

A Land of Rich Ethnic Tapestry

TRIPURA



ABOUT THE MONOGRAPH

The modern State of Tripura is part of the North-Eastern region of India which harbours six other States and is known as "Seven Sisters". Tripura is an ancient land, which saw waves of tribal influx many centuries ago from Mongolia, Tibet, China and Burma. The migrants settled there and became sons of the soil. The settlers were of non-Aryan stock, speaking dialects that sprang from the Tibeto-Burmese language as well as language of the early inhabitants of Tripura. There are 19 tribes and 17 recognised sub-tribes in Tripura....

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TRIPURA

(A Pictorial Monograph on Tribes of Tripura)



Published by
Tribal Research & Cultural Institute
Government of Tripura
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Front Cover – Main Pix: An old Reang Lady
Bottom (L to R): Old Halam Lady,
Reang Girl, Kuki Boy, Garo Girl.

Back Cover – Main Pix: Weaving by a Chakma Lady
Bottom (L to R): Tripuri Girl,
Chakma Boy, Mog Girl, Jamatia Girl.

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CONTENT

Prologue	1-2
Days Long Ago	3-4
Faith They Live By	4-5
The Tripuris	6-19
The Reangs	20-31
The Jamatias	32-38
The Noatias	39-45
The Halams	46-52
The Chakmas	53-59
The Mogs	60-65
The Kukis	66-69
The Garos	70-74
The Uchais	75-76
Epilogue	77-78



Chief Minister
Tripura

Message

Tripura is one of the Seven Sisters that make up the North-Eastern Region of India. Much about the State is yet to be explored, especially its glorious past. Tripura is blessed with enigmatic hills, captivating dales, dense forests, myriad flora and lush green valleys. The State takes great pride in its tribal identities and diversities. The colourful traditional life of Tripura's numerous tribes and their harmonious existence create a unique cultural mosaic. Thus, researchers, social scientists, students and people in general will have keen interest to know about the tribes of Tripura and certainly this monograph will meet that purpose.

I heartily welcome and appreciate the laudable effort of the Tribal Research Institute of the Tribal Welfare Department for publishing this chronicle of ethnic communities inhabiting Tripura. I hope and believe that this documentation on the tribes of Tripura will generate immense interest among present readers as well as future research scholars, who would like to have an insight into the life and culture of Tripura tribes.

(Manik Sarkar)

Date : 25th November 2008
Agartala



Minister
Tribal Welfare Department
Government of Tripura

Message

I am happy to note that the Tribal Research Institute under the Tribal Welfare Department has brought out this Pictorial Monograph as an important document on the major tribes of Tripura. This book is an endeavour to describe lucidly the ethnic features of Tripura tribes with colourful photographic glimpses of their social organization and socio-economic activities along with a brief account of their age-old traditions, customs, folk life, rites and rituals.

I hope this attempt of the Tribal Research Institute will be very useful to all concerned to know a little about the tribes of Tripura and study them further.

I convey my thanks to all the staff members of, Tribal Research Institute, for their initiatives and scholarly exercise in bringing out this important publication. The printer of this book also deserves appreciation.

Aghore Debbarma

(Aghore Debbarma)

Date : 25th November 2008
Agartala



S. K. Das, IAS
Commissioner & Secretary
Tribal Welfare Department
Government of Tripura

Message

Various ethnic communities have enriched the State of Tripura. Question may arise where did they come from? How did they become the aboriginals of this land? What makes themselves to a mosaic presentation of different culture in the same socio-economic environment? And how do they continue to preserve their age-old tradition against the aggressive influence of modernization?

This monograph shall provide the readers, researchers, anthropologists an in-depth account of ethnic components of various indigenous communities of Tripura, right from migration to this territory to their socio-economic life & colourful cultural heritage. I hope that readers will find this publication interesting and informative about all the tribes of Tripura.

I convey my sincere thanks to all the staff members of Tribal Research Institute for their concerted effort in publishing this pictorial monograph from the Directorate of Tribal Research Institute, Government of Tripura.

(S. K. Das, IAS)

Date : 25th November 2008
Agartala

Preface

Tripura is an abode of indigenous people who have migrated to this land during an unknown period in the history of the Indian sub-continent. Anthropologically these people are known as tribals of the North-East Region. The tribals and their ethnographic features have always attracted anthropologists, social scientists and others to get an insight into their past and present, particularly in the search of the genetic past of human beings. Tribal people, with their traditional life and culture, are in the true sense, the root of our civilization.

In Tripura there are 19 different tribes, each with a distinct cultural heritage, living in great communal harmony. Ethnically they are mainly of Mongoloid origin and have migrated from a place in between Mongolia, Tibet and Burma. Linguistically these tribes are divided into three distinct groups, (i) Bodo Group of tribes who are known as aboriginal tribes of Tripura. They are Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia (Tripura), Murasingh, Koloi, Rupini and Uchai. Their language is Kok-Borok, which is under the Bodo linguistic group, (ii) Tribes like Halam, Kuki, Molsom, Darlong, Kaipeng and Lushai speak a language of the Kuki-Chin linguistic group. (iii) Mog and Chakma tribes speak a language of the Arakanese linguistic group.

Besides, a few immigrant tribes live in Tripura that migrated from Central India, particularly from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhotanagpur. They are Bhill, Santal, Munda, Orang and Meghalaya tribes like Khasi and Garo. Bhutias and Lepchas also inhabiting in Tripura, are originally eastern Himalayan tribes. All these tribes belong to Austroloid, Austro-Asiatic, Austric and Mongoloid origin, each having distinctive ethnic features. These immigrant tribes, however, entered Tripura for economic reasons during the 1st part of the 19th century.

The Socio-economic life of Tripura tribes was once completely based on the traditional Jhum cultivation (slash-burn-sow method of agriculture) and their lives revolved around sowing, weeding and harvesting. Their ceremonies and festivals, religious activities, folk songs, dance and

appeasing of deities are still invigorated with sweet melodies of traditional string instruments and the drum. These ethnic components are so colourful that people outside the tribal communities, including research scholars will have immense interest to know about the tribes of Tripura.

Thus, an attempt has been made to prepare and publish an Ethnographic Monograph on all the major tribes of the State in a single volume to unfold the beautiful, age-old Jhum-based life and cultural heritage of Tripura tribes.

I convey my thanks to Sri Kumud Kundu Choudhury, Sri Naresh Devvarma, Sri Shyamlal Deb Barma, Prof. Suraj Choudhury and Sri Sayan Chowdhury, Dr. P. N. Bhattacharjee, Dr. Gutam Kumar Bera, Anthropologist who were reviewed this pictorial Monograph to make it authentic and as in order.

For authentic presentation of this monograph in methodical manner, I have taken the work with great interest and developed the monograph with some ethnic information beside covering some other tribes. Attempt has also been made by me for enriching this Monograph with few colourful photographs to make it a useful document on Tripura tribes.

I am sure this book will be very useful to all concerned and particularly to research scholars interested for further in-depth studies on various tribes of Tripura.



Director
Tribal Research & Cultural Institute

Date : 31st July 2010
Place: Agartala



Tribal Population			
Bhill	: 2336	Lushai	: 4777
Bhutia	: 29	Mog	: 30385
Chaimal	: 226	Munda	: 12416
Chakma	: 64293	Noatia	: 6655
Garo	: 11180	Orang	: 6223
Halam	: 47245	Reang	: 165103
Jamatia	: 74949	Santhal	: 2151
Khasia	: 630	Tripuri	: 543848
Kuki	: 11674	Uchai	: 2103
Lepcha	: 105	Unspecified	: 7098

Tribal Splendour Of Tripura

Prologue

Tripura is a tiny tribal dominated State located in the North-East part of India. Entire Geo-topographical areas of Tripura are covered with high tillas and slopes. Green valleys, abundant forest cover, large scale of wild animals inside the forest cover, wide fields, uncountable streams, rivers, fertile land, plenty of edible plants, which have attracted numbers of indigenous tribal communities to enter Tripura in different waves and to settle here adopting jhum based economy to sustain their lives. These tribal communities having their separate ethnic feature with colourful traditions have created a multi-ethnic cultural assimilation in this State. Beside tribal population, non-tribals have also constituted a mixed cultural environment since long back. A land-locked State, Tripura shares borders with Bangladesh and the adjoining States of Assam and Mizoram.

The State, which has an area of 10,492 sq. km., had been an independent kingdom until the British appointed a Political Agent for Tripura in 1871; but the state was never ruled directly by the British. On 15th October 1949, Tripura merged with Indian Union and was made a Union Territory on 1 July, 1963. It became a full-fledged Indian State on 21 January, 1972.

Tripura is an ancient land, which saw waves of tribal influx many centuries ago from Mongolia, Tibet, China and Burma. The migrants settled here and became sons of the soil. The settlers were of non-Aryan stock, speaking dialects that sprang from the Tibeto-Burmese language group as well as

drawing from the tongues of early inhabitants of Tripura.

Census 2001 puts the population of Tripura at 31,91,168, of whom 9,93,426 (31.05%) belong to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category. There are 19 tribes namely, 1) Tripuri (5,43,848) 2) Reang (1,65,103) 3) Jamatia 4) Chakma 5) Lusai 6) Mog 7) Garo 8) Kuki 9) Chaimal 10) Uchai 11) Halam 12) Khasia

Tripura girl in traditional dress



13) Bhutia 14) Munda 15) Orang 16) Lepcha 17) Santal 18) Bhil 19) Noatia. Of them, nine (Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, Halam, Chakma, Mog, Lushai and Kuki) are treated as major tribes.

There are also 17 recognized sub-tribes of the Kukies. They are: 1) Baite, 2) Belalhut 3) Chhalya 4) Fun 5) Hajango 6) Jangtei 7) Khareng 8) Khephong 9) Kuntei 10) Laifang 11) Lentei 12) Mizel 13) Namte 14) Paitu, paite 15) Rangchan 16) Rangkhole 17) Thangluya.

Linguistically, Tripura tribes may be distinguished into three distinct categories. Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, Uchai, Rupini, Kolai and Murasing are Kok Borok-speaking tribes identified as users of Bodo Language of Tibeto Burman family. These tribes mainly migrated to this territory from a place called Shan State of Upper Burma and down hills of Tibet and linguistically are known as Bodo

group of Tribes. Halam, Kuki, Lusai and other tribes like Rangkhal, Molsom, Darlong Kaipeng are linguistically known as Kuki Chin group of tribes, who migrated from China. The language spoken by Mog and Chakma is known to be as a language of Arakan origin. These two tribes have mainly migrated from Arakan Hills of Burma and settled in south Tripura. The Chakmas migrated through Mizoram and live mainly in North and Dhalai Districts.

At an age when forces of modernization are marching remorselessly ahead to invade the cultures and lifestyles of individual communities, the tribes of Tripura present distinctive identities. They are simple but vibrant people who retain their earnest ways of life. That's a remarkable achievement in a world that seems to believe in cultural standardization.

A tribal hamlet





The Royal Palace of Tripura

Days long ago

History: Scholars have divided the history of Tripura into four parts, namely
 1) Mythological Period 2) Ancient Period
 3) Historical Period 4) Modern Period.

The Mythological Period dates back to the time when the Puranas and the Indian epics were composed. The land finds mention in the writings of Parasara and some other sages who flourished in the hoary past. The Mahabharata too has references of Tripura.

The Ancient Period begins in the 7th century when the Tripuri Kings ruled from Kailashahar in North Tripura and used Fa (father) as their title.

The Historical Period starts in the 14th century when the Kings of Tripura adopted

the 'Manikya' title and shifted their capital to Udaipur (formerly Rangamati) on the bank of the river Gomti in South Tripura. This is known as the most glorious period of rule of the Tripura kingdom.

The Modern Period begins with the Mughal

Tribal Belle



domination over Tripura and extends to the present day. It was during this period (early 19th century) that the capital of the kingdom was shifted to Puran Habeli and then to Agartala, in West Tripura. Since then Agartala remains the State's capital.

Nomenclature: There are divergent opinions on the origin of the name of Tripura. The traditional idea is that the name originated from Tripura Sundari, the reigning deity of the land. Another view is that the name originated from Tripur, a king whose name is recorded in the Royal Chronicle Rajmala, which is the only literary source of Tripura's ancient history. But a school of historians do not agree with this view. In their opinion, the character of Tripur was apocryphal.

Yet another theory says that the name came from Tipra, a totem (tortoise) which was worshipped as a kind of god. The Tipra tortoise, however, was seen as a malevolent kind of god who brings bad luck.

A more probable explanation, offered by some other researchers, is that the word Tripura is a nominal compound formed by the combination of two separate nouns, Tui (water) and Pra (estuary). The conjoining of these words comes to mean "the wide lower part or mouth of a river, into which the sea enters at High Tide".

This etymological analysis is backed by the kingdom's geographical location in the Middle Ages. During the 14th and 15th centuries, the kingdom of Tripura covered the whole eastern region of Bengal from the Brahmaputra river in the north and

west, the Bay of Bengal in the south and Burma to the east.

Kingdom: Tripura is known to have been one of the largest of Indian kingdoms, comprising as it did Sylhet, Dhaka and Chittagong divisions of Bangladesh, Cachar Valley of Assam, and part of Mizoram.

Maharaj Kirit Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur was the last king of Tripura before it merged with India on October 15, 1949. Maharaja Pradyot Bikram Kishore Manikya is now the crowned head of the Royal House of Tripura.

Faiths they live by

Religion is an important element to sustain tribal life. The dominant faiths prevalent among the Tripura tribes are Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism. The Tripuris call themselves Kshahtriyas and practise Hinduism. They had faith in animistic rites and rituals handed down from generation to generation. Other Kok Borok-speaking tribes like Reang, Jamatia, Noatias are a warrior race and also claim themselves as *Kshatriyas*. They are followers of Hinduism traditionally. But now a days a part of them have been converted to Christianity. The majority of the Lushais, Kukis and Garos are Christians. The Chakmas and Moghs are essentially Buddhists.

The process of embracing Hinduism among the tribal people of Tripura has continued since the prehistoric times. Christianity is a relatively recent arrival and conversion began when European missionaries started to visit the State in the early 20th century. Buddhism is much older in Tripura than Christianity.

Hinduism: It is hard to assign a date to mark the beginning of Hinduism in Tripura. All evidence indicate that it began in prehistoric times. However, some scholars have attempted to assign a tentative time during 500 BC as "the period of transition from Tribalism to Hinduism."

Buddhism: It was during the 5th or 6th century that Buddhism arrived in Tripura. The establishment of a Buddhist monastery on the Lalmai Hill and the conversion of a member of the royal family by Buddhist monks marked the beginning of the spread of this faith in the State. But Buddhism failed to spread as fast and wide as Christianity. Two tribal groups in Tripura are Buddhists and they are mainly the Mogs and the Chakmas.

Christianity: In fact Christianity appeared in Tripura during the reign of Maharaj Amar

Manikya, who had an artillery division comprising Portuguese soldiers (referred to in Rajmala as "Ferangi Sainya"). These army men were all Christians and were settled in a village called Mariamnagar.

The first batch of Christian missionaries entered Tripura from Manipur in 1910. Then came others. They worked as much to improve the lot of the impoverished villagers as to proselytize them.

Tribalism: Though the majority of the tribal people in Tripura have come under the influence of organized religions, their lives are still marked with remnants of their primitive faith. That is a legacy they carry from their distant past. The primitive tribal religions are a mixture of animism, fetishism, ancestor worship, totemism, spiritism, and witchcraft.

Traditional Jhum cultivation



Brief Ethnographic Accounts of Tripura Tribes

The Tripuris

The Tripuris are the largest tribal community in Tripura. They are also found in significant numbers in neighbouring Bangladesh, having similar culture and language.

The Tripuris took the name of "Deb Barma", conferred by the King of Tripura. The ruling Kings used the surname 'Deb Barman'.

The Beginning: It is hard to say anything definitive about how and when the Tripuris came and settled in Tripura. One opinion is that the Tripuris originally lived in Western China, near the Yang-Tse-Kiang and the Hwang Ho rivers. They came to Tripura via Dhubri (in Assam). Scholars assume that the migration took place before 65 AD, the year Buddhism was introduced in China. The fact that the early Sanskrit texts contain references to these people as "Kiratas". After settling in Tripura, the Tripuris gradually expanded their settlement and ruled Comilla, Noakhali, Chittagong and Sylhet (in Bangladesh).

According to renowned philologist Dr. Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay, the Tripuris were Bodos who first settled in the Brahmaputra Valley and then extended to other areas. They went to Tripura from Cachar (in Assam) and Sylhet. Dr. Chattopadhyay described the Tripuris linguistically as Indo-Mongoloids. From Tripura they spread to Comilla and possibly also to Noakhali district, and thus they occupied the mouth of the Ganges by the eastern sea.

Rajmala, on the other hand, offers a mythological explanation. According to court chroniclers, "King Druhya, the youngest son of Yayati of the Lunar dynasty, married a Bodo princess, for which reason he was disinherited. He set up a new dynasty in North-Eastern India and defeated the king of the Kiratas. And his progeny became a ruling race."

Allied Branches: The Tripuris are the main tribal group in Tripura who speak a common language, Kokborok, with local variations. The other branches of the group are the Reang (also known as the Bru), the Jamatia, the Noatia (also known as the Tripura or Nutan Tripuri), the Uchoi, the Koloi, the Murasing and the Rupini. They all are Kok Borok speaking tribe. Their living style, food habit, culture are almost same.

Social Organization: Each of the Tripuri branches had its own elementary social and administrative organization starting from the village level and up to the chieftainship of the whole tribe. They enjoyed their traditional freedom, which was so essential to tribal society. They kept in touch with their king through their headmen or the Sardars of their Village Councils.

The Village Council was an important organization in the social life of the Tripuris. The Council had the power to resolve serious problems like land disputes, breaches of customs, harassment of women, marriage problems, and so on. So the indigenous people of Tripura had evolved their own system of local self-government much before the modern panchayet system was officially introduced.

Lineage: The Tripuris and the other related clans are patriarchal in their lineage. In earlier times, the right to inheritance was from a father to a son (or sons), but that system has now been somewhat modified, though daughters are not yet treated on fully equal terms with sons in matters of property. The two-thirds of a man's property goes to his son or sons after his death, while the rest is shared by his widow and daughter (or daughters). If the widow stays with a daughter (or a son), that daughter (or son) is entitled to her mother's share of property after her death.

Home: The Tripuris, who are spread all over

the civil subdivisions of Tripura, lived mainly on the slopes of hills in a group of five to fifty families. They lived in a specially built bamboo house (Ua) raised two to five feet from the ground. The height of the house was considered to be a protection against the depredations by wild animals. This house is known as "Tong Ghar" where they now rarely live.

The times have changed, and Tripuris now also live in good numbers in the plains, where they no longer need to build such houses as they did when they lived almost entirely in hilly or forest areas. They now choose modern

Traditional rice husking





Tribal girls (Reang)

architectural designs for the places they live in. In village they live in mud wall house with GCI (tin) roof.

Dress: Breaking out of isolation and increasing interaction with people in the plains have influenced the tastes and outlook of Tripuris. However, traditional Tripuri women wear a dress called *rignai* which reaches just below the knee. They weave in their loom, a small piece of cloth, which they call *risa*, and they use this as their breast garment. Modern Tripuri girls wear Churidar-Pajama or Sari outside and *rignai-risha* at home.

Time was when women of every Tripuri clan wore their own kind of *rignai*, whose designs

were so distinct that each clan could be identified by the pattern of the *rignai* their women wore. However, intermingling of clans has led women to wear the *rignais* of other clans as well. They also use *rikutu*, which is a plain cloth of a different colour and shade. Tripuri women themselves weave the *rikutu* these days.

Cuisine: The cuisine of the Tripuris is well known as that of the Tibetans or the Chinese. They prepare tasty dishes in a healthy and hygienic way. Some of their dishes are so delicious that they are eaten even by non-Tripuris quite regularly.

Tripuris call their cuisine *Mui Borok*. They call rice *Mai* in their Kokborok language. *Maisa*,

Mami and *Guriya* are the three varieties of rice they use for cooking.

Some of the more popular Tripuri dishes are: *Awandru*, *Bwtwi*, *Chakhwi*, *Chakhwtwi*, *Chakhwtwi Kwthwng*, *Thokni Chakhwi*, *Berma bwtwi*, *Chatang*, *Mosodeng*, *Deng*, *Gudok*, *Hang*, *Ik*, *Muitru*, *Hontali*, *Muhr*, *Mwkhwi*, *Napek*, *Peng*, *Rabra*, *Ruk*, *Ser*, *Sok*, *Yohk*, and *Yaksapik*.

Berma, which is a fermented and dried form of a fish (*Puthi*), is frequently used by the Tripuris while preparing 'Godak'. It works as a flavouring agent, which gives an appetizingly pungent smell to their food.

One other thing to say in favour of the Tripuri cuisine is that they make a good number of their dishes without oil. That's surely good from the health point of view, as any doctor would appreciate.

Language: Kokborok, which is also spelt in a different way, is composed of two words, *Kok* (language) and *Borok* (man). So the combination of these words means "Language of men". In actual terms it means a language spoken by 8 (eight) major tribal communities having similar culture and lifestyle. They are also recognised as Borok Race.

Carrying basket to market



Kokborok is an ancient language. The earliest evidence of the written form of this language was found in Koloma Script when Durlobendra Chontai wrote a history of Tripura kings. Chantai used the Koloma script to write the book in tonal language. Later, two Brahmins, Sukreswar and Vaneswar, translated it into both Sanskrit and Bengali. Unfortunately, the Kokborok version of the book was lost in course of time.

After the disappearance of the Koloma script, Kokborok began to be written in the Bengali script. In 1897 written form of Kokborok "Kok-Borma" was published in Bengali script written by Doulat Ahamed. But Thakur Radha Mohan Deb Barma, whose book 'Kokborokma' (Tripuri Grammar) appeared in 1900, was the man who actually initiated literal works of Kokborok language and literature. Now both Bengali and Roman scripts are used to write Kokborok.

A Tibeto-Burmese language belonging to the larger Sino-Tibetan linguistic family, Kokborok has affinities with Bodo and Dimasa languages (as spoken in Assam) and Garo (as spoken in Bangladesh). In 1979, it became an official language of Tripura. There are organizations like Kokborok Unnayan Parishad, Kokborok Sahitya Sabha, Kokborok Sahitya Sangsad, Hachukni Khorang Publishers, Kokborok tei Hukumu Mission, Kokborok Academy and some other Kokborok Publishers which have long been working for the development of the Kokborok language beside Tribal Research Institute. There has also been a demand for the recognition of Kokborok as one of the constitutionally recognised Indian languages.

Literature: The emergence of Kokborok as a literary language is fairly recent. In the 1970's, a few books, including Smai Kwtal, a translation of the New Testament, were published. The book proved a big success and it went into many editions.

Hachuk Khurio (In the lap of hills) by Sudhanya Deb Barma was the first modern novel to be published in Kokborok. It was published in 1987. Earlier, in 1984, Shyamlal Deb Barma had published Dunderkma, a compilation of 12 short stories. Still earlier, in 1983, Naresh Chandra Dev Barma and Shyamlal Deb Barma had jointly edited Kok-Borok Koklob Bwchab, a collection of poems and was published by Kumud Kundu Choudhuri. Kokborok Ramayan was also published by Sri Pravash Ch. Dhar and similarly several literary books and translation works were done by Sri Nanda Kumar Deb Barma. These early works gave an impetus to literary activities in Kokborok language, and inspired many others to pursue literary careers.

Religion: The Tripuris worship many gods and goddesses as well as spirits. Their religious practices differ in some respects from those of the Bengalis, who are now the principal inhabitants of Tripura. For example, unlike the Bengalis, they do not offer puja to clay images of gods and goddesses. Instead, they worship deities in the shapes of bamboo structures or stones. Laxmi is their family goddess and is worshipped with devotion.

The following are some of the more important Tripuri deities:

1. Matai Katar and Matai Katarma (supreme deities of wealth and security).



Ker Puja

2. Akhatra and Bikhitra (jointly named Lampra, these twin deities, who are the sons of Matai Katar and Matai Katarma, are worshipped at the beginning of all social and religious ceremonies).
3. Tooima (goddess of water).
4. Sangram (consort of Tooima, Sangram is the god of wealth and prosperity).
5. Mailooma (goddess of paddy and other crops).
6. Nakchumatai (goddess of homestead).
7. Kalia and Garia (gods of success).
8. Saklakmatai (god of health).

9. Thoomnairok and Banirok (messengers of death).
10. Chaakal Jook (guardian deity of witch worshipped to be kept in good humour).

Now-a-days Tripuris are accustomed to hindu rites and rituals and observing pujas and festivals at par with hindu Bengalis.

Marriage: Scholars have recorded many forms of traditional Tripuri marriage. The main ones are as follows:

1. Hamjwk Tubui Kaimani (Marriage through Negotiator): This is popularly known as arranged marriage among Tripuris.



Preparation of puja on the eve of Pous Sankranti at Trithamukh

Garia puja – in marry making scene



Parents or guardians play a decisive role in finalizing this type of marriage, leaving the bride and bridegroom with little choice.

2. Nakkaisa Kaimung (Marriage by Exchange): Though rare among the Tripuris, parents exchange a bride or a groom as daughter-in-law or son-in-law.
 3. Kharlaiol Kaijakmani (Marriage by Elopement): A boy and a girl run away and get married without the approval of their respective parents or guardians. This type of marriage is now-a-days very common. But once it was restricted by social council. This practice is taken up to avoid paying dowry or bride price.
 4. Fuisai Tooboa (Marriage by Purchase): In this alliance, the bridegroom partly pays a lump sum of money to the bride's family as her bride price.
 5. Koklam Kwrwi Kaimung (Marriage by capture): Forcible marriage is permitted under this system, but it is not very common among the Tripuris.
 6. Hamjaklai Kaijakmani (Marriage by love): This form of marriage is becoming increasingly popular in Tripuri society. Though the bride and the bridegroom choose each other, marriage is held with the consent of their parents.
 7. Chamari Amar (Marriage by service): Prevalent in Tripuri society, this form of marriage sees the bridegroom leave his own or parents' house for his would be father-in-laws' place, which becomes his home for life. He cultivates the fields given to him by his father-in-law.
 8. Chamari Ampa (Marriage by Brief Service): This marriage is identical to Chamari Amar. The solitary difference is that here the bridegroom lives and renders services in his parent-in-laws' house for a certain period of time, and not for life.
 9. Sikla Sogya Kaimani (Child Marriage): This form of marriage, where a girl is married off before she reaches puberty, seldom happens these days.
 10. Burui Hamjagai Kaijakmani (Marriage by Insistence): In such a marriage, a girl requests her parents or guardians to begin negotiations with the family of the boy of her choice, and the parents or guardians comply even though they may not like to do so.
 11. Sindoor Phoolna (Widow Remarriage): The Tripuri society permits widow remarriage as also marriage for a divorcee or a woman deserted by her husband and sometime with remaining child.
 12. Halukchalani (Marriage to Relative): Though extremely restricted and uncommon, Tripuri society also allows this form of marriage on compulsion.
- Divorce:** It is permitted in Tripuri society on grounds like 1) if a wife is barren or a husband is impotent 2) if a spouse is affected with an incurable disease 3) if a wife is doubtful and possesses witch power 4) if a spouse carries on an illicit relationship 5) if married life is

marked with bitter quarrels and bickering 6) if a spouse is ill-tempered 7) if a spouse neglects household duties or is not capable of discharging them.

Birth: Like any other people, the Tripuris too have their own rites and rituals associated with birth, death and appeasement of evil spirits. They also observe and arrange rites and rituals as their Bengali counter parts in the village due to cultural assimilation.

Tripuri society imposes some restrictions on the work and diet of a pregnant woman. These restrictions seem to have stemmed from a combination of long experience and native medical knowledge acquired by the ancient population.

For example, a pregnant woman, who counts her pregnancy months from when she stops menstruating, are taught not to lift weights and do hard work during pregnancy. Curiously, the Tripuris have their own way of determining the sex of an unborn baby. A person supposed to be an expert in childbirth predicts the sex of the baby by assumption. This, needless to say, is no scientific method.

There are cases where a pregnant woman also wears an amulet made of, among other things, roots, barks and leaves of certain plants to keep herself out of harm's way. She receives the talisman from the village priest (Ochai), who presents it to her after the performance of traditional family rites.

The relatives of a newborn baby are supposed to get over their unholiness after eight days of the birth of the baby (in urban areas, this period extends to 12 days). A purification

ceremony, Suryadarsan, is held on the ninth day (in urban areas it is held on the 21st day in case a male child is born and on the 13th day in case of the birth of a female child).

Name-giving is part of this ceremony, though it is no longer practised by urban Tripuris. After the sighting of the sun is over, each of the people who would like to give the baby a name lights a lamp in the name of their personal choice. The name associated with the lamp that burns to the last is selected for the child. The urban Tripuris hold the naming ceremony on the sixth day from the day of the birth. Birth day is also observed by them now-a-days.

Death: Though the Tripuris now cremate their dead, but in case of accidental or abnormal death or of child below one year, they bury the body.

The Tripuris generally do not cremate a body at night. They prefer to wait for daybreak. All the relatives of the deceased are informed. The body is washed in warm water and dressed. Then the body is laid on a bamboo bier (talai) with the deceased's head placed in the northern direction. The relatives and other visitors pay their homage to the dead while the body lies on the bier. They kill a cock at the foot of the dead by striking it on the ground. Next, cooked rice is offered to the dead along with the killed chicken. Some other rituals are performed as well.

The dead body is taken out on the bier in a funeral procession to the crematorium, where some other rites like buying of earth, "digging of oven" and touching the dead's mouth with fire are performed. After the cremation is



Tribal village

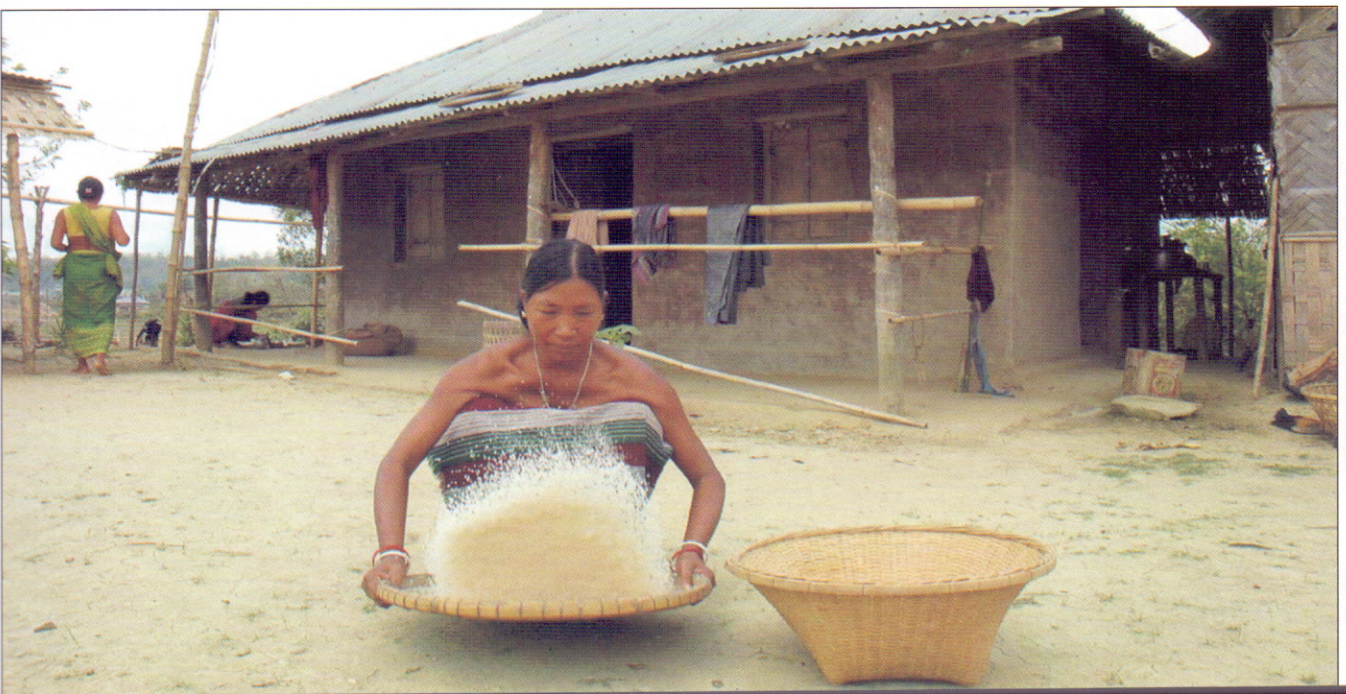
over, the funeral participants returned to the deceased's home. On the way, they take a purification bath in a river or any other waterbody.

The Tripuris mourn their dead for 12 days. The *sradh* and *maikhalai* (offering of food and drink to the departed soul) ceremonies take place on the 13th day.

Folk Medicine: Indigenous communities earned

knowledge by practise in their surroundings of dense and remote forest. Their livelihood had also been sustained by forest produces like green vegetable, green leaf, roots, bark and various mineral resources. Naturally therefore, they used to live on folk treatment on trial & error method through readily available ingredients in the forest. In this way the tribals came to know the method of survival made of folk medicine out of wild leaf,

Tribal women in day to day life





Tripuri dance (Lebang Bumani)



plants, roots, fruits and many other things easily available in the forest. Tribal medicine men used to treat patients affected with specific diseases through their own prepared medicine, the knowledge traditionally handed down to a person of the same family. It, however, sometimes did not show positive results rather caused death of ailing person.

The *ochai* occupies the centre stage of the world of traditional medicine in Tripura. He plays the dual roles of a priest and a doctor. Not only does he apply cures made from indigenous herbs but also performs magical rites as part of his healing process.

The first task of the *ochai* is to make sure that the illness is not caused by an evil spirit. Then he uses medicines made from herbs and animal products to treat the ailment. Tripura has a host of such medicines for treatment of a large number of diseases.

Music and Dance: The Tripuris are gay people who love music and dance. Like every other community, they have their own folk-based songs and dance forms, which were composed perhaps in the early days of their collective living out of their simple thoughts and emotions. These folk songs and dances are invigorated with sweet melodies of string instruments, as can be seen in *Musuk Sulmani* (hunting dance sequences).

Tripuris have folk songs related to ceremonies and Jhum culture. They have songs to celebrate love (*Jadukaliya*) and commemorate the dead (*Resekhagra*). They have songs to be sung during marriage (*Chamaritunmani* and *Hamjuk Rahamani*), harvesting, and arduous journeys through hill tracts (*Hachwog Kamani*).

They also have songs to lull children to sleep (*Owaing Khilimani*).

The musical instruments the Tripuris use are made of wood, animal skin and bamboo. Their principal instruments are the *Sumui* (flute) *Sarinda* (stringed instrument), *Chongpreng* (chordophonic instrument), *Kham* (drum), *Dangdu* (small rod idiophone) and cymbals.

Tripuri dance forms are expressions of tribal ways of life. Of them, *Garia* (performed during *Garia puja* in the month of *Baisakha*), *Mamita* (performed after worshipping the gods and goddesses of *Duapathar*) and *Lebangbumani* are more popular, and performed collectively by men and women. *Maikatal* is the harvesting dance performed in the months of *Bhadra* and *Aswin*. The dances are performed to the accompaniment of musical instruments.

Games: The Tripuris are vigorous people who are fond of games. They have their traditional sports and games common to all the Tripuri clans. However, these traditional games are increasingly losing popularity, though some of them are still played in rural areas. The urban Tripuri has grown fonder of games played at national and international levels.

However, noteworthy of the many Tripuri games and sports are as follows:

- *Achugwi Phan Sohlaimgung* (Pole wrestling played by two people).
- *Bumanikotor* (Children's game played collectively).
- *Dwkhwi Sotonmgung* (tug-of-war).
- *Kaldong* or *Kadong* (Children's game played with muli bamboos).



Playing Chongpreng

- Longoi Chokmung (Swinging game for children).
- Muphuk Sagwnang (Played to test a young man's strength).
- Musta Seklaio (Wrist fight).
- Sohlaamani (Free hand wrestling).

Tripuri and Reang girls at sports





Traditional Tong Ghar

The Reangs

Numerically, the Reangs are the second largest tribal group in Tripura, next to the Tripuris. There are dense Reang habitations in the subdivisions of Kailashahar, Kanchanpur, Amarpur and Belonia in the State. They belong to the Mongoloid racial stock. The dialect they speak is one of the Indo-Mongoloid groups of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. The Riang dialect is locally known as *Kau-bru*.

Migration: The Reangs are said to have come first from Shan state of upper Burma (now Myanmar) in different waves to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Similarly, another group came through the Mizoram Border. Reangs have lived in Mizoram in large numbers from the time of their migration and still live in

Mizoram and a part of them slowly crossed over to Tripura particularly to Kanchanpur, Chawmanu, Kailashahar, Ambassa and other places of North Tripura. Reangs settled in the Chittagong Hill Tracts moved to South Tripura and concentrated in Udaipur, Belonia, Amarpur and Gandacharra Sub-Divisions. There are legends galore. However, scholars say that they were part of the great movement of the Mongoloid population. Reangs are also found in Assam, migrated from the same region of Burma, particularly in Cachar areas. A large number of Reangs still live in Chittagong Hill tracts. Most of them however use title not as Reang but 'Tripura'.

Myths have inextricably been mixed with facts in the history of the Reang migration to

Tripura. Legends say the Reangs are closely related to the royal clan of the Tripuris. Tradition has it that a Tripuri prince, who was banished, went along with his followers to the Mayanithalang area of the Lushai Hills and established a kingdom there. His descendants ruled the State for generations till there was no rightful heir to the throne. That let loose anarchy and internecine feuds, which forced the chiefs of four sub-tribes (*Twikluha, Yongsika, Paisika and Tuibruha*) to go along with their people on a journey to Tripura by way of Chittagong. It was an arduous trek. The Reangs managed to cross the Dombur hill peak after two failed attempts. Uchai, same blood of Reangs, could cross the hill after the Reangs, and were treated as a separate tribe viz. Uchai; though their tradition and culture are the same.

The Reangs reached Tripura during the reign of King Mahendra Manikya. But they failed to meet the king and make their submissions owing to bureaucratic resistance. Their supplies ran out, and they suffered great privations, but that did not weaken their resolve to get their message across to the king. In order to gain royal attention, they broke the dam over the Gomti river while a religious ceremony was being held there. It was a serious offence, and the king sentenced the chiefs to death. The Reang chiefs then pinned their hopes on queen Gunoboti to whom they made their prayers. The queen prevailed over the king to withdraw the death sentence. That made Reangs to be the loyal subjects of the Tripura king.

Bamboo trading by Tribals





Reang couple in traditional dress

However, in their attempt to shift facts from fiction, scholars have concluded that the Reangs left their original Indian home in Mayanithalang because of internal feuds among some chiefs. A few of them, along with their people, migrated to Tripura and Chittagong centuries ago. That must have happened before the 15th century AD, because it is recorded that Dhanya Manikya (1462–1555), a Tripura king of the Deb Barma clan, had two Reang commanders in his army.

Groups and Sub-groups: The Reangs are divided broadly into two groups, *Meska* and *Molsoi*. The *Meskas* have seven sub-groups (*dopha*), while the *Molsois* have six.

The *Meska* sub-groups are: *Meska* (lemon tree), *Mwsa* (tiger) *Chorkhi* (spinning wheel), *Raikwchak* (red cane), *Uairem* (born of mixed marriage), *Tokma yosku* (toes of hens), and *Twimuiyafak* (tortoise).

The *Molsoi* sub-groups are: *Molsoi* (chilli), *Apet* (a type of fish), *Nogkham* (burnt house), *Chongpreng* (musical instrument), *Yakstam* (finger ring), and *Reang kachko* (chief). The pattern of naming of the sub-groups suggests that they have totemic names.

The 13 Reang sub-groups have 26 heads, who are called *Kotor Dopha*. These chiefs, again, are divided into two categories, *Rai* and *Kasko*. *Rai*



Typical Reang House



Fishing by Reang Couple

means Raja. It is a title received by the chiefs of the sub-groups. *Kasko*, on the other hand, means chief minister. The title is self-explanatory. There is a controversy among them about their title "Reang". They speak themselves as "Bru" instead of Reang because 'Reang' is only a sub tribe (sub-group) among the Bru Community. But since the title Reang is largely used by people outside their community, Reangs, have an identity crisis among them. It is, however, fact that Reang can read and write in Kok-Borok and no major differences are there except tonal effect.

Occupation: The Reangs are by nature still a nomadic tribe. Their food gathering activities were hunting wild animals, catching fish and following primitive method of cultivation, which is known as Jhum cultivation. In Jhum, they used to produce everything they needed. The cultivation is accompanied by religious rituals. First, they clear a site on a hill slope (*Haping Halap*) and earmark it for jhumming by pitching two poles of bamboo in the form of a cross. That's a warning against trespassing. Then they offer puja to the presiding deity of jhum (*Bura-chha*). and pray for a rich harvest. The seeds are sown after the first monsoon showers, and the crops are harvested in winter. Now-a-days, they have been shifting to modern agricultural methods.

The chief crops the Reangs grow are *Khul* (cotton), *Mai* (paddy), *Maichiny* (maize) all vegetables and *Banta* (a leafy spice). Gathering of edible roots and creepers are also done to supplement the income. They sometimes hunt animals for consumption of their meat. They enjoy group hunting of wild animals, share meat and arrange grand feast.



Home: The Reangs are used to community-style living, and they generally live on hilltops in groups. They build their huts (*Gaireing/Char Nouh*) with forest resources like poles made of bamboo or wood, bamboo strips (used to make the platform), and bamboo leaves or



Hozagiri dance by Reang Girls

changrass (used for roofing). The Reangs change home after one or two years to a new jhum site after observing ceremonial pujas and appeasing deities of dense forest.

However, the nomadic tendency of the Reangs is slowly waning. They are settled in certain

areas where they live mostly in mud houses with grass roofing. Sometimes GCI sheets are used for roofing in place of grass. But till today their nomadic nature and jhum based life ornamented them as one of the primitive tribes in India.



Ganga Puja

Rice pounding by Reang ladies





Inside Reang House



Ladies returning from field with firewood

Food and drinks: Besides jhuming and hunting, the Reangs also catch fish to supplement their diet. Being fond of fish, they fish in rivers and ditches during the rains, and in stagnant waters in the winter. They use traps made of cane and bamboo splits for fishing. Those have narrow openings and more than one chamber inside.

Rice, pulses, vegetables, dried fish, fish, bamboo shoot, roots and green leaves are their staple food. They also eat meat of hunted birds and animals. The Vaisnavites among them, however, are mostly vegetarians. Their special red rice produced in jhum is so tasty that only rice could be equal to a complete



Reang Mother and Child — Long way to go

lunch with all kind protein and minerals. Due to their natural food Reang's general health is quite good.

The practice of drinking liquor is widespread among both men and women in the Reang community. Liquor has also an inevitable presence on all social occasions. They have their own method of brewing their liquor known as *arraq* or *chow-arraq* (rice beer). Their primitive culture is, however, under process of transition.

Dresses and Ornaments: The Reangs are simply dressed. Their traditional clothes are not much different from those of other tribal clans living in Tripura.

Men wear a loincloth (hand woven), and a piece of cloth as shirt for the upper portion of the body, they also wear turbans. Women wear

A Reang Lady





A Reang lady enjoying smoking

a long piece of cloth for the lower part of the body known as *passra* or *rignai* in their own dialect and a short piece of cloth (*ria*) as breast garment. They make their clothes in their own domestic looms. The Reangs also wear colourful shirts and saris made in mills.

Reang women know how to appear beautiful and fashionable in their own way. The meticulous way they do their hair reflects this. They are also fond of wearing ornaments made of silver and other metals. Notable among the ornaments they wear are *Rangbutang* and *Anchali* (to wear around neck), *Tar* (for forehead), *Youhchow* checha (for forearm), *Kharu* (for legs), and *Jhumka* (for ears).

Crafts: The Reangs make bamboo baskets to supplement their income. In fact, basket-making is a popular craft among many other tribal communities as well. The Reangs collect the raw materials (bamboo) from forests and

produce containers of various shapes and sizes that could be used for different purposes like storing food grains (*Nau-khain*) and paddy and other jhum products (*Mai-Nauh*), and making alkaline water (*Chauhkhohi Khauh*). They also make combs, mattresses and implements for fishing and hunting.

The women make clothes not only for themselves but also for sale. These hand-woven clothes are not in demand among non-tribals, but there are takers among their own and other tribal clans. In fact, they are quite popular for their colour schemes and designs. The baskets they make are used by Bengalis as well.

Economic Activities: Reangs in Tripura are still recognised as primitive tribe. Their life and economy is therefore centralised with forest and its surroundings. Jhum cultivation and other food gathering activities like hunting of wild animals, birds, catching fish, collection of

forest based fruits, leaf and plants etc. are their major economic activities. However, Reangs are well experienced in other fields of economic activities like rubber gardening, plain land cultivation, maintaining small business, beside services in Govt. and Private Sectors.

Marriage: The Reangs are traditionally endogamous. They generally do not marry outside their own clan, though there have been some recent examples of inter-tribe and inter-caste marriages among them. Endogamy indicates they love to preserve their exclusiveness. Once they had cross cousin marriage as custom.

They have two types of marriage: *Halak chaya* and *Halaksam*. "Relations by marriage within the community and generation is known as Halaksam and the forbidden relation between different generations is known as *Halak chaya*", writes R.K. Acharyya in his book, *Insight into the Reangs*.

Though all kinds of cousin marriages are prevalent among the Reangs, parallel cousin marriage is on the decline, while cross cousin marriage is very few owing to disintegration of joint families.

Curiously, the Reangs treat widows, widowers and divorcees as unclean and disallow them from participating in social ceremonies. However, they allow marriage between a virgin and a widower or a divorcee. There is no bar to a widow marrying the younger brother of her deceased husband. Similarly, a widower is permitted to marry his younger sister-in-law.

The Reang marriage system is almost similar to that of the Tripuris. They generally accept

1) Marriage by negotiation conducted by the matchmaker called *Garwinda Andra* 2) Marriage by service, where the bride's father receives the bride price in kind or by service rendered by the bridegroom 3) Love Marriage 4) Marriage by exchange, where the bride's brother marries his brother-in-law's sister to strengthen the bond between the two families.

Divorce: Divorce is permitted if it is approved by the Village Council. One may ask for a divorce on such grounds as 1) Maladjustment of temperament 2) Aversion to work 3) Extra-marital relationship 4) Impotency 5) Insanity 6) Incurable disease. Adultery and offences against women are seriously viewed by the social council and they impose punishment.

Religious practices: Not unlike the Tripuris, the Reangs worship many gods and goddesses. Notable among their female deities are *Motaikotoma*, *Songrama*, *Tuiburma*, *Mainouhma*, and *Bani-Rao Khulongma*. The king of the deities is *Thuimairo*. Another important deity is *Buraha*, who is seen as being "omnipotent and omniscient". He is roughly the Reang equivalent of the Hindu god Shiva. Other deities include *Soinairao* (equivalent of the Hindu god Chitragupta), *Benaiga* (god of bamboo, cotton, jute and other commercial crops), *Jampira* (god of forest), *Sisi* and *Manji* (guardian spirits of the dead), and *Lampra* (god of the sea and the sky). They believe in spirits and the existence of the soul. Their animistic belief and thought are the colourful ethnic components of tribalism and primitive culture.

The Reangs came directly under the influence of Hinduism in the early 19th century and



Homage to Water Goddess

embraced Vaisnavism in good numbers. According to Acharyya, the influence of Lord Krishna on the Reangs "is tremendous". The Vaisnavas among the Reangs gave up eating meat and fish. Moreover Reang believe that Lord Shiva is their own God, who used to be a tribal.

Death: Like the Tripuris, the Reangs cremate their dead. Cremation is done on the banks of a river or rivulet. But bodies are buried in cases of death caused by infectious diseases like cholera, small pox etc. The graves are dug up after a few months to collect bones, which are immersed in the river. The bodies of Children aged one year or below are also buried.

The rituals that begin before the body is taken out in a funeral procession, finish with cremation, purification bath and collection of residual bones, known as *Borok Sakma*. The post-funeral rituals are called *Lukhlaimong*. The post-funeral rituals connected with unnatural deaths are known as *Kothainamang*.

Village Administration: The Reangs have a well-defined and well-organized three-tier

administration of their own, comparable to the three-tier panchayet system of modern India. The *Rai* (head of the community) occupies the highest position in the administrative hierarchy, followed by *Chapia Khan* (heir-apparent to the *Rai*). Next comes the *Chapia*, who is the heir-apparent to the *Chapia Khan*. The priest is called *Darkalim*. There are also other officials who run the village administrative system. All disputes are resolved in accordance with the customary laws of the Reangs. But due to social transitions in the community and modern wave in the life & culture of the people in general in the state Reang's traditions in social customs & taboos had to face transitions in spheres of Jhum based life to village administration, socio-religious life to economic activities and birth culture to death culture. Even then Reang's cultural heritage are still well practised than that of other tribal communities in Tripura.



Jamatia child

The Jamatias

The Jamatias are the third largest tribe in Tripura, next to the Tripuris and the Reangs. Like Tripuris, ethnically Jamatias are a part of Tibeto-Burman racial stock and equally a Mongoloid tribe, migrated to this land. Formerly, they were settled in Udaipur and Amarapur subdivisions of South Tripura district, but later they spread to other areas of the State as well.

Nomenclature: There is no one opinion on the origin of the tribe's name. According to one school of thought, the word "*jamatia*" is a corruption of the term "*jamayet*" which means "a gathering" in Bengali and Urdu. Another group of scholars is of the opinion that the Jamatias are called so for their employment in the army, which was called "*jamat*".

There is yet another opinion, which says that the name is a combination of two words, *jama* (tax) and *twiya*, which means "not to bear the burden". The Jamatias are called so because, as armymen, they were granted house tax (*ghar chukti*) exemption. In fact, the Jamatia soldiers enjoyed many such privileges in the army and were popular before Tripura kings.

W.W. Hunter, who supported this view, wrote: "The Jamatias are the fighting caste of Tipprehs and are well fitted for jungle warfare. They are exempted from all forced coolie labour, a privilege of which they are very tenacious and the infringement of which was the cause of sanguinary rebellion" There is also a legend, told by elders of the Jamatia

Jamatia girl in her traditional dress





Traditional Marriage Ceremony of Jamatia Tribe

community, surrounding the nomenclature. According to the story, Pub Narayan, a legendary Jamatia hero, defeated the Kukis and brought the image of *Biyagwang Goriya* (a popular Jamatia deity) back from their land. When they presented the deity to the king, the latter ordered that the deity be worshipped at a 'jamayet'. Since then the people who worshipped the deity in an assemblage and their descendants have been known as the Jamatias. In another opinion Jamatias are an assembly of warrior people of different tribal groups recognised by the then Kings of Tripura who had been given settlement in plain land for easy movement for war purpose.

Origin: Scholars assume the Jamatias have mixed blood in their veins. "As the armed forces of the previous rulers of Tripura

consisted of different tribes, e.g. Tripuris, Noatias and the Reangs, there is every chance of the admixture of various tribes in the formation of the Jamatiya tribe," says Dr. Pradip Nath Bhattacharya in his book, *The Jamatias of Tripura*. "There is also a little trace of the Kukis in this tribe as *Kherpang* lineage of the *Biyagwnang Goriya* came from Kuki land along with the image of *Biyagwang Goriya*. Besides this, to speak more precisely, as the Tripuris held a predominant position in the armed forces of Tripura, they played a vital part in formation of the Jamatiya tribe."

Dialect: However, the Jamatias are ethnically close to the Tripuris. Their mother tongue is also *Kokborok*, though with a drawl. This dialect belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family of the Tibeto Burman linguistic family and is

similar to the Bodo/Bodo group of Assam. Their dialect differs phonetically from its mother language *Kok Borok* in its partial or full nasalization, use of borrowed words from non-tribal languages and short forms of pronunciation. There is a rich oral tradition of legends, tales, songs, proverbs and riddles in the Jamatia dialect. Even then their language is officially treated as *Kok Borok*.

Occupation: The Jamatias rarely practice *Jhum* cultivation and have largely given up jhuming in favour of plough cultivation. When other Tripura tribe still clung to shifting cultivation in hilly areas, Jamatias practised plain land cultivation by tradition. Because of that they were not accustomed to make their habitat atop hills but preferred to live at the way side of rivers, streams and *charras*, where they would have green valley, wide field and wet land. Therefore, they are found in good numbers in the plains than other tribes. Another reason is that a large number of Jamatias were in Royal Army for which they had no scope for jhum cultivation.

Food: Jamatias are non-vegetarian by tradition. Dry fish & bamboo shoot are their most favourite items with rice. They also like meat and fish. A good number of them are followers of *vaishnavism* and avoid all kinds of non vegetarian items.

Concentration: Major concentration of Jamatias is in Takarjala, Udaipur, Amarpur, Teliamura, Khowai (Kalyanpur, Trishabari) and some pockets of other subdivisions of Tripura.

Social Administration: The Jamatias have evolved a well-knit three-tier system to govern over their society. It is divided into



Jamatia couple

three parts: 1) *Luku* (council at village level), 2) *Moyal* (council at regional level), and 3) *Hoda* (supreme council at community level).

One headman (*Chakdiri*) and two or more people are there to assist him to make up the council at village level. The headman, who is the authorized spokesman of the villagers, is usually selected by the village elders. He deals with minor crimes, social disputes and also looks after the religious code and principle of the village. He administers by traditional rules.

Thirty to fifty villages make up the area of a regional council, which has two headmen (*Moyol Panchay*), elected by the *adongs* of the village councils, to run the administration. These headmen have powers to resolve all inter-village disputes that may occur in their

region, in consultation with the heads of the village councils. But their verdicts are not always final.

Disputes or complaints that cannot be satisfactorily dealt with at the regional council may be put before the supreme council. There is no higher body to appeal to in the Jamatia social hierarchy against the verdict of the *Hoda* the supreme council.

The *Hoda* is headed by the *Hoda-Okra*, who is elected for five years by the *adongs* of every village council. Earlier, there was only one person to head the *Hoda*, but later they introduced the system of electing two *Okras* for two territorial divisions, Amarpur and Udaipur.

The *Hoda* is responsible for the overall welfare of the Jamatia community. It plays a vital role



Lampra Wathop (Puja for welfare) by Jamatia

in keeping the Jamatia society well-regulated. It deals with all sorts of crimes and disputes as also holds social and religious festivals. In other words, the *Hoda* combines in its powers social, religious and judicial functions.

Garia dance of Jamatia





Sukui - Traditional game played by Jamatia girls

Religion: The Jamatias profess Hinduism, Their religious beliefs and practices also reflect a combination of Vaisnavism and tribalism. At the same time, they did not totally abandon their animistic past. Most of their deities are akin to Hindu Gods & Goddess.

It was at the initiative of King Birchandra Manikya that the Jamatias switched their faith to *Vaisnavism* in the 19th century. Thereby hangs a tale. The Jamatias revolted in 1862 under the leadership of Parikshit Jamatia against the reign of terror let loose by a royal officer, Oakiray Hazari. The king put down the rebellion with the help of his Darlong (another Tripura tribe) soldiers. But he showed mercy to the rebel leader. This gesture moved the leader so much that he and his people decided to embrace *Vaisnavism*, as it was the cult followed by the king.

The Jamatias are devout *Vaisnavas*, so much so that they changed their dietary habits and became vegetarians. "It should be noted that as a result of embracing *Vaisnavism* they gave up eating of pig and other animal-meat including fish. Moreover they began to wear the sacred thread (*paita*) and started to appoint Brahmin priests for the performance of their religious functions," writes Bhattacharya. They consider the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Gita as their holy books.

The Jamatias offer puja to major Hindu Gods and Goddesses like Durga, Kali and Saraswati. They also perform their traditional tribal pujas like *Goriya puja*, *Lampra puja*, *Maylwngma puja*, *Khulwngma puja*, etc. with great community participation.

Goria is a benevolent male deity akin to Lord Shiva worshipped by other Tripura tribes as

well. The Jamatias hold *Goria* puja as a community festival in the same manner as *Durga* puja is celebrated by the Bengalis. *Goria* deity as per Hindu mythology is regarded as lord Shiva. As such neighboring Hindu Bengalees participate in *Goria* festival in large scale with great devotion for the welfare of the family members and specially children.

Lampra puja, which signifies the dissolvment of all kinds of impurity or the termination of a period of mourning, is held on different occasions like birth, marriage and death.

Maylwngma and *Khulwngma* are two common goddesses who are worshipped as family deities by the Jamatias. They are the deities of crops and cotton. The puja is performed twice a year. In the recent past it has been found that

a micro section of Jamatia population of the State has embraced Christianity.

Marriage: The Jamatias have two traditional marriage systems: 1) *Chawmrwy nahomwng* (marriage by service) 2) *Hanjwk Nahomani* (marriage at bridegroom's house).

In *Chawmrwy nahomwng*, the bridegroom has to stay in his father-in-law's house for a minimum period of two years. In *Hanjwk Nahomani*, the marriage is held in the bridegroom's house. However, a new system has emerged in which the marriage is held at the bride's house and the groom returns home the next day along with his newly-wed wife.

Cross cousin and parallel cousin marriages are prohibited among the Jamatias. There is no dowry system in their community. Though

Weaving by Jamatia lady



now-a-days certain conditions take place.

Divorce: The divorce rate is comparatively high among the Jamatias. Divorce is granted on various grounds, including impotence, barrenness, adultery, mental illness and high-headedness. Divorce pleas may be made to the village council. If it is not settled there, the regional council may be appealed too. If the case still remains to be settled to the satisfaction of both parties, appeal may be made to the supreme council (the *Hoda*). Now-a-days, the cases of divorce are also moved before the civil court if it is not settled in the social council. The supreme council generally pass their judgement on the basis of their customary laws.

Birth: After the birth of a baby, the relatives give him or her name, and ask the *ochay* (priest) to do *Lampra* puja in that name. A barber cuts the hair of the baby. The puja, done to pacify the evil spirit of water, is held on the banks of a tank or a stream.

If a mother cannot breastfeed the baby even after five days of birth, the female members of the family perform a ceremony called *Aboktwy khangmwng*, where seven cakes are prepared with the powder of *atap* rice and an amount of water is added to some rice powder and stirred to look like milk. This mixture is then stirred and offered to seven Jamatiya deities.

Death: The Jamatia death rituals are on the whole similar to those of the other Tripuri clans. The Jamatias burn their dead. The *shradh* ceremony is held after three nights by

the relatives of the deceased, but those belonging to the same lineage perform the *shradh* on the thirteenth day. In case of unnatural deaths, the *shradh* is held on the third day.

Children, who die before they are 18 months' old, are buried. If a woman dies in her pregnancy, the foetus is taken out of the womb and buried.

Clothing and Ornaments: There are no specific differences with respect to dresses worn by Jamatias than that of other tribes like Tripuris, Reang. Most of the aged men wear sacred beads (*Tulsi mala*) around the neck. The women wear "*Khasiamala*" and "*Parbamala*" (Types of bead necklaces). They are also very fond of flowers and use them for hairstyle. Jamatia women are fond of their traditional ornaments like *rangbwtang* (chain to wear around the neck), *brindaful* (brass or silver earring), *boliya* (a thick bangle made of metals), *sanggeynh* (hair clip), etc. But these ornaments have long yielded place to modern fashionable jewellery.

Crafts: The Jamatias are enough skilled to make things with bamboo. They make baskets of different shapes and sizes having different names like *langa*, *chenpay*, *khuturuk*, *tisiyng*, *dul*, *bayliyng*, and *wasung*. Besides, they also make various fishing gear as well.

Jamatias are now well advanced tribe like Tripuris in respect of education, employment, social and political eliteness.

The Noatias

The Noatias are the oldest settlers of Tripura and most akin to Tripuris. They have eleven major clans. Five of them viz. *Naitong*, *Deildak*, *Anaokia*, *Khaklo*, and *Totaram* still live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. The rest (*Aslong*, *Murasing*, *Keowa*, *Gorjon*, *Koalicha*, *Tongbai*) are the inhabitants of Tripura. Noatias are found mainly in South Tripura at Belonia, Sabroom and in some pockets of Amarpur, Kamalpur etc. areas in Tripura.

Origin: A school of thought believes that the Noatias were the last entrant to the Tripura race. They use etymology to support their view. The word Noatia means "newcomer". This tribe is also known as *Katal*, which too means new. It is believed that ruler of Tripura arranged for their 2nd times settlement in Tripura after staying outside the state in Arakan and then Chittagong.

However, this view is not universally accepted, because there are scholars who are of the opinion that the Noatias are "the original inhabitants" of Tripura. This theory has the backing of anthropological evidence, as the Noatias take closely after the Tripuris, who were the earliest settlers of the land. Noatias are also known as Nowa-Tripuri and similarly Tripuris as Puran Tripura.

Dr. S.B. Saha has attempted to present a credible synthesis of these two views in his book, "Socio-Economic Survey of the Noatia Tribes". According to him, the Tripura kings occupied Chittagong and Arakan in the 16th century. Many Tripuris went to live in the occupied areas at that time. They settled in an area called Naitong in Arakan. Naitong means an unlucky hillock in the Burmese language.



Noatia couple

In their new place of settlement, the Tripuris came in close social and matrimonial contact with the Chakmas, Mogs and Burmese. "Such matrimonial contact with the Burmese, the Chakmas and the Mogs brought into being a new tribe who, however, came to consider themselves different from the Tripuris," wrote Dr. Saha. They went back to Tripura after a long time and settled to the south of the kingdom. So they came to be seen as newcomers and became known as Noatias. However, that five of the Noatia clans stayed back in Chittagong and adjoining areas goes to indicate a substantial part of the community refused to return to Tripura. Thus



Noatia girl preparing food



Noatia lady carrying firewood

a large number of Noatias still live in Chittagong Hill Tracts and Rangamati area of Bangladesh.

Ethnology: Ethnologically, the Noatias are of Tibeto Burman language family having marked Mongoloid features. As stated, they bear a strong resemblance to the Tripuris with their broad heads, small eyes, flat noses and well built physique. They are yellow brown to light brown in complexion.

Naming of clans: Not unlike most other tribal clans, the Noatia clans too are named after the places they hail from or their leaders. The clan names are also traced to the heroic deeds of their chiefs. The majority of the Noatia clans were named when they were in Arakan. For example, the clan name of *Naitong* is taken from the place they were settled in. Noatias do not follow the *Varna* system. Some Noatias

identify themselves as Kshatriyas. They place Jamatias and Reangs next to them as per social hierarchy. Though they do not agree with this concept.

Dr. Saha, who made an elaborate field study on this tribe, writes: "During my field trip, it is learnt that those tribals acquired the following titles in Arakan, which was their original abode, as per their heroic deeds." In case of other clans, they received their titles from the Tripura Kings.

Language: The Noatias speak a *Kokborok* dialect called *Tipra* or *Murang*. But due to long stay at Arakan and Chittagong Hills, their language bears loan words of Mog and Chakma. Hence their dialect is most akin to Arakan and Burmese language. Bengali words are very much common. This is due to their prolong stay at Chittagong.

Economy: Agriculture is the mainstay of the Noatia economy. Traditionally, they practise jhum cultivation, though the method of plough cultivation is becoming increasingly popular with them. Beside jungle produces like bamboos, fire wood, plants, fruits, roots etc. sustain them. Some of them are agricultural labourers who make a living by tilling land owned by others. They also rear large number of poultry birds to increase their income. Women of Noatia community are very laborious and participate in all spheres of economic activities. They work as labourers, weave cloths, collect fuel, fetch water, apart from doing household chores. They also work during pujas, festivals, ceremonies, etc.

Village Administration: The Noatias have a headman, known as *Roaza* or *Choudhury*, for



Noatia lady enjoy smoking



Noatia handloom



Noatia basket



Noatia Dance (Tangbiti)



Garia dance of Noatia



Noatia girls in traditional dress

each village. He deals with rural disputes in consultation with senior villagers.

The Noatias also have their village council with powers to deal with cases of divorce, adultery, theft, breach of social rules or norms, etc. *Kaglainani* (divorce) is granted to either of the spouses on the ground of adultery, maladjustment and cruelty. The Chowdhury also mediates in all sorts of disputes related to land issues and social conflicts.

Religion: The religion of the Noatias contains elements of Hinduism and tribalism. Like the Hindus, they believe it was water all over before the universe was created. Their ancient tribal faith is now strongly coloured by Hindu influence with an accent on the Shakti and *Vaisnava* cults. "A good number of the Noatias are found to lead the lives of *Vaisnava* mendicants," writes Dr. Saha. The *Murasingh* though they claim to be a separate *Kok-Borok* speaking tribe still their origin background

ethnic components etc. are most akin to Noatia tribe. This sub-clan of Noatias are followers of *Vaishnavism* and they do not eat non-veg. item like meat, fish of any kind and follow all *Vaishnava* rites and rituals including funeral rites. During "*Kartick Purnima*" *Murasingh* observe community religious festival.

The Hindu deities they worship include Siva, Durga, Kali, Laxmi and Saraswati. They also perform pujas – *Lampra* puja, *Tuima* puja, *Ker* puja, *Goria* puja and *Nakri* puja, to mention a few as their tribal religion enjoins on them. They believe in magic and witchcraft and use them with elaborate rituals to drive off evil spirits.

Funeral: The Noatias burn their dead. People who die of diseases like cholera, tuberculosis, small pox and leprosy are buried. The body of a baby, who dies in the first month of its mortal existence, is put in a cradle which is

hung on a tree in the middle of a forest. After the cremation is over, the residual bones are collected and immersed in a river or any other waterbody. The *shradh* is performed after twelve days.

Home: The Noatias build their homes in the hills. They live in thatched cottages with walls made of bamboos or cungrass, plastered on either side with thick coats of a mixture of mud and cow dung. They are built on platforms at a height of about eight feet. These houses are known as *Tong Ghar*. Now-a-days, they build '*Machang Ghar*' in plain areas also and live in communal harmony. These homes are for the toiling masses. Well-to-do Noatias live in better houses as their neighbouring Bengalis do.

Marriage: Though the Noatias are a monogamous tribe, polygamy is not prohibited among them. Marriage by negotiation is the common forms of wedding. The negotiations are conducted by the families of the bride and bridegroom. Marriage by service, locally called *Jamai Khata*, also prevails among them. Now-a-days love marriage is very much common among them. The post-marital residence is generally patriarchal. Bride price is usually taken. Child marriage is a rare occurrence, but widow marriage is fairly prevalent.

Divorce petitions are dealt with by the village chief, who gives his ruling after consultations with the village elders. The *Chowdhury* of the village also looks after different social problems at the community level.

Food and Drinks: Rice is the staple food of the Noatias. They also eat vegetables, eggs, pork, chicken and fish. When food is scarce during

the monsoon, bamboo shoot is widely used as an article of alternative diet. They sell marketable surplus and purchase food stuff from nearby markets.

Home-brewed rice beer is a popular alcoholic drink. They mix leaves and barks of certain wild plants with boiled *atap* rice in an earthen pitcher, which is left to brew for three or four days, keeping its mouth covered with banana leaves.

Dresses and Ornaments: The Noatias are simply-dressed people. The men of their tribe use a loincloth to wrap around their waists and a shirt when they go out. The women use *ria* (or *risha*) to cover the upper part of their bodies, while for the lower part they wear a long dress known as *pachhra*.

Noatia women are fond of silver and flower ornaments. Heavy use of such ornaments is found during wedding ceremonies and other social occasions. Brides are presented with large numbers of ornaments made of silver, gold, etc.

The common ornaments that they use are: earrings (*dheri*, *taiya* and *wakhum*), necklaces (*kanthi*, *hashi*, *sat-lahari*, *panch-lahari*, *rangbak* and *mala*), wristlets (*kasar* and *kuri*), nose-rings (*kali* and *bali*), finger-ring (*yasitam*).

Crafts: Weaving is a cottage industry among the Noatias. In the past they made such items as wrappers, bed-covers, screens and *asanas* on a large scale. This industry has now lost some of its importance. But the Noatias continue to produce some beautiful items, including household articles, with bamboo and its roots. They also make pots and vessels.

The Halams

The Halams are known to be a group of tribes under same surname, same ethnic feature but having minor differences in languages and culture. They were nomadic in nature and known to have been a race close to Kukis. They are actually a section of the Kukis who accepted the rule of the Deb Barmas in Tripura. The Halams are also known as Mila Kukis. The Kukis call them *Rang-Long*.

Halams are divided into 12 clans, but later the number of their branches rose to 16. They are:

- 1) Kalai 2) Kulu 3) Korbong 4) Kaipang 5) Kaireng
- 6) Chadai 7) Dab 8) Sakachef 9) Thangachep
- 10) Nabeen 11) Bongsher 12) Morchhum
- 13) Rangkhwl 14) Rupini 15) Langai 16) Langlung.

Migration: Legends have it that the Halams migrated to Tripura from Khurpuitabhum, a hilly region located to the north of Manipur. *Khur*, *pui* and *ta* stand for 'source', 'river' and 'from', respectively, in the language of the Kukis. Linguistic analysis indicates the Halams must have had their original settlement near the source of a river, which, writes S.B.K. Dev Varman in his book, *The Tribes of Tripura: A Dissertation*, flowed "out of the Barail ranges which they through centuries have not forgotten."

A dispute broke out between Tripura and Manipur over the possession of a village, *Thanghum*, situated to the west of Surma and Barak. Some scholars think that the village was the original home of the Halams. The river (*pui*) by which they are supposed to have lived may have been the Surma.

Dialect: The dialect spoken by Halams is akin to the Kuki-chin group of the Tibeto-Burman



Old Halam lady

family. But the majority of them are bilingual, as they can speak both *Mrung* and *Tripuri* fluently. For economic reasons they also speak broken Bengali.

Occupation: The Halams are an agricultural community. Jhum cultivation still sustains their livelihood beside wild vegetable and roots. Hunting of any kind of wild animal still substitutes their food gathering activities. The process of change from jhum to plough cultivation is comparatively slow.

Religion: The Halams are closer to the Tripuris in their religious beliefs and practices than the Kukis, from whom they have descended. They are worshippers of the Shakti cult, though Vaisnavism is spreading fast among some clans like the *Kalais* and *Rupinis*.

However, like many other Tripura tribes, the Halams too follow a religion containing elements of both Hinduism and their traditional animistic faith, which goes by the name of Tribalism. They are idolators who worship a number of deities and also believe in evil spirits.

The principal Hindu gods and goddesses the Halams pray to are Siva, Durga and Kali. Other



Halam cultivators working in Jhum field

Young Halam (Kaipeag) girl making cloth in their traditional method





Halam Man Making Basket



Halam Handicrafts

important deities are *Sundar-rai-Bakundrai*, *Srikalarai-kolorai*, *Kallaki*, *Kholongma*, *Nachensing*, *Bayoi Taisik neekra*, *Adam Raja*, *Longthoria*, *Khumtalsin*, *Yamkaitho-yamanarayan*, *chhepite*, *Dhaleswari* and *Khacharmannu*.

It is a sign of their continued faith in Tribalism that they offer burnt fish and meats to spirits (ghosts and goblins) while worshipping the deities mentioned above. Rice and bananas are offered to Shiva and Yamanarain.

The Halams are also river worshippers. They offer puja to the river Surma. It is an important event in their religious life. They call it *Bara Puja* (the big puja), which takes place at an interval of four or five years. The river worship takes the form of a community festival with subscriptions being raised and enthusiastic participation of the people.

The Bara Puja is a great occasion for the Halams where a large number of goats, ducks, fowl, pigs and bison are sacrificed and



After the day's toil

offered to the river. This puja generally ends with a community meeting where matters of importance to the community are raised and deliberated upon. Some of the sub-tribes under Halam Community have been converted to Christianity. They observe all religious festivals according to Christian principle.

Halam (Koloi) girl preparing food





Bamboo dance by Halam



Batting of cotton by Halam girl



Halam couple

Marriage and Divorce: Monogamy is the conventional norm followed by the Halams, though polygamy is not ruled out. Child marriage is also not uncommon. Marriageable age followed by them is from 24–28 for boys & 20–22 for girls.

Marriage by service, which was earlier an important wedding form, is increasingly giving way to another that permits the payment of bride price. However, the period of voluntary service rendered by the bridegroom in marriage by service is known as *Jamai Utha*.

The Halam marriage reflects a secular outlook. No religious rites are performed. The arrangement of a marriage is done without the participation of the parents of the bride and the bridegroom. It is the bride and the groom who arrange the marriage between themselves, which surely indicates the freedom enjoyed by young men and women in the matter of marriage. However, the marriage parties are required to offer drinks to the community gathered for the function.

Both the spouses can seek divorce (*rottoi*) for adultery and maladjustment. According to the traditional rules, the Halams permit desertation of a wife by a husband with the payment of fine. The husband has to pay specified amounts of money and drinks for deserting his wife. That apart, if a woman is expecting and deserts her husband, a child, if

born, is claimed by the ex-husband as his.

Death: The Halams, who profess Hinduism, burn their dead. No strict time gaps are observed in the performance of obsequial and funeral rites. These depend on the choice of the people who are supposed to perform the rites. This, again, goes to show that the Halams have a society that displays a respect for individual choices in its practices.

Dresses and Ornaments: The women of the Halam community wear *dubra*, a single piece of hand-woven cloth, which covers the body from chest to knees. They also wear *ria*, but it is not so common.

The Halam women are fond of ornaments. Their ornaments are generally made of beads and conch.

Halam market at Zoitang village



The Chakmas

Chakmas are known to be a tribe of South East Asia migrated to Tripura in different waves through different migratory routes. They have three major groups like *Anokhia*, *Tandugia* and *Mangla*. Besides they have 8 (eight) sub groups like 1) *Milima* 2) *Tanja* 3) *Barua* 4) *Koda* 5) *Wuangsa* 6) *Buma* 7) *Kurchya* 8) *Kadua*. They are found mostly in Kailasahar, Amarpur and Sabroom subdivisions of the State. They are also concentrated in Dhalai District.

Origin: There are many opinions about the origin of the Chakmas and their migration to Tripura. However, on the whole it may be said that the Chakmas, who were originally Indians, left the country in prehistoric times, probably before the arrival of the Aryans. As Pannalal Majumdar writes in his book, *The Chakmas of Tripura*: "However, in ancient times,



Chakma couple in traditional dress

Inside Chakma kitchen





Chakma ornaments

the Chakmas went to Burma from north India and later on they entered into Chittagong through Arakan and proceeded towards Hill Tracts of Chittagong and settled there, or they entered into Chittagong Hill Tracts coming from Chiengmi or Thailand through the regions of north and central Burma and Arakan...."

So it may be safely concluded that the Chakmas came to Tripura from the Hill Tracts of Chittagong and Arakan which are contiguous with the State. Historical evidence indicates that the migration took place in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is also believed that at the time of migration to Hill Chittagong from Burma, a section of Chakma entered Mizoram and are settled in a separate District Council area of Mizoram. From Mizoram Chakma again entered in Tripura and settled in entire North and Dhalai District of Tripura. Their main concentration are at Longthorai Valley, Kanchanpur etc. Places. Apart from this, in other opinion Chakmas have blood connection with the Shan people who are known to be, as Bodo Tribes of Assam, of Mongoloid origin. Except religious culture,

Chakmas have similar ethnic relation with tribes of Assam. So Chakmas live in entire N.E. Region.

Ethnology: The Chakmas have typically Mongoloid features. They are yellow-complexioned, of short to medium height, and have oblique eyes and flat noses. They have little hair on their faces and chests. In their opinion, Chakma means "a person expert in trapping elephants."

Language: The conventional notion accepts G.A. Grierson's definition of the language spoken by the Chakmas. He described it as "a sub-dialect of Eastern Bengali." But this idea is no longer universally accepted. Still it is important that broken Bengali words are very much common in their language. This has perhaps happened due to prolong stay at Chittagong Hill Tracts with neighbouring Bengali Muslims.

Modern Chakma writers are opposed to Grierson's views. According to Niranjana Chakma, a prominent member of the Chakma Society in Tripura, the Chakma language, which has undergone radical transformations over the ages, deserves the dignity of an independent language. His opinion bears examination. Intellectuals among Chakmas propose to introduce a separate Chakma script in Burmese alphabets. Previously and till the date Bengali script is being used for writing Chakma literature and reading materials etc.

The Chakma language in its present form has a large stock of words derived from such old Aryan languages as Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit as also from new Indo-Aryan languages like Bengali, Hindi and Assamese. Besides, as

Pannalal Majumdar writes, "Many Chakma words are identical in use with the Tibeto-Burman and the Tibeto-Chinese languages such as Tibetan, Arakanese or Burmese, Ahom, Thai, Kadai, Bodo, Tripuri, etc." That apart, the Chakma language has its own alphabet and grammatical forms. So the demand for an independent status for this language cannot be dismissed out of hand as unreasonable.

Economy: The traditional village economy of the Chakmas in Tripura is based on Jhum cultivation. As some restrictions have been imposed on shifting cultivation in Tripura to save soil and forest resources, many landless Chakmas have started plough cultivation. Beside, like other tribal groups in Tripura, Chakmas work as daily labourers and also work in brick fields, agricultural fields, collect

forest produces and run small shops in village huts. They also cultivate land on share cropping-basis or live as vegetable vendors. Among Chakmas there are folk medicinemen, who live on selling of folk medicine and treatment beside agricultural works.

Home: As the Chakmas have to travel from one place to another in search of fertile jhum land, they build small huts on cultivation sites. As W.W. Hunter wrote, these houses are built "in the fashion of the hills with bamboos only and roofs thatched with wild jungle leaves/sungrass." In his book, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Hutchinson has written that these small cottages "are built entirely with bamboo with a *machhan* floor some six feet above the ground." Non-jhumias among the Chakmas live on "settled cultivable land."

Biju dance by Chakma



Religion: The Chakmas are Buddhists. They zealously maintain the monasteries in their villages. The vast majority of the Chakmas belong to the *Hunyan* sect of *Theravada Buddhism*. In fact, they have long been practising Buddhism, but their faith contains strong Hindu and animistic elements.

The Chakmas, whether living in Tripura or outside, follow two methods in performing their religious rituals: 1) scriptural 2) customary.

The rituals as mentioned in their holy books are performed in the same manner by all Chakmas, no matter where they live, while the customary rituals have regional variations.

The pujas the Chakmas hold may be divided into three categories. There are some pujas which are held in the family, and some held in the village. There are still other type of pujas, which may be described as clan-based. 'Bizu', it is the community festival observed on last day of Chaitra (last day of Bengali Calender year).

The Chakmas worship a number of gods and goddesses. In the family, they worship *Biyawtra*, *Parameshwari*, *Basumatti* (to achieve peace and prosperity), *Ma Lakki Ma* (to have a good harvest), *Ganga* and *Biyatra* (to purify the family and protect them against evil spirits). 'Mahamuni Mela' is a major festival among the Chakmas, which is attended by all neighbouring communities. This festival is also largely participated by the Mog Community who are also Buddhist.

The deities worshipped at village-based pujas include *Ma-Lakki-Ma*, *Than*, *Biyatra*, *Ganga*, *Dhaleswari*, *Parameswari*, *Kalaiya*, *Bhut Raja* and





Weaving by Chakma ladies



Chakma girls

Matya. They are worshipped for protection against diseases, epidemics, evil spirits and wild animals, including the tiger.

The clan-based puja is the worship of Lord Buddha for salvation of the dead of several generations of a given clan.

Marriage: There are two systems of marriage prevailing in Chakma society following rites and rituals as per Buddhism and following traditional rites according to their customary laws. In the former system, Buddhist priests (*bhikshus*) conduct the marriage. The advanced sections in the Chakma community follow this system. In the traditional system, it is the village *ojhas* who conduct the marriage.

Child marriage is a rarity, but Chakma widows are allowed to remarry. A widow is not permitted to wear ornaments until she is remarried.

Death: The Chakmas keep their dead wrapped in a white cloth outside the house before cremation. If the family of the deceased cannot afford cremation, the body is buried till the harvesting is done. Then the remains are exhumed for cremation after the performance of the last rites.

Chakma lady returning home from Jhum field



The Chakmas strongly believe in the idea of rebirth. The bones of the dead are collected from the crematorium and immersed in a river. The Buddhist *bhikshus* conduct the last rituals connected with death on the seventh day. A community feast is organised in memory of the departed soul.

Social Administration: The Chakmas have their own social panchayat system which is divided into three types: 1) Village Chakma Social Panchayat 2) Regional Chakma Social Panchayat 3) *Sola-Ani* Chakma Social Panchayat.

The way this hierarchy works is in many respects similar to the village administration systems followed by the Jamatias and some other Tripura tribes. This may also be called a community judicial system for resolving social and family disputes and trying crimes committed within the community with the help of customary laws. The community leader of Chakma is known as 'Karbari' who used to resolve all sorts of disputes amongst the community people in general. Besides there were Talukdar Court and Dewan Court. These courts had to decide over criminal and social offence like land dispute, divorce, adultery, illicit relation etc.

Food and Drinks: The usual Chakma diet includes rice, pulses, vegetables and milk and milk products. They also eat fish, reptiles and flesh of animals like the goat and the buffalo, pig and other wild animals.

The making of liquor has taken the form of a cottage industry among the Chakmas. Almost every family makes its own drinks. They produce two types of liquor: 1) *Dwa Chuni* 2)

Jogara. The former is the stronger of the two. Serving of liquor is common during major festivals.

Dresses and Crafts: The Chakmas have their own traditional dresses, though nowadays they wear dhoti and sari in the style of the neighbouring Bengalis. However, they have quite a number of traditional dresses like *Pinon*, *Ganja Khani*, *Khadi*, *Rangakhadi*, and *Chibiktana Khadi*.

The Chakmas, expert as they are in weaving and spinning, also make towels, shawls, pugrees (turbans) and bags made of cloth.

Varied and beautiful designs are an important feature of the weaving craft of the Chakmas. They call the designs *Flu* (flower). The Chakmas are known for their preference for bright colours. So the articles they weave are of bright colours and full of interesting designs.

Chakma handloom





Mog couple in traditional dress

The Mogs

Mog of Tripura are followers of Buddhism. Mogs is another Tibeto-Burmese tribe known to be originated from Burmese and Arakan tribes. Mogs migrated to Tripura from Arakan Hills where they were once the main tribe. This migration took place first at Chittagong Hill Tracts and then in Tripura.

Nomenclature: The Arakanese are known as the Mogs (the pirates) in Chittagong. But they hardly like to be called pirates. They like to call themselves by their ancient Burmese name *Merma* and speaker of *Merma* Language, which originated from the Burmese linguistic family.

Kingdom: Legends tell us the Mogs ruled a large kingdom at one time, so much so that the Tripura capital of Rangamati (Udaipur) was included in it. King Jaiharu Fa of Tripura is said



Mog monument



Mog Dance

to have wrested Rangamati, which was the capital of Tripura for over a thousand years, from the Mogs.

According to *Rajoang*, a chronicle of the Arakanese kings, "the kingdom of Mog extended from the Meghna to the borders of Pegu." Rambu was the Arakanese capital, which is now a part of Bangladesh.

Family: The Mogs have a patrilineal family system with a bias towards the eldest child. Half the property goes to the eldest son after the father's death, and the rest is equally divided among other sons. In a similar manner, the major share of the mother's jewellery goes to the eldest daughter.

Food and drinks: The Mogs do not have any food restrictions. The staple food of the Mogs is

rice. They are more fond of meat and dried fish than vegetables. The poorer sections among the Mogs gather edible roots and plants from the forests. Addiction to liquor is widespread, even though there is religious restriction. However, now-a-days their food habit has changed with a view to health care and modern ways of life.

Migration: A large Arakanese wave reached Chittagong in the second half of the 15th century. As S.B.K. Dev Barman writes: "Though they lost the northern areas to the Muslims, the southern part remained under them." Internal disturbances led the Mogs to leave Chittagong for Tripura and settle there. Earlier, they had been settled in Sabroom and Belonia, but later began to spread to the plains of Tripura and also in North Tripura.



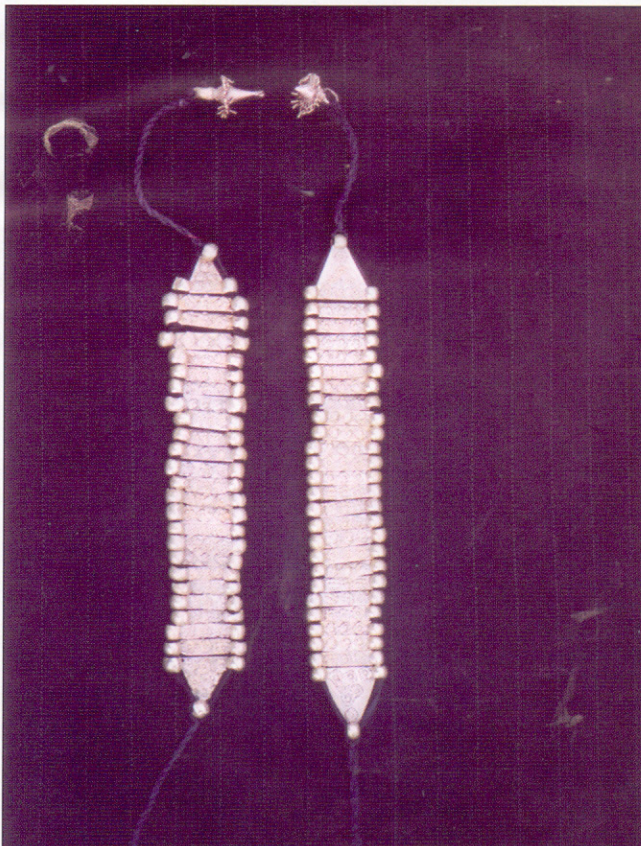
Mog ladies in Dheki Ghar



Mog dance



Mog puja alter



Mog ornaments



Mog handloom



Typical Mog musical instrument

Economy: Mog's economy is based on forest-oriented activities, plain-land agriculture, wage earning through physical labour in different sectors and unspecified occupations. Their women also work equally with the male members in the family to raise income. Their income also comes from selling of marketable surplus of paddy, wheat, cash crops, etc and out of rearing domestic animals & poultry birds.

Death: Mogs cremate their dead. They observe one week death pollution. If a child below 5 years, dies the body is buried. The dead body is generally kept inside a room till all the relatives of the deceased arrive. Funeral music

played till the priest advises for a funeral procession and utters chants as per religious law before the body. After cremation, a grand feast is arranged in the deceased's house by his/her elder son or nearest kin.

Language: The Mogs speak a dialect, which is described by Grierson as part of the Assam-Burmese group of the Tibeto-Chinese family of languages. They have their own written script in Arakan Language format.

Religion: An overwhelming majority of the Mogs are Buddhists. The Buddha is their God. But, not unlike other tribal groups, they have their local deities like Chinni and Chichi. Besides, they also worship Hindu goddesses

like Kali and Ganga beside many household deities.

Claude Levi-Strauses has described the religion of the Mogs as "a syncretistic religion in which elements of ancient animistic cults continue in spite of the official confession of Buddhism."

However, every Mog village has a Buddhist temple (*kheyang*). A priest (*shamphura*), who takes a vow of celibacy, is in charge of the temple. The Buddhism practised by the Mogs in Tripura is in many respects similar to the way the Buddha is worshipped in Burma (now Myanmar). "The organizational structure of their order is similar to that of the Sangha in Burma," writes S.B.K. Dev Barman.

Festivals: The boat festival, which takes place in September–October, and the water festival, which is similar to the Hindu festival of *Holi*, are the two important festivals observed by the Mogs. However, the Mogs settled in Tripura do not celebrate the boat festival, which is observed on a full-moon night. *Maha Muni Mela* is also another important festival of Mogs observed by them with joy at South Tripura. Thousands of non-tribals also participate in this festival.

Village Organisation: The Mogs have their own village council whose chief is known as *Bomarang* or *Choudhury*. The council functionaries are elected on the basis of their wealth and social status. The *Choudhury* presides over the council meetings and has the power to levy a fine.

Endogamy: According to some scholars, the Mogs of Tripura are broadly divided into two endogamous clans (*Palamsa* and *Chota*

Palamsa), but Dev Barman says that endogamy "is not strictly followed". The census report of 1961 mentions eight sub-clans of the Chota Palamsa: *Palangsa*, *Patamsa*, *Logeiassa*, *Rekhoisa*, *Karaonurusa*, *Lungdungsa* and *Kheuisa*.

Marriage and Divorce: The Mogs have two types of marriage: Marriage by Negotiation and by Service. Love marriage is also allowed. Divorce and remarriage are permitted without social complications. Weddings are conducted in simple ceremonies. It is not essential for the Mogs to give large community feasts on the occasion of marriage. That shows the Mogs are a liberal community.

The Mogs respect individual choices and allow greater degrees of freedom to their women than some other tribal communities. In fact Mog women in the family have more important role than men.

A Mog Buddhist monk





Kuki couple

The Kukis

Though Kukis were identified with the Lushais in the past, the 1931 census report made a distinction between the two communities. Yet it is not easy to differentiate one from the other. As A.M. Dutta writes in his book, *A Study on the Lushais of Jampui Hills in Tripura*, "Although it is difficult to distinguish the Lushais from the Kukis, broadly speaking, the Lushais of Tripura are today far more advanced than the Darlong Kukis in matters of education and social advancement." So these tribes can't be separately identified within the nomenclature of Kukis.

Dutta's views are supported, though not exactly in the same words, by Ramgopal Singh, author of the monograph, *The Kukis of Tripura*. He writes, "In spite of some differences existing between the Kukis and the Lushais, they are practically the same group of people with common racial stock and do not actually signify two different tribes."

The Kukis are known by different names to different communities. The Bengalis call them Kukis, the Cachharis (people of Cachhar in Assam) call them Lushais, and they call themselves Hare-ems. In the Chin Hills region and along the Burma border, the Kukis are known as Chins. In Tripura, the Kukis are known as the Darlongs as well. However, 'Kuki' has been accepted as the generic name for the community.

Headhunters: That the Kukis (Lushais) were headhunters till the middle of the 19th century has been recorded in the Tripura District Gazetteer. They hunted heads during the



Old Kuki lady

funerals of their chieftains. This is also borne out by the etymological analysis of the word 'Lushai' which is evidently a slight variant on the word 'Luchai'. *Lu* means head and *Chai* means cutting. The word 'Darlong' too means the same. *Dar* means head and *Long* means to cut. So both of the community are popularly known as Kuki tribe. Though they express their grievances to be recognized as Kukis rather they feel proud to call them as Darlong and Lusai and commonly as Mizos.

Migration: The Kukis have been settled in Tripura for a long time. They are mentioned in *Rajmala*. The story told is that Lord Shiva fell "in love with a Kuki girl, who was in consequence put to death by his shrew of a wife". In another place, it is said that Udaipur was under the rule of the Kukis. It became the Tripura capital

when the Kukis were defeated by the kings of Tripura.

Legends apart, scholars assume that the Kukis came to the present area of Tripura in different waves. Those who arrived first came to be known as the Halams, which is why some among the Halams still claim themselves as Kukis. Those who arrived next were probably the Darlongs and the Lushais.

The original home of the Kukis has been identified as Chin Hills. However, there is no one opinion in this matter.

The Kuki International Forum (KIF) says that "the term 'Kuki' refers to an ethnic entity that spreads out in a contiguous region in Northeast India, Northwest Burma (Myanmar), and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. The dispersal of this people by the existing international boundaries is the result of initial British colonialists' deliberations."

Kuki musical instrument (Rewchiten)



The KIF further says that "prior to the British annexation of their land (before the independence of Burma and India), the Kukis were said to be living in their country. However, today they are scattered in different parts of the world. In present-day Burma, the Kukis predominantly occupy Upper Sagaing Division, particularly in the Kabaw Valley (*Kangmang Phaicham*). On the Indian side, the Kuki population spreads out to the states of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura. The Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh also has a significant Kuki population."

Clans: The Kukis of Tripura are divided into 26 clans. They are: *Paitu, Chotlang, Khareng, Baibek, Amrai, Chamlen, Batle, Riyete, Balta, Rangchon, Rangchia, Chhailoi, Jangtei, Pailai, Beltu, Paite, Phun, Phuntei, Lentai, Hraltei, Sowalai, Powaktu, Dhum, Burdoia, Chhaljen* and *Rangte*.

Language: All Kuki clans speak the same dialect with local variations. The language of the Kukis, which has affinities with Manipuri, belongs to the Indo-Mongoloid branch of the Tibeto-Burman family.

It is said that "the Kukis were in possession of some documents, inscribed on leather, known as *Savun Lekhajo'l* (scroll). These scrolls were lost in the passage of time, and along with this, the Kukis also lost their script."

The Kukis now use the Roman script to write their language. In Tripura Lusai language is being taught in school in areas dominated by Lusai tribe.

Economic Activities: The Kukis do jhuming, fishing, food-gathering and hunting. They generally live in the hills in houses on raised bamboo platforms. Jhum cultivation is the traditional practice. Bamboo jungles are



Kuki dance

cleared in the months of November–December for jhuming. Come the rains, and they plant seeds of cotton, paddy, melon, pumpkin, sesamum, etc. But not unlike other tribes, the Kukis too have now taken too plough cultivation, though not entirely.

The crops the Kukis grow meet their food requirements for only half the year. So they have to gather food for another six months. With baskets on their backs and choppers in hands, young Kuki girls go into the jungles in search of food. They generally collect roots, vegetables and tubers. They also collect bamboo shoots, which they cook with vegetables, dried fish and burnt meat. That's a favourite dish of the Kukis.

The Kukis do not discriminate much in the matter of eating flesh. They hunt deer, wild bears, squirrels, monkeys, elephants and dogs for their meat. They also domesticate animals and birds like pigs, goats, chickens, ducks and pigeons and sacrifice them for eating on special occasions. It is the men who go hunting. They know various form of traps

which are used for trapping wild animals and birds.

Young boys and old men go fishing in rivulets and streams in or around their villages and swamps in the foothills.

Religion: Traditionally, the Kukis believe in a supreme God whom they call *Pathien*. They also worship various spirits and Lord Shiva. They do believe that there is a life after death. But animism took a back seat with their conversion to Christianity. They still follow their traditional rites and rituals apart from performing Christian religious rites.

Marriage and Divorce: The Kukis are endogamous, and so seldom marry outside their tribe. Ramgopal Singh, the author of *The Kukis of Tripura*, writes, "It was observed from my survey that only three families married (into) other (than the) Kuki tribe in the sample 115 families."

According to S.B.K. Dev Barman, polygamy is "not prevalent" among the Kukis. Pre-marital cohabitation is not permitted in the rule book, but is allowed because it almost always results in marriage. Both parallel and cross-cousin marriages are allowed in Kuki society. Monogamy and adult marriage constitute the marital norms. But negotiation is the most common way of finalising marriage in the Kuki society.

Divorce is permitted only with the community's consent. The spouse who appeals for a divorce has to pay compensation to the other party and give a community feast. Widows and widowers are not barred from marrying again. Child marriage happens only rarely, if at all.

Village Administration: A Kuki village is like a self-sufficient State run by a chief known as *Sangalthong*. It is the duty of the village chief to settle all kinds of disputes in consultation with the members of the village council. The chief is elected by the villagers, who "decide on whom the chieftainship will be conferred and they go to his house with a bottle of rice beer and request him to be the leader of the village," writes Ramgopal Singh.

Disputes among villages are settled by the *Ujirs*, who are appointed by the Kuki Raja or *Lal* for a certain area. It should be mentioned in this connection that the Tripura kings would appoint the *Lals* for the Kuki community. The duty of the *Lal*, who was accountable to the king of Tripura, was to control his community and look after its welfare. When a democratic administration was introduced in Tripura after the State's merger with India, the position of the *Lal* weakened and that of the village chieftain was strengthened.

Dresses and ornaments: The Kukis seldom wore clothes in the distant past. The only male clothing was a long piece of cotton cloth, called *Mosol-rem*. In addition, men wore turbans. But changes came in their dress pattern with the passing of time. They began to wear dhoti (*Pom-seng*) and shirt (*Pom-pur*), while their women put on a dress called *pon-jel* to cover their waist and *Pon-sil* to wrap round the upper parts of their bodies. The influence of Christianity brought about further changes. Now the Kuki boys wear trousers and shirts. The girls wear skirts, blouses and long gowns.

Misi (also called *Rathoi*), a special kind of garland made of a reddish glass-like material, is a favourite ornament of the Kuki women. Besides, women wear earrings made of bamboo strips. It is called *Nabe*. However, Kuki women have begun to use ornaments like necklaces and bangles as well.

Darlong (Sub-tribe of Kuki) cultivators of their pineapple orchard



The Garos

The Garo is another migrated tribe who came and settled in Tripura during the first part of 19th Century and at a large scale after 1950 A.D. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Sino-Tibetan group. They have ethnic and linguistic affinity with Kacharis, Rabhas, Kochs, Mikirs, Tipperas and many other tribes of the North-Eastern region of India.

Early History: In India, the Garos are distributed over Kamrup, Goalpara and Karbi Anglong in Assam, Garo Hills in Meghalaya, and the Sadar and Udaipur subdivisions of Tripura. The Garos are also found in substantial numbers in the Mymensing district of Bangladesh with their original cultural heritage and practices.

Legends have it that the Garos, who originally lived in Tibet, first came to Meghalaya over 400 years ago. They crossed the river Brahmaputra and settled in the river valley. Later, they are said to have been "driven up the hills" by some other tribes.

Migration: In Tripura Garos migrated from Bangladesh and recently from Meghalaya and Assam. They are broadly divided into two groups: *Achik* and *Dabeng*. "The Garos of Tripura belong to the Dabeng division and migrated to India from the Mymensing and Sylhet districts of Bangladesh," writes Dr. Prodip Nath Bhattacharjee in his book, 'The Garos of Tripura'. He gives five probable reasons for the Garo migration to Tripura, which are as follows:

1. Scarcity of sufficient land for jhuming in Mymensing and Sylhet districts.



Old Garo man

2. Communal disturbance in Pakistan immediately after the partition of India.
3. The lure of Tripura's vast uncultivated land.
4. The affinity to hillocks with adjacent plain land that Tripura has in plenty.
5. Their long-standing socio-cultural relations with the Bengalis were also another factor that induced them to settle in Tripura.

About 200 families came from Mymensingh in the first Garo exodus to Tripura. They settled in Indranagar and Nandannagar areas in the vicinity of Agartala. More came later. The Garos then began to spread to different areas like Monainagar, Nagichara, Mahishkhola, and Pritilata in the Sadar subdivision of Tripura.



Garo lady in traditional dress



Wangala dance of the Garos



Now they are mainly concentrated in the Sadar and Udaipur subdivisions of the Sate. Even today they come and settle in Tripura from Meghalaya and Bangladesh.

Language: The Garos speak a dialect belonging to the Bodo group of the Sino-Tibetan language family. It is a spoken language, and so there is no tradition of writing among the Garos in their own language.

Lineage: The Garos are a matrilineal tribe. The mother is the mistress of the family, and her property goes to her daughters after her death. If a woman has more than one daughter, she names her successor (*Nokma*). It is the youngest daughter who is usually named, and she inherits the major share of her mother's property. The rest is distributed among other daughters at the time of their marriage.

The brothers, if any, have no claim to their mother's property. They leave their parents' house at a young age, and live in the village dormitory (*Nokpanti*) till they get married. Once married, they go to live in their in-laws' houses or set up their own establishments to be with their wives. Every large Garo village has a dormitory, which serves as a guest-house and a law court as well.

Economy: The majority of the Garos in Tripura live in rural regions. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood. Those who have land practise settled cultivation, and those who do not are engaged in jhuming in remote areas. According to Dr. Bhattacharjee, an important feature of their economic structure is the active participation of women in agricultural activities. Rubber is also a new area of generating income before them.



Garo flute player

However, some Garos are also engaged in other kinds of work like house construction, trade and commerce, livestock tending, etc. But they are very small in number.

Religion: As stated, the Garos are a predominantly Christian tribe. Curiously, all the Garos of Tripura declared themselves as Hindus in the 1911 census. But Christianity spread so fast that the Christians soon outnumbered the Hindus in the community. The 1981 census report put 54% of the Garos living in Tripura as Christians and 45.22% as Hindus. But both the religious communities have sweet relation and peaceful co-existence. They unitedly observe 'Wangala' festival and other major ceremonies.

The Hindu Garos cling to their faith. The priest (*Kamal*) is the central figure in the traditional Garo religious set-up. In fact, the Hinduism that the Garos practise is a combination of monotheism, polytheism and animism. They worship spirits (*Middis*), but the manner of worship varies from place to place.

Marriage: The traditional Garo attitude to marriage is that it is made in heaven, and so it is wrong to break it. In other words, the marital bond is treated as something of



Garo couple

permanent nature. Marriage within a *machong* (exogamous sub-clan) is prohibited, and is not desirable between the members of the same *chatchi* (clan). Their marriages take place in between ages of 18 to 22 for girls & 25–28 for boys.

The Garos consider the match between one's daughter and nephew (son of sister) as the most desirable one. Though marriages are held following prolonged negotiations, marriage by elopement (*Chunapa* wedding) also takes place. If the husband dies, the widow remarries his younger brother or any nearest kin of the family with a view to avoid dispute over land.

A rather peculiar custom is associated with widow marriage. If a bachelor marries a widow (*randi*), then the latter's daughter, if any, by her previous marriage becomes the second wife (*jiggidi*) to him. On the other hand, if a man's wife suffers a protracted illness or turns out to be barren, he is permitted to take another wife

from among his wife's younger sisters.

Food and Drinks: Garos have a fondness for roasted food. They traditionally use the pig's fat as their medium for cooking instead of mustard oil. Some of their favourite dishes are *Kharichi* (prepared with dehydrated fish and alkaline water), *Godok* (a vegetable dish), *Gabba* (prepared with fish or vegetables), *Sua* (roasted flesh of birds), and *Yamti* (cake).

Consumption of wine is common. It has also an important role in their socio-religious life, for wine is drunk in almost all ceremonies.

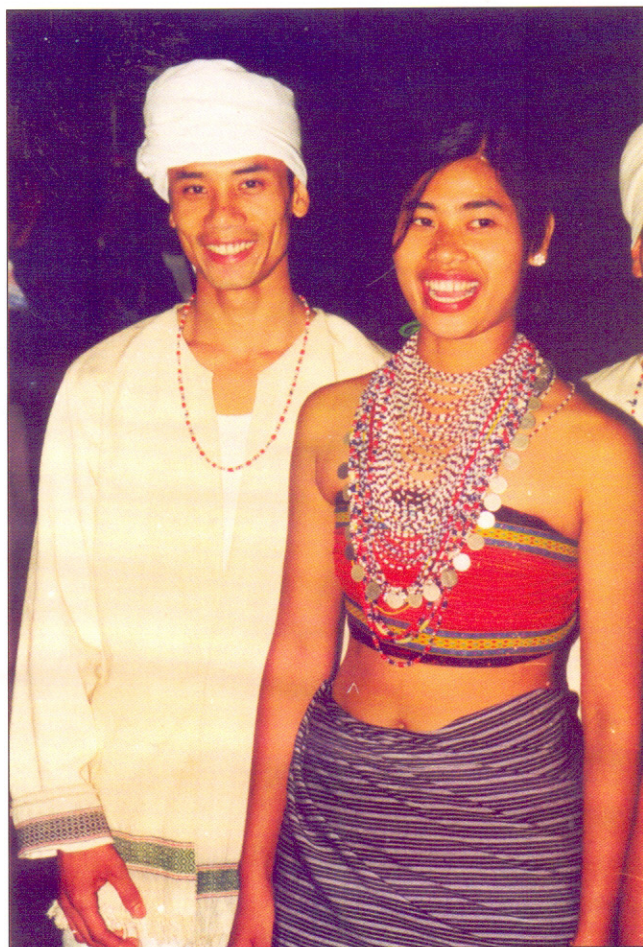
The Garos generally drink two kinds of wine: *Arak chu* (refined wine) and *Bwtchichu mandi* (unrefined wine made from boiled rice). An ingredient, known as *chawanchi*, is used as the fermenting agent in the preparation of wine. It is a mixture of the barks or leaves of *Samakhi* tree and ground rice-powder. Leaves of sugarcane, chilli, jackfruit, etc. are added to make the taste better.

The Uchais

Uchai is a small tribe living in Tripura. They have migrated from Arakan Hills. As per 2001 Census they are only 2,103. According to their folk tale, Reang and Uchai are of same origin. In fact both the Reang and Uchai have common identity of Mongoloid Origin and their language is also similar with *Kok Borok*, which is a language of Tibeto-Burman Linguistic family.

Habitation: Uchais live in Amarpur and Belonia Sub-Divisions. They are also found in Jampui Hill and Dasda areas of North Tripura. However their major concentration are around Tirthamukh, Jatanbari, Bara Bari, and Depa Charra of Amarpur. It is said that Uchais first migrated to Chittagong Hill Tracts from Arakan and then entered Tripura mainly in the Southern part of the State. They live in Tong (Gaireng), a house built by chan grass and bamboos.

Economy: Traditionally Uchais were jhum cultivators and still practise jhum. In jhum, they used to produce every thing they need. Uchais are expert in hunting wild animals and birds beside catching fish and collecting forest produces as subsidiary food components. Rice is their staple food. They are fond of dry fish. They use Bow (*pa*) and Arrow (*pansu*), *Kubui*, *Toinga* etc. made of different metal for the purpose of hunting and jhum cultivation. Uchais rear large number of cattle. Pig, goat, poultry birds etc. to sustain their livelihood. Uchais now-a-days have been accustomed to plough cultivation. They are also well-known for their handicraft works made of bamboos and cane.



Uchai couple

Social life: Uchais are socially organised community. They have 12 (twelve) clans like *Paikatma*, *Kheyang*, *Jalai*, *Ukachy*, *Urang*, *Takma* etc. In Tripura, 3(three) clans namely *Paikatma*, *Kheyang* and *Jalai* among Uchais could be found. Their clan members still reside in Chittagong Hills.

Family: Uchais believe in Joint family concept of life. They prefer it for security of life and division of labour in jhum field and group hunting of wild animals. But this joint family concept is now rarely found. In family, the relation between elderly person and others is very much sweet. Father and grand father in the family are therefore recognised as authoritarian head. Property right also

transmits from father to Son. Daughter in the family is regarded as Laxmi, symbol of prosperity in the family.

Marriage: There is nothing special to mention about Uchais marriage system. Most of the mongoloid tribes follow the similar custom and tradition regarding marriage alliances. Guardian of Uchai boy visits house of the preferred girl and after a series of discussion with guardian of the proposed girl, finalise marriage, if both the parties agree to execute the marriage. In the whole process, to show respect to each other and to follow customs of the community, bride-price, wine, eatable quantity of meat for community feast are arranged by both the parties. *Jamikhata* (compulsory service for two years in the bride's house) though was in force for the bridegroom, but it is now not a hard and fast rule.

Divorce: Divorce is a natural phenomana in all the human societies in the world. Uchais Community is also not outside this norm. Among them divorce is permitted by the village council after a series of sittings. In that case, wife is compensated by the husband according to the strength of the ground of divorce appeal. Their supreme council is called "SAPRA".

Religion: Uchais follow the same religion as the Tripuris, Reangs and Jamatias. They are the followers of Hinduism. Some of them also follow Christianity and Buddhism. They observe pujas like *Randak*, *Garia*, *Ker*, *Ganga puja*, *Naksu matai* etc. Besides, there are many deities who are appeased by them for the welfare of the family members, good crops

and prosperity. Among them *Vaishnabs* are also found. Christian Uchais generally observe religious events and ceremonies as per their calendar. Uchais are expert of folk medicine. They can treat for minor diseases out of their folk medicine.

Disposal of Dead: Uchai cremate their dead. But in case of children below the age of 10 years are generally buried. Cremation ground generally is selected on the bank of a river or *cherra* (stream). After the death, the body is kept on the courtyard for last see off of relatives and neighbours. A procession is held towards cremation ground. A ritual is also observed in the burning ghat before cremation. A general feast is arranged by the head of the family of the deceased for the relatives and neighbours. The Christian Uchais bury the dead following prayer meeting and other rites as per their customs.

Transition: Every society in the world is under process of social and economic transition. Uchais once were absolutely a primitive tribe like Reangs. Jhum cultivation was their only means of living. But they are now familiar with plain land cultivation. Among them growth rate of literacy is remarkable.

Uchai dance



Epilogue

An over view of ethnographic account about major tribes of Tripura has been presented in this monograph. But out of the 19 tribes of Tripura, there are some minor tribes alongwith four immigrant tribes living in Tripura. They are Chaimal, Lepcha, Bhutia, Khasia, Bhill, Munda, Orang and Santal.

Among these tribes, Chaimal is a small group having population of 226 persons in the state under 2001 Census. They are mainly found in Dhalai District. In fact they belong to Kuki-Chin group of tribes with similar life cycle of Halam tribe. Lusai is also another small tribe of Tripura having population of 4777 persons. They mainly stay at Hill areas of Kanchanpur Sub-Division. This tribe belongs to Kuki-chin group and nearer to Kuki-Darlong tribes in respect of their life, culture and language. They are famous as Orange producing community in the state. Socio-economically they are advanced in all respects. Most of them are christain by religion.

Lepcha and Bhutias are less known tribes in Tripura. They are only 105 and 29 persons as per 2001 census. They belong to Himalayan Tribes, migrated to this territory for economic reason. They were actually brought by the then king of Tripura as warrior class for royal army. They belong to Mongoliod origin and their language is classified under Tibeto-Burman group of Languages. Lepcha and Bhutias are Buddhist by religion. They are highly concentrated in Arunachal Pradesh and Darjeeling. Khasias are Meghalayan tribe. They are only 630 persons in Tripura as per

2001 Census. Khasias belong to Austro-Asiatic racial stock and their Language could be grouped under Mon-Khmer group of Languages. Khasia are famous for their matrilineal society. In Tripura they are concentrated in Kailasahar & Dharmanagar, mainly in golokpur and Dhatucharra. By religion Khasis are now mostly Christian. They are also famous as betel leaf producing community.

Bhill is one of the immigrant tribes in Tripura. They are 2336 persons as per 2001 Census. Bhills belong to Central Indian tribes migrated from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar etc states. Mundas are mainly Tea garden workers and migrated to Tripura during 1916. Their original homeland was places like Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. They have originated from Austroliod racial stock. Mundaris is their language. Like Bhill they were also a warrier class. Birasa Munda among the Mundas is still a symbol of revolt against the then British rule. As per 2001 census they are 12, 416 persons in the state. In all tea gardens of Tripura, Mundas could be found. Beside their animistic thought and belief, Mundas have belief in Hindu deities and Sakticult. Similarly Orang and Santals are also immigrant tribes migrated from Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa. Orang and Santals by religion are Hindus. They have been brought to this state during the 1st part of 19th Century to work in Tea Garden and brick fields. Beside, plain land cultivation, their major economic activities, like Bhills and Mundas, Orangs & Santhals, are expert use of Bow & Arrows for hunting wild animals and birds. Jhumur Dance during Holi Festival is very much important in their life. As

per 2001 Census Orang and Santhals are 6223 and 2151 respectively in numbers in the state.

Apart from the scheduled number of tribes, there are also some other tribes who have their well known identities though they are not separately enlisted in the tribal list of Tripura. They are Kolai, Rupini, Molsum, Bong Korbong, Hrangkhal and Kaipeng. All these tribes are, however, recognized as sub-tribes of Halam Community. Among these tribes Kolo and Rupini speak in Kok-Borok and also share the culture, food habit, folk life of Tripuris. Ethnic identity of these tribes are also same as they are also of Mongoloid origin with similar physical stature and skin complexion.

To sum up, it is to be mentioned here that Tripura has its unique features of tribal life, more varied than that of tribals of other north-eastern states, because of multi-ethnic variation in social life, economic activities, cultural life, and over all in languages. Even then all the tribal communities of Tripura live together with great communal harmony and peaceful co-existence practising their own culture which are being handed down from generation to generation. So, this multi-ethnic heritage of Tripura tribes is obviously a part of Indian Culture and Vision.

Munda house





Khasi lady



Old Khasi lady



Khasi children



Khasi male



Bhutia couple

Lepcha couple



Bhutia boy



Lepcha girl

Bhutia girls





Munda couple



Orang girl



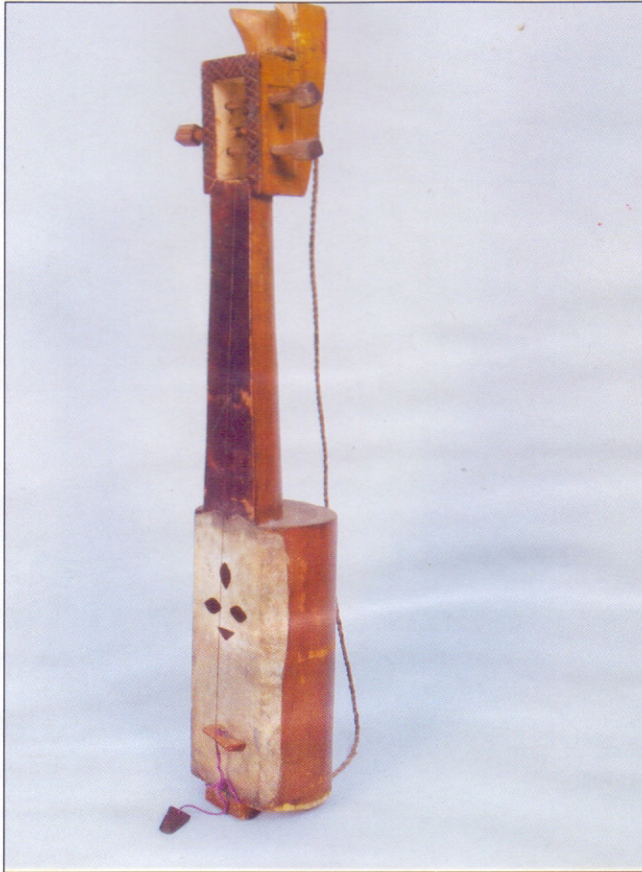
Santhal house

Jhumur dance of the Santhals

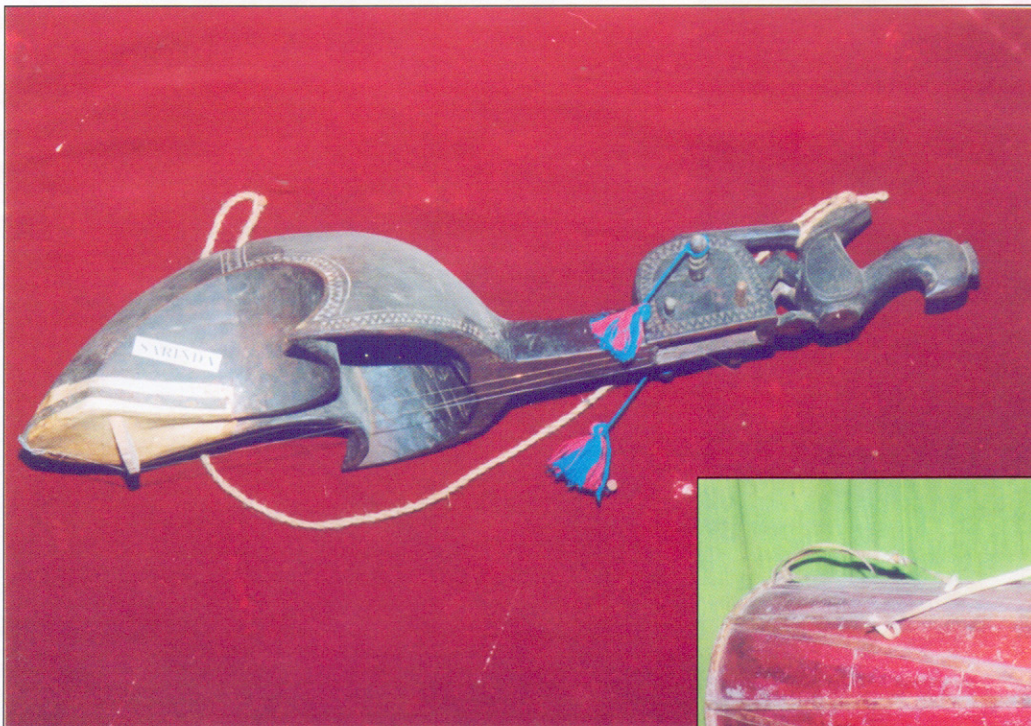


Some Musical Instruments of Tripura Tribes

Glorious Champreng



Khuang (Kham)



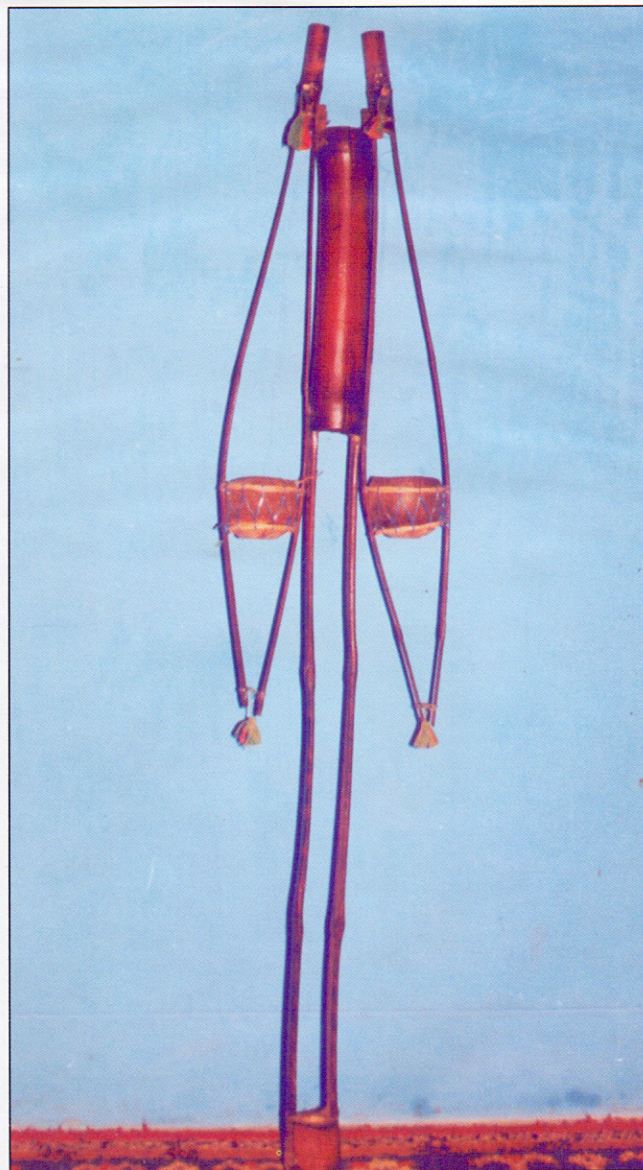
Kham

Sarinda





Playing Sarinda



Lebanti/Tak-tui-Trang



Bamboo dance of the Lusais



Jampui Hills



Wrestling



Towards village



Joy of Mundas



Khuntia (Ban phul)— beauty of Tripura

...All these tribes and sub-tribes live in harmony and peace in Tripura as the high hallmark of unity in diversity championing a unique cultural synthesis nowhere else to be found in India. This Monograph is a unique chronicle of the life and living of host of ethnic communities inhabiting Tripura.

At an age when forces of modernisation are marching remorselessly ahead to invade the cultures and lifestyle of individual communities, the tribes of Tripura present distinctive identities. They are simple but vibrant people who retain their earnest ways of life. This is a remarkable achievement in a world that seems to believe in cultural standardization.

