central Court may be elected by the village panchayets.
3. We further pray that under Central Court there should be village panchayets freely elected by the village dwellers.
4. We seek information on the following specific points :-
 - (a) Is it lawful on the part of a Chief to seize belongings of his migrating subjects ?
 - (b) Is it an obligation on the part of a subject to give zarzetawpor or papelhmen to the Chief in paddy of any amount when he migrates ?
 - (c) Does abolition of some oppressive customs mean curbing the power of the Chief ?"¹

"Two points emerge from the above letter", observed Mr. Dipak Chowdhuri - First, the Union demanded a certain

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1. Letter from Chairman, Tripura Lushai Union to Dewan, dated 18 October, 1948 (B-1, SI-17, TSA).

amount of rule of law in place of the absolutism of the Chief as ; and secondly, the approval of the Tripura Government, which was ultimate power was necessary for the Union in order to attain success. And for all this an official recognition of the Union was an urgent necessity.²

The constitution of the Tripura Lushai Union revealed that the main objective of the Union was to change and modify the bad and oppressive customs gradually. It was essentially a social reform movement and the Union adopted the strategy of constitutional agitation by means of democratic institutions. But initially, the Government of Tripura hesitated to give recognition to the Lushai Union.

Meanwhile, the Tripura Merger Agreement was signed on 9th September, 1949 and on 15th October, the Administration of the State was taken over by a Chief Commissioner on behalf of the Govt. of Tripura. The Lushai Union, under the changed circumstances elected a committee of twenty members to discuss matters relating to the traditional customs of the Lushais. This committee held its first meeting at Tlaksih on 23 October, 1949, and resolved, among other things that — “1. The Committee be known as the Social customs Reforming Committee.

2. The Committee record its loyalty to the existing Tripura State Government.

3. The customary laws and obligations be liable to modifications with the consent of overwhelming majority of the member of the Committee.

4. The committee be permanent and its members be

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2. Mr. Dipak Kr. Chowdhury - The reform movement of the Lushais of Tripura (1946-49), a paper presented in a Seminar of autonomy movement, Organised by Department of History, Tripura University, 1992.

reelected every five years.

5. Each family give paddy full of two kerosine tins annually to the Chief as Fatang for the time being provided that family has paddy sufficient for a year's consumption. If paddy is short Rs. 1/- may be paid instead.

6. The custom of forced and free labour he abolished as this is a sign of slavery (Forced and free labour means a custom of compulsory labour rendered by the subjects to the Chief free of charge).

7. The custom of sachhiah be abolished as this is a sing of slavery (Sachhiah is payment by a subject to the Chief a front leg of wild animals killed. The defaulter is fined Rs. 40/-).

8. The custom or priviledged class be abolished and all men be equal in the eye of customary laws.

9. The custom of Zalen and Rambual he abolished (According to this custom some men have right to the best plot of Jhuming lands on payment of 5 maunds of paddy to the Chief.

10. The custom of Papelhman and Zarzotawp be abolished (Papelhman is a fine of Rs. 40/- to the maximum realised by the Chief from a subject on whom he had shown favour when the subject leaves him. Zarzotawp is a custom of confirsca-tion by the Chief of paddy belonging to a migrating sub-ject).

11. The house, property and garden of a Lushai subject of Tripura State be at the disposal of the owner even when he migrates.

12. The Committee have the power to introduce better and progressive customs among the Lushais of Tripura State"1

1. Letter from Chairman, Tripura Lushai Union to Chief Com-missioner, Tripura dated 12 November, 1949.

The above resolutions of the Committee were sent to the Chief Commissioner for approval. In a letter, which made the Lushais "overflowed with joy", R. K. Roy, the Chief Commissioner, declared :

"Regarding the proposed abolition of certain customary payments made to your Chiefs, and certain privileges and powers now exercised by your Chiefs. I would inform you that such practices are not being upheld at present by any laws of the land and that it is open to the Lushai people themselves to alter and abolish such customs by general opinion. As it is against the policy of this Government to interfere unnecessarily in the manners and customs of tribal people, you yourselves will have to devise the means by which old customs which you now consider to be undesirable should be abolished. The only thing that I would advise you to bear in mind in this connection is that such changes should be brought about by lawful means and the weight of public opinion and not be resort to any acts which affect public peace and tranquility of contravene the existing laws of the land."

The Reform Movement of the Lushais of Tripura adds a new Chapter in the rich heritage of democratic movements organised by tribal people of Tripura. 'Tripura Lushai Union' ultimately succeeded in upholding their rights against the autocratic system of Chieftainship.

Tribal Politics in Tripura since Independence : After independence of India and the merger of Tripura with the Indian Union the tribal people of Tripura faced with another new challenge a challenge of keeping up their tribal iden-

1. Letter from R. K. Roy, Chief Commissioner, Tripura to Chairman Tripura Lushai Union No. 1526/CA/66, dated 24 November, 1949.

tity. The intermittent influx of refugees into Tripura after the partition of India reduced parti-percentage of tribal population in the state from 50.09 percent in 1941 to 28.95 percent in 1971. However the number has been increased in the year of 1991 census report.

In the changing phenomenon of the society of Tripura the tribals began to think that their existence in Tripura faced a threat. Some ethocentric tribal organisations came into being with a view to protecting the tribal interest in Tripura. In 1947 'Seng-Krak' was formed by a group of millitant tribals with the object of protecting the interests of the tribal. Its leaders were dead against the influx of the refugees. At last, the organisation was declared out lawed for its violent activities. In the successive year, 'Paharia Union', 'Adivasi Sangh' and Tripura Rajya. Adivasi Sangha were formed more or less with the same obeject of establishing tribal dominance in the administration. In 1945 Adivasi Samsad came into existance as a result of the fushion of the previous associations. This organisation under took some movement programme for the higher rate of participation of tribal people in administration.

In 1967, a younger section of the tribal organised themselves under the banner of 'Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti'. TUJS put forward four demands. The demands were :-

1. Restoration of Tribal lands transferred to non-tribals since 1960.
2. Formation of an Autonomous District Council for the tribals in the State.
3. Reservation of Government jobs for the Tribals.
4. Recognition of Kok-Borok as State Language and a medium of instruction and introduction of Roman Script to this language. Since 1967 T.U.J.S has been launching demo-

cratic movements in support of tribal demands. But its younger militant group went underground and formed a secret organisation named Tripura National Volunteers Force which adopted militant line of action.

In the history of democratic movements organised by the tribal people of Tripura, the role of 'Tripura Rajya Gana Mukti Parishad' is remarkable. Originally formed in 1948 under the banner of Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad. It was renamed as 'Tripura Rajya Upajati Gana Mukti Parishad' in 1962. In the struggle of tribal masses they did welcome the co-operation of other democratic minded people or the non-tribal communities some of the aims and objectives as highlighted in the constitution of the 'Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad' were :

1. To work for all round development of agriculture, industry, education and culture of the tribal people.
2. To protect the rights of all the tribals by keeping good relations with all communities along the growth and development of democracy in Tripura for a lasting peace. The Gana Mukti Parishad demanded time and again for implementation of the land Revenue and Land Reforms Act of 1960 and prohibition or transfer of tribal land to the non-tribal, formation of an elected and powerful tribal welfare board, constitution of an expert language committee for the development of the tribal language 'KOK Barak'. It appealed to the tribal people in general to launch vigorous movement to change the state of affairs and appealed to the democratic minded people of the non-tribal communities in particular to extend support and solidarity to the tribal demands.

Political participation and political consciousness is an important indicator of democratic functioning of a social system. It is in this sphere of political consciousness and

participation that the tribes of Tripura have shown a marked degree of interest irrespective of their educational level. The formation of Tribal Political Organisation like 'Paharia Union' (1951), 'Adibeshi Samiti' (1952), 'Tripura a Rajya Adibashi Sangha' (1953), 'Adibashi Samad' (1954), Tripura Upajati Juba Samity' (1967), The Tripura Hills People's Party (1983), Tripura National Volunteers (1988) shows the growing political consciousness of the tribal people of Tripura. Most of these organisations demand for restoration of tribal lands transferred to non-tribal. They suffer from an apprehension that their language, culture and every sphere of their way of life were at stake.

The tribal political movement in Tripura more or less revolved around three principal points viz. land, language and local autonomy. 'Reservation of land for the Tribal, recognition of tribal language KOK-Borok as the second State language and formation of Autonomous District Council in the tribal areas of Tripura' were the three points of thrust of tribal movement.

With a different ideological approach, another section of the Tripura Tribal had launched autonomy movement long before T.U.J.S. embarked on it. This section of the tribal people under the banner of 'Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad' formed in 1948 and renamed in 1962 as 'Tripura Rajya Upajati Gana Mukti Parishad'. It emphasised on a struggle of the tribal masses on democratic line.

Some of the aims and objectives as highlighted in the con-

1. B. Mahanta - Crisis of Tribal Identity and Autonomy Movement in Tripura - An Analytical Note : A Seminar paper on Autonomy Movements of Tripura - organised by the Deptt. of History, Tripura University, Feb. 1992.

stitution of the 'Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad' were

1. To work for all round development of agriculture, industry education and culture of the tribal people.

2. To protect the rights of all the tribals by keeping good relations with all communities along the growth and development of democracy on tripura for a lasting peace.

The Tribal movement in Tripura achieved its success with the introduction of autonomous District Council. They also got their language KOK-Borok recognised as the second State language. The job quota of the tribals in the Government services is now strictly protected and tribals right to land is ensured. Thus the long cherished democratic tradition of the Tribals of Tripura has been strenthened with the introduction of Autonomous District Council.

CHAPTER -V

INTRODUCTION OF AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL :

The tribal people of Tripura had been agitating for autonomy for long years to preserve and protect their distinct ways of life. Because as a result of the continuous influx of displaced people in to Tripura. due to partition of India, the tribal people began to loose their land on account of transfers. In 1952 Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, then Prime Minister of India, convened a National Conference to discuss problems affecting the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population of the country. In that conference Sri Dasaratha Deb, M.P., proposed that a definite area should be declared as reserved for the tribal people of Tripura where non-tribals should not be allowed to settle down permanently and buy or sell any land.

In 1955 Sri G. B. Panth, the then Home Minister in the Union Government of India, expressed the opinion that the pressure of population had already reached a saturation point in Tripura and it would not be advisable to allow further absorption of additional people in such a tiny state.

The Dhebar Commission was appointed in 1960 to examine the problems of the Scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribe population of the country. In a note submitted to this commission Sri N. M Patnaik, the then chief Commissioner of Tripura, submitted that a specified area should be declared as reserved for the tribal people under schedule V of the constitution. The Dhebar Commission recommended, inter alia, that Tribal Development Blocks might be sat up as an experimental measure in Tribal Compact Areas and if this measure failed to bring about any material improvement among the tribal people, measures under Schedule V might be given a trial.

Thereafter the Administrative Reforms Commission, set up under the Chairmanship of Sri K. Hanumanthaiya, examined this issue and suggested that some compact tribal area in the State like Manipur and Tripura might be specified and Tribal Councils set up there along with delegation of well defined administrative powers.

It is against this background that the Government of Tripura decided to set up an autonomous council for the prominently Tribal Areas of the State to introduce internal autonomy in tribal compact Areas and thereby protect the social, economic and cultural interests of the tribal population. Tripura is the only State in India in which the original inhabitants, i.e. the tribes have been out - numbered by the influx of immigrants particularly after the partition of the India sub-continent. The Autonomous District Council came into being on 18th January, 1982 under seventh schedule of the constitution. But the provisions of the seventh schedule were not enough to fulfil the aspirations of the tribal people of Tripura. The struggle for autonomy and introduction of sixth schedule continued, Hence suspicion prevailed in some corners that district autonomy would separate the tribal people from the rest of India. The tribal people should be disassociated from the non-tribal people and hence the National Interest of India would be jeopardised.

Even in the Constitution Assembly Debate on the agenda of the discussion of the sixth schedule, we found that some member apprehended ; " the whole schedule is conceived in a way which is negation of Government"1. It appeared that the tribes would use the District Councils as a weapon to divide and balkanise India. Of course, the idea has been proved wrong, as testified by history in later years. In the Constituent Assembly Debate on 6th September, 1946. Rev.J.J.M.Nicholas Roy strongly

argued in favour of formation of sixth Schedule as he understood that the provisions of the sixth scheduled satisfy the tribal people to a certain extent and at the same time join them to the rest of province.

Rev. Nichols Roy ridiculed the notion that the autonomy conferred on the tribals would be misused and argued strongly against such a notion. He submitted :

" To say that those tribesmen will be inimical or they would raid Assam or go out to Tibet if this Sixth Schedule is introduced in these areas is rather surprising. The idea is based on wrong understanding of facts and a wrong psychological approach to the problem of bringing the hill folks and the plains together. This schedule has given a certain measure of self government to these hill areas but the laws and regulations to be made by the District Councils are subject to the control and assent of the Government of Assam. What is more unifying than that? The Sub-Committee for the Tribal Areas in Assam recommended that these districts mentioned in the Sixth Schedule should have a sort of self government to rule themselves according to their culture and genius....The provisions of the sixth Schedule satisfy these people to a certain extent and at the same time join them to the rest of the Province." Rev. Nichols Roy felt that the village Councils in the autonomous districts and the districts would enable the hill people to rule themselves in their own way and to develop themselves according to their own methods.

Against that background, he posed questions :

" Why should you deprive the people of the thing which they consider to be good and which does not hurt anybody on earth? It does not hurt India. Why do you not want them to develop themselves in their own way? The Gandhian principle

is to encourage Village Panchayats in the whole India. Why then should anyone object to the establishment of the District Councils demand by the hills people? This measure of self - Government will make them feel that the whole of India is sympathetic with them and India is not going to force upon them anything which will destroy their feeling and their culture."

At the instance of Rev. Nicholes Roy, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar came to understand the danger that was implicit in the move to separate the "State areas" from the Unitedkhasi Jaintia Hills District. Dr. Ambedkar spoke in the Assembly following the line enunciated by Rev. Nichols Roy :

" Supposing this area (Myllem State areas) were completely excluded from United Khasi- Jaintia Hills District, the result will be that these people, though they are fundamentally alive to their brethren in the rest of the part of Myllem State with regard to marriage laws, their customs, etc. they will become at once subject to the general law of inheritance, general law of marriage, all general laws which the Parliament may make or which the Assam Legislature may make."

Dr. Ambedkar asserted, " I do not think that it is right that a part of the people who are homogenous in certain matters should be served in this manner." He was in total agreement with Rev. Nichols Roy about maintaining the unity of Khasi- Jaintia people. The latter sought to impress this idea on his audience time and again in the Constituent Assembly, Committees and other platforms. His goal was clear that it was only through the unity of the hill people and the consolidation of their areas as a district entity that the Sixth Schedule was to be incorporated in the Constitution.

Rev. Nichols Roy thus rightfully earned the distinction of being called "the Father of the Autonomous District Council".

In Tripura, also the tribal people of Tripura demanded the Autonomous District Council under Schedule VI of the Constitution. It was in the wake of a persistent struggle that the central Government agreed to introduce Sixth Schedule. In the last session of the Seventh Parliament, the Constitution was amended (49th Amendment) unanimously for introducing Sixth Schedule in Tripura. With its introduction on 1st April, 1985, the long-cherished demand of the tribal people got its fulfilment. The autonomous district council emphasizes on improving their condition of living which covers health, education and some aspects of the economic life. At the same time through the introduction of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution the tribal communities were allowed considerable freedom to operate and develop their traditional institutions through the Autonomous District Councils and Regional Councils.

But although the constitution has made provisions for granting a substantial degree of autonomy to the autonomous district councils, in actual fact the TTADC has not fully exercised this autonomy for various reasons. However, one phase of the tribal autonomy movement in Tripura has been successfully completed with the setting up of the TTAADC but the battle for making autonomy more meaningful is a continuing one. The TTAADC has yet to ensure that the people living within its area are able to exercise their autonomy by participating in the formulation and execution of the measures taken for their development.

The establishment of village committee is becoming an important and strong step of TTADC involving the tribal masses in development function. Already on 28th February 1994, the

Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Establishment of Village Committee Act, 1994 was passed to provide for the establishment of village Committee in village for the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District. The Act is considered expedient to establish and develop local self Government and to make better provisions for administration of village into well developed and sufficient unit. Regarding the establishment and composition of village committee it has been mentioned.

(1) There shall be established for each village a village Committee to deal with all of any of the matters referred to in Section 29 and 21 and the village Committee shall consist of such number of members not having more than nine and not being less than seven as may be determined by the Executive Committee by Notification in accordance with such scale as may be prescribed on the reference to the population of the village determined on the basis of the register of ordinary residents of the village.

(2) There shall be reservation for the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes in the Village Committees proportionate to their respective population of the area concerned.

(3) Not less than 10 percent of the members of the village Committee shall be reserved for women on rotation basis.

(4) The members shall be elected on the basis of adult suffrage;

(5) Every village Committee shall be body corporate having perpetual succession and a common seal and shall subject to any restriction or condition imposed by or under this Act, or any other Act having power of acquire by purchase, gift or otherwise, to hold, administer or transfer property both movable and to enter into any contract and shall, by its name, sue

or be sued.

The members of village Committee elected at the first General Election or any general election as the case may be shall hold office for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer unless otherwise dissolved under any law for time being in force.

Subject to the control and guidance of the Executive Committee the Village Committee shall initiate the Development Schemes for their village areas. They shall be the Executive Agency of all minor Development schemes for their village areas. They shall be the Executive Agency of all minor development schemes within their jurisdiction for which the District Council may provide funds. They may also receive and recommend the cases of any individual Development Schemes or Grievances to the District Council.

(2) Subject to such rules as may be prescribed on behalf by the Executive Committee, Village Committee may exercise all or any of the following functions :-

- (a) Sanitation and conservancy of the village areas.
- (b) Cleaning and maintaining of village roads and paths;
- (c) Construction, maintenance and improvement of village wells and tanks for the supply of water to the villagers for drinking, washing and bathing purposes;
- (d) Taking of curative and preventive measures of the epidemic disease;
- (e) Opening and maintenance of burial and cremation grounds for human dead bodies and opening of disposal of animal dead bodies.
- (f) To encourage villagers for kitchen gardening and educate them for preparation of organic manured and the use

of chemical fertilisers.

(g) Maintenance of records of yearly population census, cattle census, spinning and weaving loom census, landless and unemployed person census;

(i) Encouragement of cattle rearing in khutti system and establishment of village grazing grounds to control stray cattle;

(j) Maintenance and construction of new building and house;

(k) Encouragement of maintaining register of birth and death in the village;

(l) Maintenance of children, adult and women education;

(m) Construction and maintenance of Rest House in the village;

(n) Establishment and maintenance of social and cultural club including reading and recreation room;

(o) Popularisation of indigenous sports, folk dance and music and celebration of National days and other festivals ;

(p) Destruction of stray dogs and disposal of un-claimed cattles.

(q) Any other matter which, if the Executive Committee think proper, may be delegated from time to time ;

(r) Subject to such conditions and modifications as may be made by the Executive Committee, the Village Committee may also perform any of the duties and function as specified in chapter III part II of the Tripura Panchayat Act, 1993.

The power and functions of Village Committee has been assigned in such a way so that the Village Committee can establish and develop Local Self-Government successfully.

CHAPTER - VI

The Jamatiya Society : The role of Hoda Okra.

In Tripura since long past people of various communities have been peacefully co-existing in this state and upholding their own social rules of administration. The Jamatiya Community hold the third position in respect of numerical strength among the nineteen tribes of Tripura. Regarding the origin of the term Jamatiya various opinions are prevailing among the society members also.

In the book entitled " Tripura Rajyaer Census Bibarani 1931, Somendra Deb Barma states that -

" The Jamatiyas in the past served in the army of Tripura. The word Jamat means a group or a congregation of people. The army which was formed by them was called Jamat. Since then they have been known as Jamatiyas." Omesh Saigal holds the view that ' Jamat in Urdu means an assemblage of persons. The former rulers of Tripura used to recruit his army from a class of Tribals who were not only warriors but also had proved their loyalty to him. A fair proportion of his armed forces were drawn from amongst the Jamatiyas who formed a group in his army and it was from this fact that they derived their clan name.

In the opinion of some elder members of the community, especially the present Hoda Okra of the society, the term ' Jamatiya' is derived from the word 'jama' which means tax and 'twiya' meaning not to bear the burden of. According to them once upon a time the Jamatiyas were serving in the army. But at that time there was no system of pension. That's why after retirement as a reward of service, the Jamatiya was freed from payment of tax.

Sree Nara Narayan Jamatiya of Silghati, the present Hoda Okra of Jamatiya Society is of the opinion that 'Okra' means elder brother. He narrates the legendary tale regarding the origin of Jamatiya. The king of Jajati got three sons, Janjam, Manjam and Tuktukiya. The king Jajati was attacked by Leprosy. A saint made forecast that if any of the son accepts the disease of Leprosy then only the king would be relieved. The youngest son Tuktukiya came forward and the king was relieved of the disease. As a token of reward Tuktukiya gained the throne and the elder brothers left the kingdom. After being the king of the State the younger brother invited the elders to take the responsibility of defence and exempted them from tax. The term 'Okra' thereby stands for elder brothers. The institution of 'Hoda' 'Okra' in that sense stands for the guardian of society and hold a position of responsibility. Hoda is the supreme council of the Jamatiya Community. The term 'Hoda' means society. The head of the Hoda is called 'hoda okra'. Previously there was only one hoda Okra for the entire Jamatiya Community. Later on the system of two okras was introduced for the two divisions of the territory e.g. Amarpur and Udaipur. The two Okras are elected in the annual conference which is generally held in the month of December. They are generally elected for a period of five years. Regarding the post of Okra, he must be religious - minded with adequate knowledge of the functions and general rules of their traditional administrative organisation. The traditional administrative system of the Jamatiyas is democratic in nature. Various kind of social problems are solved by joint decisions. Actually, the whole Jamatiya community is socially controlled by their hoda. A deep study of the constitution of 'hoda' reveals that the mechanism of their social control is well organised. Another fact that comes out is that violation of their customary law is seldom found in their community. In an exclusive interview

with the present hada Okra N.N Jamatiya of Silghati. Udaipur Sub-Division, the author was informed that even high officials of the Government employee in the Jamatiya community generally obey the decision of the hada okra in respect of socio-economic disputes of the village. Another important point to be noted here is that decentralisation of power which is the precondition of democracy is the main basis of the traditional administrative system of the Jamatiya. A deep study of the constitution of the 'Hoda' system in Jamatiya Society (which was published on 1981 by Brahmanda kumar Jamatiya and Lalit Mohan Jamatiya) reveals the fact that the principle of democracy was honoured by the makers of the Constitution.¹ The Constitution of 'Hada' is being presented here in nutshell.²

THE STRUCTURE OF HADA OF THE JAMATIYAS

Introduction

Tripura is a small State in India. Since long past people of various communities have been peacefully co-existing in this state and upholding their social rules of their own. The Jamatiya community is one of those social communities. The Jamatiyas have their own culture and characteristics which is more brighter than that of other communities. It is known to all that there have been existing separate judiciary and administration since very ancient time for controlling the social life of the Jamatiyas in a democratic way. The identity of our culture and characteristics is being maintained by un-written Hada Structure. But in this changing era though people have reached the highest position of development, we are lagging behind due to superstition and ignorance. As such a written Hadastructure has been accepted for the first time in pursuance of the decisions adopted in the Annual Conference of Jamatiya Hoda held in the Koaimura para on 25-26th Agrahayan 1382 Tripurabda. But all

the social norms did not come under the purview of this structure. some additions became essential. So in the Annual meeting of 'Hoda' held in Debbari at Amarpur on 23/24th Agrahayana, 1388, the structure received recommendation for second time printing with a view to bring those rules and norms under its purview. ¹

The English version of the Constitution of Jamatiya Hada was done by Dr. Chandan Chakraborty of Udaipur Degree College.

The Constitution of Jamatiya Hada

CHAPTER - I

NAME

1. The name of the highest organisation of the Jamatiya Community is Hada. Hada means Society.

2. It is limited within the Jamatiya Society only. So it is termed as Jamatiya Hada.

3. The procedure to apply the power of social administration in the various phases of Jamatiya Society has been named as 'Structure'.

4. The Jamatiya Hada is a firm and independent social institution free from party politics.

5. The Mayal and the Luku are the lower level social organisation inside Hada. None can disobey or disregard them.

6. The structure of Hada is above all types of disregard and criticism.

It has been composed with a view to heightening the social character as well as protecting the Indian democratic rights. So none has the right to criticise it adversely or disregard it.

CHAPTER -II

Aims and Objects

7. This social institution is meant for building the social character and keeping peace and order.

8. One of its highest object is to eradicate superstition and ignorance after protecting the social unity and own characteristic and to develop the cultural activities.

9. To organise public opinion and determine the proper punishment to those who are against the social development and break the social norms and peace.

10. A total development of society and recognising the status of women in society is deemed to be a pure objective of this institution.

11. To show due respect and regard to Okra, the commander in chief of the Hada.

12. Its aim is to protect Okra from the conspirators and to extend him help while in danger .

13. To confer social status to kherfong Achai, Motai Bal Nai, Dariya and others connected with the works of Hada.

14. This institution was established with special aim to -

a) render self sacrifice and hard labour in the educational and service works of the Jamatiya society.

b) encourage all types of development in industry and health.

c) form social fighting unitedly in perspective of time and situation.

CHAPTER - III

Social Structure

15. The traditional structure of the Jamatiya Society is formed in three stages - Hada, Mayal and Luku.

16. Hada is the highest organisation of the society, it directs and decides the social rules and practices of entire Jamatia society.

17. Every body of the society is bound to abide by the rules

32. The controlling power for any addition alteration or correction of the ideals, policies, service, views and means adopted by the Okra or Hada Committee is bestowed on the highest assembly or Hada.

33. A progressive and powerful Hada Committee be formed in the Annual Conference with a view to helping and counselling the two Okras. The committee Members cannot be deputed to any other social meeting.

34. The annual accounts submitted by the Hada Committee shall be examined and passed by the highest assembly or Hada.

35. The decisions in any critical matter can be given by the highest assembly.

36. Any new proposal related to social development can be ratified by the highest assembly through the Hada committee.

37. No subscription can be collected for Hoda unless it is passed in the General meeting of Hada.

38. Any proposal of Okra may be passed or postponed by the highest assembly.

39. Any conspiracy or problem may be brought to the notice of the highest assembly. In such cases the assembly shall delegate responsibility on Okra for its proper solution.

40. It is not the responsibility of the highest assembly to judge any personal problem of Luku.

41. The highest assembly shall only determine the law and order and recommend it for the benefit of the entire Jamatiya society. But the responsibility for its execution does not lie on the assembly. Hada Okra shall execute it in the society or

different Mayal and Lukus at the suggestion of its Advistory Committee.

42. Any principle accepted by the highest Assembly or Board is mendatory to be abided by every Mayal or Luku.

43. If some principle recommended by the highest Board is not excuted in a Mayal or Luku, the two Okras along with the Advisory Committee shall be responsible to the Board.

CHAPTER -V

Power and Education of Okra

44. Sardara or Okra is the highest respectable man in all respects in the Jamatiya Society.

45. In the annual meeting or any other meeting of Hada, Okra can only preside over. Only he is the man who can explain any principle or excute it.

46. He even presides over the meetings of the Committee of Hada.

47. He can collect subscription for some puja of Hada or for other necessity.

48. Okra can convene an emergent meeting with the Panchayat for materialsing the decision of Hada immediately. Of course, at least one member from Hada- Community- Committee should remain present.

49. He is allowed to spend upto an amount of Rs.200/- at a time for the interest of the society in some urgent matter. He should of course,intimate his Committee of the matter.

50. a) Okra is empowered to judge all types of arbitration such as divorce, illegal love affairs, adultery larceny and robbery etc.

b) Okra himself can create pressure on chowdhury to call for the miscreants of the society.

51. None but the Okra has got the power to judge those who break Hada's rules and obstruct development works. Even the Govt. also cannot interfere without Okra's permission. But if he is unable to solve the problem, then he may hand over it to the Govt.

52. Okra can retrench any member of the Committee on recommendation of other Committee members, if he acts against the interest of Hada or breaks the rules. He may appoint new member in the vacant post, subject to its recommendation in any subsequent meeting.

53. Okra acts as an arbitrator in any difference of opinion in idealistic matter or any debate. In urgent matters he solves problems by his ready-wit and considerations and in this way administers the Jamatiya society.

54. If a proposal is accepted in the Hada Committee urgently, the Okra or Sardara will not be able to excute it in the society. He can take action on this basis, but the proposal should be placed in a subsequent meeting of Hada.

55. Generally he cannot apply any rule in the society unless it is recommended in the Annual meeting of Hada.

56. He can give suggestions to the Secretary to convened an emergent meeting of Hada at any time.

57. Generally Okra heimself cannot convene meetings of the Hada Committee. He can only give suggestion. But if meetings cannot be convened due to the negligence of the Secretary then only he can convene meeting.

58. Okra himself can summon the anti-socials and con-

spirators and arrange for judgement.

59. Actually the Hada-employees have no right to collect subscription. They collect subscriptions having been permitted by Okra. They are bound to abide by the rules of collecting subscriptions. Otherwise Okra can take disciplinary action against them.

SECTION -6

Duties & Responsibilities of Okra

a) Both the Okras cannot follow some works or principles which are adverse to each other.

b) They must have awareness and allegiance to the laws and to the rules and regulations of the Pujas and festivals which have been approved by Hada.

c) The first and foremost duty of both the Okra is to materialise the proposals and decisions approved by Hada.

d) While judging the arbitration, at least one member of the Advisory Committee should be kept present in every suit. Otherwise the judgement shall be considered void.

e) It is necessary to have the approval of the committee while performing the development works.

f) If some one becomes endangered while perfecting the regulations of the society, he should be made out of danger by the Okra. Again when conflict erupts among themselves or with any other society. it is the responsibility of Okra to solve the matter properly and impartially.

g) If some development of Hada is delayed due to negligence or inaction of any member of the Advisory Committee the two Okras shall also be held responsible among others.

h) If there arises any disturbance in the society or the interest of the society is hampered due to anti developmental attitude of Okra, both the Okras and the Hada Committee are jointly responsible for it.

SECTION -7

Duration of the office of the Okras

60. The duration of the two Okras is five years. They may be dismissed before the tenure is over by the highest Board or Hada in the following manner if they perform works which are anti Hada and anti development.

a) The proposal of allegation against two Okras regarding their anti Hada and anti development activities is to be approved by 2/3rd members of the Hada Committee.

b) Support by the majority of the Mayal Panchayets is needed.

c) The Okras may hold office even after expiry of the stipulated period in case it is approved by the highest Board.

d) The Okras may resign from the post at their own will if they can furnish particular cause or reason which is acceptable to the committee. It is to be mentioned here that as the two Okras are appointed together they are to resign together.

SECTION -8

Eligibility

a) The Okras must belong to Jamatiya society and they must be flawless in character.

b) They must be well conversant in social rules and regulations a lover of his society and must be impartial to party politics.

c) The age shall be above thirty five years and within seventy years.

d) A literate person having progressive mind may be nominated to the post of Okra.

e) If a person appointed to some post of Hada is again appointed to the post of Okra, he shall have to leave the previous post.

f) Consumption of alcohol is totally prohibited while appointed to the post of Okra.

SECTION - 9

Formation of Hada Advisory Committee

61. A powerful and progressive Hada Advisory committee is formed with the persons who are devoted to society, free from superstition, active worker, progressive having knowledge about outer world and having capacity in helping and counselling the Okras.

a) This committee is formed unanimously for a period of five years in the annual meeting of Hada.

b) The member of the committee shall be at least seven to nine.

c) There will be one General Secretary one treasurer, and one Secretary for education and culture and -one- Secretary- for the Hada Committee in pursuance of the Okra's advice.

d) The General Secretary shall convene meetings of the Committee three times a year.

e) The General Meeting of the Committee shall be held in the month of Jaistha, Kartik and Falgun.

f) Only those persons may be the members of the committee who are above 21 years of age, lovers of society, conscious, responsible and conversant with the rules and regulations of Hada.

g) The members of the Advisory Committee are not eligible to be the members of two or more posts of social organisations simultaneously.

SECTION -10

The function and power of the Committee

1. The first and foremost duty of the committee is to help the Okras properly as per the ideals of the Hada.

2. To maintain accounts and papers of Hada and to give suggestions in this regard whenever necessary.

3. The meetings of the Committee shall be held with a view of forming a disciplined society and excuting social norms.

4. This committee shall lead with the entire norms of the society.

5. To reform the rules and regulations of Achai for developing own national culture.

6. The prime duty of the committee is to help and give suggestions to the Okras for making the working policies of Hada popular and effective and hightening the standard of living as well.

7. To encourage in economic, moral education, enjoyable religious matters as well in festival and puja ceremonies and to create a congenial atmosphere.

8. The 2/3rd members approval of the Advisory Committee has the right to approve suspension of an autocrat Okra till

the next annual meeting.

9. To tender appropriate wages to be workers employed for the Hada.

a) In case of urgency the members of the Advisory Committee can solve problems with the help of their reasoning and wit. This is however, to be approved by the Hada Okra.

b) Some new proposal for the interest of the society can be dealt with only in the meeting and the Hada committee. Dealing with such new proposal in other meeting will be considered illegal.

c) The committee shall always help two Okras in regard to social judgement.

d) Having been instructed by Okra the committee can convene meeting any time.

e) If the plaintiff and the defendant are not satisfied with the adjudication of the Okra they may prefer appeal to the committee. The committee can recommend to the Okra for review of the judgement if it thinks fit. The judgement for this appeal shall be considered final.

f) If one of the Okras is held responsible for his work against the social interest and if the explanation given by the two Okras jointly is not considered acceptable by the committee it may submit report in the meeting against the misdeed of the Sardar.

SECTION - 11

Duties and responsibilities of the Committee

1. The duty of the Committee is to take necessary step

after discussion with each other for protection of the existing social norms.

2. It may request the Panchayet and Choudhury for implementing the approved rules in the society. But it cannot introduce any new rule or policy. Any policy passed in the meeting of the committee shall have to be approved in the Annual Meeting.

SECTION - 20

General Rules of Hada

1. Every Jamatiya is bound to be loyal to the ideals and aims of the Hada.

2. Every Jamatiya is considered ordinary member of Hada by virtue of birth.

3. Any person belonging to a separate tribe may be a member of Jamatia Hada in the following way.

a) He is to reside in a Jamatia para at least for one year after being included in Luku.

b) Afterwards he shall pray to Hada Okra to be a Jamatiya and make the prayer granted. Lastly he has to take "Twi" of Achai. It is to be mentioned here that the granting of his prayer depends on consideration of Hada Okra.

c) Any women from other tribe can be the member of Jamatiya Hada by matrimonial alliance. In such cases approval of Hada Okra or taking of 'Twi' of Achai is not necessary. In the case of made of course, he has to be included in Luku and resided at least for one year. Subsequently when he will be regarded as Jamatiya there will not be any barrier of matrimonial relations.

4. Every Jamatiya per family or per Nukhang is bound to pay the subscription of Hada's Mayal and Luku.

5. A Jamatiya cannot have two wives simultaneously. If so, it may be considered social defamation and as such he shall be held guilty of violating the Hada's principles.

6. None shall be allowed to introduce matrimonial alliance at his own will violating the existing social norms. None shall be allowed to introduce dowry system.

7. Consumption of alcohol is totally prohibited for helping proper manifestation of personality. A girl before her 17 years of age and a boy before his 25 years of age cannot be married.

8. Respect and dignity to women should be protected.

9. None can elope women forcefully.

It is compulsory and sacred duty of every man in the society to impart education to its children.

10. Every member of the society are expected to have the mentality of co-operation and endurance.

12. To give service to the guest and to respect them is considered as a human virtue in Jamatiya society.

13. Society will not give protection to the thief and decoits.

14. The disputes should be dissolved neutrally.

15. Every member of the society has to maintain the tradition and culture of the society.

Article 21 and 22 deals with the disciplinary rules regarding justice and the rate of fine of the offender. Article 23 to 27

and 29 to 31 discusses about the general rules regarding marriage rites connected with death and especially with the general rules of their great festival 'Garia'.

Amendment of the Constitution

Article 28 deals with the amendment of the constitution.

a) This constitution can be changed and enhanced with the pace of time.

b) The constitution cannot be changed except in the general assembly of Jamatiya Hada.

c) To amend the constitution at least two third members of the Hada advisory committee should give their consent. Moreover, proposal regarding amendment should be discussed in full session and can be accepted only when approved by the Hada Okra.

A brief study of the constitution of Jamatiya Hada system reveals that there is system of checks and balance on the power of Hada Okra. Although Hada is the head of the society there is an advisory council to assist them. This council also acts as a check on the dictatorial tendencies of the Okras. The Okras can also be terminated before their tenure on ground of dishonesty corruption and moral degradation .

What is the main responsibility of Hada Okra ? Sree N. N Jamatiya of Silghati, the ex Hada Okra informed that his main duty was to inform the government about the present position of the society, to punish the culprits for their offence and to organise religious festival through out the year. However, minor affairs are to be settled at the Panchayet Level. All kinds of cases like divorce, adultery kidnapping, antisocial activities which could not be solved by the village council and regional council

are dealt with by the Okra. Besides the judicial function, the Hada has to perform some religious functions daily for the welfare of the entire society. One point to be noted here is that in his absence, the wife of Hada Okra is the sole authority to perform the daily religious rites. None except his wife is given in permission to perform Hada's duty. Hada's wife is also honoured the society and enjoy especial prestige. Another principle that prevails in the Jamatiya societ in that if the wife of a Hada Okra dies, automatically the Hoda will be relieved of the post and there will be re-election in the post. For the same reason an unmarried man is debarred from holding the post of Hoda - Okra. The idea underlying behind this system enlightens the fact that the man having no experience of family life is unable to understand the problem and complexities of social life.

Status of Women in Jamatiya Society

In Jamatiya Society, the girls have right in father's property. They are interested to give education to women and now a days it has been observed that the girls are more advanced than the boys in educational sphere.

The women section of the society is generally honoured and torture on the women is considered as a serious crime. The accused on this respect face severe punishment in comparison with other crime. This proves that the society as a whole stands for the dignity of women. Another praiseworthy characteristics of Jamatia society is the absence of dowry system which devalues the position of women in society. In every general conference of the society, the members of society are cautioned not to introduce dowry system in Jamatia. In spite of this even if any Jamatiya family is involved in dowry practice, the members have to face social boycott. Still a tendency is increasing among the educated section of the Jamatiya Commity

Sailen Jamatia	
Bandaray Jamatia	
Dulhada Jamatia	
Bilai Jamatia	
Kungtuk Jamatia	
Raharsing Jamatia	
Banshina Jamatia	
Diring Sing Jamatia	
Nahaiya Jamatia	
Dayeelng Jamatia	
Chingra Jamatia	
Gopindar Jamatia	
Sankada Jamatia	Khupilong
Majram Jamatia	Hadra
Saitaki Jamatia	Bampur
Tapachandra Jamatia	Marandi
Tailabashik Jamatia	Shilighati
Abhay Charan Jamatia	Twyharchwng
Premananda Jamatia	Hadra
Subal Chandra Jamatia	Ganggria (Sarbang)
Golokram Jamatia	Burburiya
Bani chandra Jamatiya	Raiya
Sadhupada Jamatia	Bampur
Druha Chandra jamatia	Hadra
Haribandhu Jamatia	Twykichik
Ananda Hari Jamatia	Daring
Hari Chandra Jamatia	Kuar

to introduce the dowry practice. But the mechanism of their social control is so well organised that the violation of their customary law is still rare in their community. One responsible Government official described his bitter experience of giving some furniture as his sister's marriage. He was harassed by the society and faced an embarrassing situation in the marriage day.

In the economic sphere also the women-folk constitute a major productive force in the society. From kitchen to paddy field women take part in work with their male counterpart. But in the political area still now the women section are being debarred to be involved in the decision making process.

In the recent Panchayet Election, Shibani Jamatiya from Hadra village near Udaipur Sub-Division was elected in the zilla Parishad and thereby introduce a new arena for the women-folk of the Society to participate in the decision making process. In spite of these developments, the women are not welcome to join active politics. Moreover, they are debarred to be a candidate for the post of Chowdhuri, Mayal Sarder or Hada Okra on the ground that the Women Section of the society is ignorant about the general social rules and norms.³

Role of Hada Okras :

Hada Okras are the head of the 'Hada' which is the Supreme Council of the Jamatia. The Okras are elected in the annual conference which is held in the month of Agrahayana. They are generally elected for a period of five years. The hada okra must be religious minded and should have adequate knowledge about the traditional administrative organisations and customary laws of the society. The following list bears the name of the Okras since the founding of 'Hada', the supreme Council.

Subhay Chandra Jamatia	Nagray
Mahiswas Chandra Jamatia	Pitra
Kushoray Jamatia	Manduwy
Raghunath Jamatia	Sungrung
Bhadu Chandra Jamtia	Raiya
Rupananda Jamatia	Harda
Sudarshan Jamatia	Noabari
Palong Chandra Jamtia	Kachima
Surjokanta Jamatia	Tulsiray
Trjomoi Jamatia	Tuta
Jagatuanda Jamatia	Tinghariya
Amritbashi Jamatia	Sangtram
Gobinda Gopal Jamatia	Raykhalang
Matilal Jamatia	Khunpwylnwg
Mohon Chandra Jamatia	Shilighati
Gopinath Jamatia	Nagray
Haridata Jamatia	Noabari
Chandra Mohan Jamatia	Baisho
Kripamay Jamatia	Bagma
Siddi kumar Jamatia	Kuwaymura
Birendra Jamatia	Debbari
Lakshmabali Jamatia	Shilighati
Brahmmananda Jamatia	Burburiya
Bhuban Bahadur Jamatia	Maharani
Mantri Bahadur Jamatiya	Rangamati
Nara Narayan Jamatia	Shilighati
Chitra kumar Jamatia	Jampui Jala.

Bikram Bahadur Jamatia

Moharcharra

Hari Charan Jamatia

Maharani

The source of above mentioned list is the book of 'The Jamatias of Tripura' by Pradip Nath Bhattacharjee and the addition has been made with the help of Sree Bhamananda Jamatiya, the advisor Secretary of present 'hoda Okras'. At present, there are thirty two Panchay and three thirty seven Chowdhury. There was a plan to increase the number of posts at Village, Moyal and S upreme level in the next annual conference. Some modifications have been done in the present Hoda Constitution, adopted on Tripurabda -1404. For example, menimum marriage time of boys and girls being 21 years and 18 years respectively has been specifically nentioned here. In respect of window marriage there is liberal attitude of the society as we find in article 246 of section 26. (Present Hoda Constitution) Another point to be noticed is that with the change of time the Jamatiya Society is giving more inportance to women participation in Hoda activities. Long twenty years back also women were members of Hoda Working Committee. The Working Committee passed a resolution that one third participaion of women representatives in the Working Committee must be ensured. The following chart of the Hoda Committees shows well representation of the women member of the society.

JAMATIA HODA TRIPURA STATE

Name and address of the Hoda Executive Members

<u>Sl.NO</u>	<u>NAME & ADDRESS</u>	<u>POST</u>	<u>TENURE</u>
1.	Bikram Bhadur Jamatiya Mohar Kami, P.O.Mohar- Chhara, Telimura, West Tripura,	OKRA	From Upto
2.	Hari Charan Jamatiya, Maiung Twisa Kami, P.O: Moharani, P.S.R.K. Pur, Udaipur, Tripura(S)	OKRA	

HODA ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

1.	Naranarayan Jamatiya, Hwl-wighati (West), P.O. Kishoreganj, P.S.R.K Pur, Udaipur, Tripura (South).	Upodesta	10-12 2000	09-12 2003
2.	Chinta Mohan Jamatia,Mwkhra Baso, P.O: Bamfurbazar, P.S: Birganj, Amarpur, Tripura (S)	Upodesta	10-12- 2000	09-12- 2003
3.	Aswathama Jamatia, Ajala, P.O. Maharani, P.S:R.k Pur, Udaipur, Tripura (south).	Upodesta	10-12- 2000	09-12- 2003
4.	Data Mohan jamatia, Karaimura, P.O: Tulamura P.S: R.K Pur, Udaipur, Tripura (South).	Udodesta (legal)	10-12- 2000	09-12- 2003

HODA AUDIT BOARD MEMBERS

1.	Manindra Jamatia, Bagma Kham- par, P.S: killa, Udaipur, Tripura (S)	Auditor
2.	Raj kumar Jamatia. Atharabla, P.O: Manikya,Udaipur, Tripura (S)	Auditor
3.	Biswajit Jamatia, Kami &P.O: Khumpuilwng, P.S: Killa, Udaipur, Tripura (S).	Auditor
4.	Pran Mohan Jamatia, Brahmma- chara, P.S : Teliamura, Khowai, Tripura (W).	Auditor

5. Deb Sankar Jamatia, Maiung Auditor
Uarai, P.O: Malbasa, P.S :
Birganj, Amarpur, Tripura(S)

HODA WORKING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

1. Ram Pada Jamatia, Atharabla, P.O. Secretary
Manikya, P.S: Killa, Udaipur, (HWC)
Tripura (S).
2. Smt. Dharani Jamatia, Hwl- Member
wighati(E) , P.O: Kishoreganj, (HWC)
P.S:R.K.PUR, Udaipur, Tripura(S)
3. Smt. Sahisnu Jamatia,Khampar Cashier
kami, P.O. Moharcharra, P.S: (HWC)
Teliamura, Tripura(West).
4. Smt. Phalguni Jamatia, Twirupua Member
Kami, P.O.& P.S: Killa, Udaipur (HWC)
Tripura (South).
5. Suchitra Jamatia,Karaimura, P.O: Member
Tulamura,P.S: R.K. Pur, Udaipur, (HWC)
Tripura (South).
6. Smt. Rai Uamadini Jamatia, Hathai Member
Kuchuk Kami, P.O :Karailwng, P.S (HWC)
Teliamura, Tripura (W)
7. Nilmani Jamatia, Mwxhra baso Member
Kami, P.O: Bamfur Bazar, P.S: (HWC)
Birganj, Amarpur, Tripura (South)
8. Sanjay Jamatia, Tentui Kami,P.O: Member
Tentui, P.S: Ampinagar, Amarpur, (HWC)
Tripura (South).
9. Ratna Sadhan Jamatia, Maung A/Secy.
Twisa Kami, P.O :Maharani, (HWC)
P.S:R.K Pur, Udaipur, Tripura
(South)
10. Moni Kanta Jamatia, Hardrai Member
Kami, P.O: Karailwng, P.S : (HWC)
Teliamura,Khowai, Tripura
(West)
- 11 Deb Narayan Jamaita, Amaresh Member

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|--------|
| | Kami, P.O : & P.S:Natun Bazar | (HWC) |
| | Amarpur, Tripura (South) | |
| 12 | Kirit Kishore Jamatia, Kuar Kami, | Member |
| | P.O: Pitra Bazar,P.S:Killa, Udaipur | (HWC) |
| | Tripura (South) | |
| 13 | Jiban Bhakta Jamatia, Kami Kwtal | Member |
| | P.O: Raiabari,P.S: Killa, Udaipur, | (HWC) |
| | Tripura (South). | |
| 14 | Hari Singh Jamatia, Burima Kami | Member |
| | Bazar, P.S: TakarJala, Bishalghar, | (HWC) |
| | Tripura (West).P.O. Jampui | |
| 15 | Chandi Data Jamatia, Manu Shal- | Member |
| | thang Kami, P.O: Birchandra Manu, | (HWC) |
| | P.S: Bilonia,Tripura (South). | |

JAMATIA HODA

The whole Jamatia population has been divided under 16 Moials (i.e Regions) with 321 villages in the State, which consist Of 32 Panchais. The Hoda Okras have delegated all practical powers temporarily to the Panchais. The Panchais can dispose off all the Regional disputes but they cannot give any physical punishment. Under Panchai, there is again a Working Committee consisting 7 Members who are responsible for the functioning of the Mayal, i.e Regions.

A Moial (Region) formed by 5 to 52 villages where two Panchai (Region Chief/ Sardar) in each Moial who are selected by that Regions Chokdiri and prominent persons amongst the villagers for a period of 5 years. At present Jamatia Hoda have 16 Moials (Regions) X 2 Panchai = 32 Panchai (Region Chief/ Sardar) and two Hoda Okras of Apex body of the community. Hoda OKRAS have also selected by the Chakdiri & Moial Panchai in the Annual Conferense of after every 5 years unanimously. Total population of Jamatia community is near about 1.00 (one) Lac so far Hoda is concerned.

The Supreme powers of the society are vested collectively on the two Hoda OKRAS who are selected ones for the five years. They are assisted by an Advisory Board having three members. Besides, it has 10 Pujaries who are directly accountable to Hoda Okras. These Pujaries perform the Pujas of Mahadev, Matarbari, Twima, Garia, Bolong Suamani, Mailuma, Khulukma consecutively all over the year for the peace and prosperity of the Jamatia in particular and the whole State in general.

In the recent past a militant organisation of Tripura, NLET (National Liberation Front of Tripura) has been posing threat to the traditional religious beliefs of tribal people. They are being warned not to practice Hinduism and to avoid idol worship and notice is being served not to participate in Durga Puja. April 1998 witnessed the Jamatiys rebelling against the NLFT for the first time when the latter instructed the community not to participate in their most important festival, Garia Puja and instead worship Jesus. That year Garia Puja was held at Pitra, South District with the largest ever congregation. This was an overt defiance of the militants threat. Since then Jamatiya Hoda has been relentlessly organizing community activities against militants to save their traditional culture and religion from their onslaught. The mass abduction of 21 volunteers of the Jamatia Hoda sparked tension in the Killa Police Station Areas. Because of continuous pressure from Jamatiya Hoda and after relentless effort of the Police and TSR (Tripura State Rifles) the Hoda Volunteers were freed on 8th Feb' 2001.

A peep into the working system of Jamatia Hoda system reveals the fact that the community is trying to maintain its customary system of unity and religious faith of oneness. Time and again it has applied to the Tribal Customary Law Committees, TTA ADC. Council for codification of their customary law

but yet to get any response from the appropriate authority in this important issue. Their grievance has been expressed in the memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister and Prime Minister respectively.

Observations : The tribals of Tripura are like the Greeks of ancient time taking much interests in socio-political life. During the regime of the earlier Manikyas the tribes enjoyed their traditional freedom based on the concept of self administration and the relation between the king and the subject tribes was maintained through the tribal chiefs or community spokesman Sardars. This relation was also limited and in most cases it was confined to the paying and collecting of taxes and occasional Nazaranas. These ancient self-governing institution of tribals differed from tribe to tribe. The Tripuris, Lushai and the Chakmas have a one tier system of self-governing institutions but the Jamatias, the Reangs have a three tier system and the Santals have a -two tier system of self-governing. " These hierarchical system of administration a observed Prof Pratap Chowdhury, demonstrate a very developed system of social administration" .

Thus it is fact that although the present system of local self-government in our country is the creation of the British, the conception of local self government was not foreign to the genius of its people. The system of local self-government of Tripurs again proves the statement of Dr. Radha Kumud Mookherji made long years ago : "the culture of the ancient Indian races was conserved and promoted through the indigenous machinery of appropriate institutions handed down from time immemorial, which embraced the manifold spneres of national life, economic and educational, social and religious. Thus the genius of the races was never in danger of being choked

and stifled for it was never in want of the adequate means of its self expression.

Although the self-governing institutions of the tribal people of Tripura has never been 'democratic' in western terms, as there was no election system the democratic atmosphere was prevalent in which the whole body of villagers took their part in the affairs. The village Councils normally conducted its deliberations in the presence of all who cared to attend. Minor offences were privately settled. But serious crimes and disputes would be settled by the Council in public in which all the elders of the village would be involved. Before giving the verdict the village headmen consulted other members on the basis of deposition made by the disputants and their witnesses. Violation of these verdict was seldom found and generally the villagers were not dissatisfied with the decision of the village council. Although the leaders of the council was not elected, they were acceptable to all and not to a few only. Justice was done according to traditional rule. Even today, these type of self-governing institutions still exist, especially in Jamatiya society. The leaders of the society clearly express their views that they have no collision with village panchayat or Governmental administration. There is no intention to interfere in the governmental affairs. During discussion about the political role of the 'Sardars' the point was emphasized by the society leaders that they are politically neutral. Political involvement is not taken at all as a criteria for selection for the post of 'Chowdhuris', 'Moyal Sardar' or 'Hada Okras'. They are the spokesman of society and their duty is to inform the government about the present problem and demands of the society. Even in the case of solution of any dispute political biasness is avoided. Hada Okra, the Supreme authority of the Jamatia Society is assisted by an advisory committee for taking decision. All the major decisions regard-

ing Jamatia Society are taken in the general meeting to be held in every 'Agrahayan' month of the year. The view of majority is taken as granted. The 'Hada Okras' play very important part in performing 'Garia' Puja. The last annual conference of the Jamatia hada was held in the month of December, 1993 at 'Sangatram para'. Burima Anchal of West District. In this conference all major decisions were taken for systematic performance of coming Garia-festival. The decisions of the meetings was published in 'Kokbarak' language and was distributed among the society members. The leaf-let is being presented here as such, to notice the democratic nature of the traditional administrative system of Jamatias.

" Baba Garia"

'Proposed Hada Meeting'

Sanghatram Para, Burima Anchal.

Sreejukta Tejkanta Jamatia Choudhuri. 25th/26th Agrahayana 1403 Tripurabda 1403 Bangabda, 11th/12th December, 1993.

Today this 25th Agrahayana (11th December) the annual conference of Jamatia Hada is being held in the residence of Sre Jukta Tejkanta Jamatia at 10.00 P.M. under the Presidentship of respectable Hada Okras Sree Nara Narayan Jamatia and Chitra Kumar Jamatia.

Proposed Legislations :

1. The expenditure statement examined by the auditor has been accepted.
2. It has been accepted that at Garia Puja the he-goat, buffalo, sheep and pегion would be sacrificed at the rate of Rs. 1 for goat and pегion and Rs.3 for buffalo and sheep.

3. In any meeting at Hoda or Moyal, the delegate fee has been fixed at Rs. five.

4. From this year the subscription for puja at especial fund has been fixed for Rs. five.

5. From today onwards the former Hada advisory board will be considered as executive committee.

6. The advisory committee of hada will be constituted with ex-hada and his employees.

7. In every Luku, a registered Khata should be maintained and the employees will collect the suscription according to this khata.

8. The dues of the last year puja subscription will have to be collected this year only.

9. The expenditure statement of the hada employees will have to be submitted in the Budget, Session of Hada Okras.

10. A Committee is to be formed to select a place for temple.

11. Only the Secretary of the 'Hada' has been entrusted with the power of expenditure.

12. Intellectuals are to be selected in all area to publish the decisiõns of 'Hada'.

At the end of the meeting all the proposals were acceptand the meeting ended by giving vote of thanks to the Presidents.

The proceedings of the meeting emphaizes on the democratic tradition of their self-governing institutions. There is no scope for autocratic exercise of power. One point to be noticed

here is that the introduction of delegate -fee has been a recent phenomenon. The system has been accepted to overcome financial crisis in the festival of Garia which is one of the major festival in the Jamatia Society.

Although justice was ' quick, perceptable and cheap' sometimes mishaps could not be avoided. For example, in the year, 1986 four persons accused of the charge of stealing the image of Garia were dragged to death near 'Atharavola' of Udaipur Sub-Division. The case is still undecided. The society leaders hold the opinion that it is simply a case of accident and the incident occurred at the heat of the public sentiment. Bhuba Hari Jamatia, the then hada Okra, came to know about the punishment of the accused only after the occurrence of the incident. However, when the accused were proved as genuine miscreants, the angry mob hecked them to death. They failed to realize that the theory of punishment is remedial. It is not oppressional, not eye for eye. or teeth for teeth.

The tribal communities are not educationally conscious to appropriate the legal aspect and the consequences of punishment. Therefore, it is essential to uplift them educationally so that they can feel the consequences of such punishment and able to realize the legal ethics.

There are hundreds tribal communities in India. All Committees are guided by their own customary laws and those customary laws are constitutionally valid, unless it is opposed to the public policy or contrary to the constitutional system. The Tribal community is generally guided by their own customary heritage. For example, in a dispute in between two tribals about succession the custom prevailing in their society shall be treated as constitutionally valid if proved by way of examination of their community Head.

Finally we can conclude that in spite of some weakness the traditional tribal self-governing institutions are hundred percent democratic. Here the term "democracy" means democracy in every sphere of life. In the tribal Community, even in much earlier time, the decisions on any issue had been taken in an open meeting of the Community and not surreptitiously. This was unlikely in feudal system of other society, where the so-called feudal lords took autocratic decision neglecting the opinion of the common people. In most of the Village Councils of the tribal Communities, decisions are taken by the people in general in meetings held regularly which may be compared to the democratic tradition of the Greek City States of ancient time.

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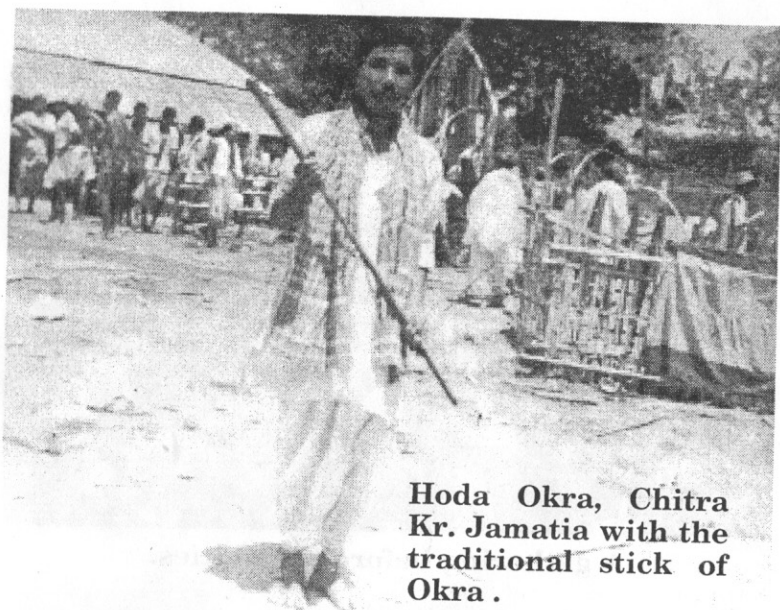
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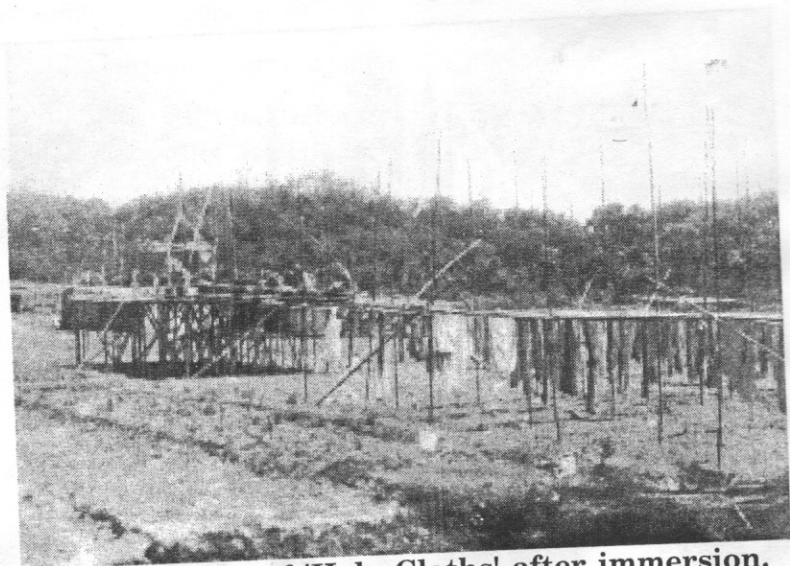
**Hoda Okra, Chitra
Kr. Jamatia with the
traditional stick of
Okra .**



Rituals in Garia Puja.



A gathering before the deities.



Preservation of 'Holy Cloths' after immersion.

