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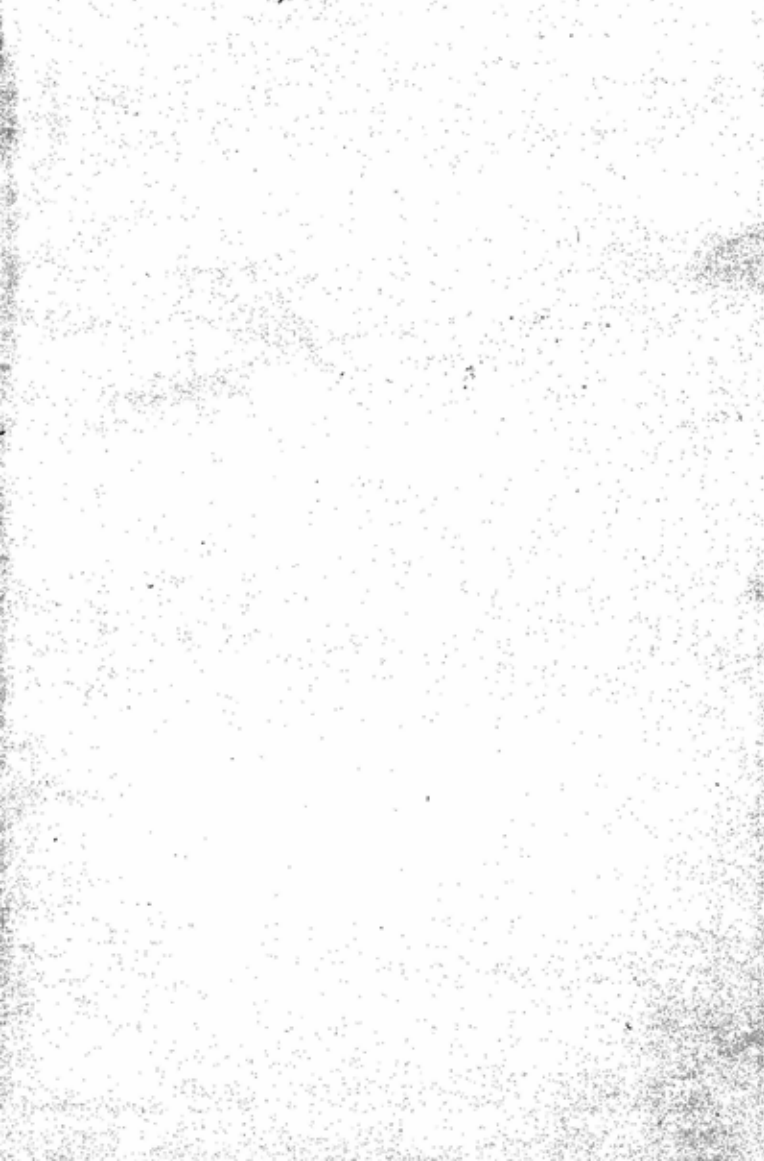
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TRIPURĀ



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TRIPURA

The Land and its People

72769

Edited by

JAGADIS GAN-CHAUDHURI



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PREFACE

THERE IS a growing interest among teachers and students, research scholars and general readers, politicians and public alike in the history and culture, politics and problems of Tripura. Some books, big and small, serious and popular, on the subject have appeared. There is, perhaps, still room, for such a volume as the one presented here.

The book is more like an anthology than a compendium. It is compiled in response to a request by the publisher. It seeks to make available to the interested persons some information and materials necessary both for first-hand knowledge and for deeper understanding. It does not cover all the areas of research.

The writings have not been selected at random, and instead of writing the book single-handed, scholars have been requested to contribute articles. In selecting topics, care has been taken so that the living issues and burning problems do not go untouched; while in assigning the tasks of writing the essays, it is sought to utilize the insight and knowledge developed by the learned scholars in their respective fields of long research.

By an economy of words, it has been possible to deal with the subjects within a handy volume. The mass of minor details which often obscure the essential points is detached and left aside. The contributors have not received enough time and space that might have been due to them; but an effort has been taken to maintain a symmetry and proportion.

The scheme of the contents has not been arranged according to an inevitable order of presentation. The essay on Geography, Physiography and Ethnography is perhaps the appropriate one to begin with. Three writings on political, administrative and religious history have been placed in the sequence now noted here. Next in order are three articles on economic problems. Essays on contemporary politics and local government, three in number, constitute the third group of papers. Thus, from the three groups of papers, the readers may trace the past, know the present and foresee the future of Tripura.

Chapters 1, 8, 9, 10 and 11 have been written by the editor; Chapter 2 by Prof. Nalini Ranjan Roy Chaudhuri, 3 by

Prof. Bani Kantha Bhattacharya, 4 by Sri Priyabrata Bhattacharya, 5 by Dr Jalad Baran Gangopadhyaya, 6 by Prof. Arun Kumar Gangopadhyaya and 7 by Dr Narendra Chandra Datta.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the writers for their contributions and co-operation. Valuable suggestions and information have been supplied by Mahārāj Kumar Sahadev Bikram Kishore, Sri Buddha Dev Barman, Sri Syama Charan Tripura, Sri Binay Dev Barman, Sri Bidhu Bhusan Chakraborti, Sri Manimoy Dev Barman, Sri Jyotirmay Datta, ex-Captain Thakur Nagendra Dev Barman, Prof. B.P. Mukhopadhyaya, Prof. Kanabi Dev Barman, Prof. Saroj Kumar Chaudhuri, Dr P.V. Nair, Prof. N.K. Chakraborti, Dr A.R. Das, Prof. B.K. Roy, Dr K.C. Lahiri and many others. Sri C.R. Das, Sri Ranjit Kr. Chakraborti and Sri Nani Gopal Roy have readily supplied me books and journals. I thank the Lecladevi Publications, Delhi, for publishing the work. Sri R.K. Barman of Maya Commercial Institute took the trouble of typing the manuscript.

Finally, I must gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to my *Guru* Professor Sudhir Ranjan Das of the University of Calcutta for his advice and *āstīrvād*.

Agartala,
TRIPURA

JAGADIS GAN-CHAUDHURI

1 June 1979

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1

The Perennially Charming Tripura

Jagadish Gan-Chaudhuri

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THE NAME Tripura has a halo of mystery encircled around it. It signifies different things to different people. The story of its origins is shrouded in myth and legend. The arguments over the origin of the nomenclature Tripura remain inconclusive even today. Some scholars ascribe the name to the goddess *Tripura Sundari* of *Radhakishorepur*. Others treat Tripura as a derivative form of *Tri Puram*, meaning a land of three cities. There is also a popular belief that a mythical king called Tripur named his kingdom Tripura after his own name. Analysing the name etymologically some researchers have found it to be a combined form of two tribal words, *tui* and *pra*, which mean 'a land adjoining water'. Yet others well-versed in the Sanskrit learning of yore have identified it with a name Tripura that occurs in ancient Sanskrit texts. The search into the genesis of the name thus continues ; a definite version and interpretation of the name will, no doubt, emerge in times to come.

The modern state of Tripurā lies to the south-west of Āssām, and to the east of Bānglādesh, formerly East Pakistān. It is located

between the parallels of 22°56' and 24°32' north latitudes, and between 91°10' and 92°21' east longitudes. The state covers an area of 10,477 sq km and the shape of the territory is irregular. It is a curved strip of land, measuring about 183.5 km in length from north-east to west, and 112.7 km in width from south to north.

Tripura is a land-locked state and its geographical limits touch both national and international boundaries. Four-fifth of its land frontiers are enclosed by the Bangladesh districts of Sylhet in the north, Comilla in the west, Noakhali and Chittagong in the south and the hill tracts of Chittagong in the south-east. It is only on its north-eastern border that Tripura meets the states of Assam and Mizoram.

The frontier lines have been demarcated with the help of pillars, stone slabs and rivers. The border line between Tripurā and the British Indian Province of Bengal was demarcated in 1854 in accordance with the awards of two arbitrators, G.P. Leychester representing the British Government and W.F. Campell representing the Rājā of Hill Tipperāh. The western border of Tripurā is very much zigzag because of the malafide intentions of the British dwellers to include every inch of the fertile lands into the British territory, leaving hills and up-lands for the local ruler. Frequent dacoity, kidnapping, smuggling and stealing of cattle, crops and forest-products of Tripura by the people living beyond the western borders pose serious problems. The changes in courses of rivers marking the international border sometimes aggravate the situation leading even to the exchange of fire. This unbearable condition continues since the inception of Pakistan. As such, frontiers of Tripura are always in tensions. The story of the eastern border of Tripura is no less painful. On the plea of the inability of King Bir Bikram to suppress the Lushai-Kuki raids in the plains during 1860s, a tribal area of 850 sq miles between the Longāi and the Dhaleswari rivers, now in Mizoram, was temporarily taken over by the British Government for direct surveillance and was later unilaterally annexed to British India.

The climate of Tripura is almost similar to that of the other states in north-eastern India and Bānglādes̄h. It is neither too hot nor too cold. The average maximum temperature is 35°C in

May and June and the average minimum is about 10°C in December and January. Sometimes the temperature falls to 5°C in winter. Situated within the monsoon zone of the Bay of Bengal in the south, the territory receives an annual heavy rainfall of more than 200 cm and on account of the excessive humidity, malaria, black-fever, bowel-complaints, dysentery and cholera were very common diseases till recently. The principal seasons are summer, the monsoon, autumn, winter and spring. Summer is between March and May. The rainy season between June and September brings cyclones, hail-storms, thunder-storms and lightning in its wake, causing damages to houses, crops, trees and even deaths of animals and human beings. The pleasant autumn has a short lease of life from October to early November and then comes winter which continues upto January. Spring is brief and occurs in the month of February.

Geology

Geologically the territory is not very old. It seems to have risen from the sea bed in the late Tertiary age about forty million years ago. The land surface is mountainous and uneven and the whole terrain abounds in rivulets, brooks, rivers, hills, plains, valleys and lakes. The rugged topography gradually softens towards the west, the hill terrain giving place to the plains, the narrow gorges to wide valleys and the primeval forests to cultivated plants. But very wide, extensive and flat fields like the ones found in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are rarely found here. The west is more developed, busy and more thickly populated than the east. Almost all the towns and business centres have grown along the western border.

The rivers in this territory are Gomati, Hāorā, Longāi, Juri, Deo, Manu, Dhalāi, Khowāi, Muhuri and Feni. The rivers are neither broad nor deep enough for navigation though some of them are wider now than before. The drainage is towards the south-west, the west and the north. All the rivers traverse Banglādesh before they fall into the Bay of Bengal. The steep descent, the zigzag course, the narrow breadth and shallow surface of the rivers combined with heavy rainfall and the loose structure of the soil cause tremendous soil-erosion and frequent floods. There are seven long ranges and numerous hillocks in Tripurā. The ranges

and hills are called *murā* and *tilā* respectively. The ranges are : *Jampai*, *Sākhāntāng*, *Longtharāi*, *Ātharamurā*, *Baramurā*, *Devāmurā* and *Sārdeng*. Of the hills, the highest are the *Jampai* (3200 feet) and the *Sākhāntāng* (2578 feet) respectively.

The flora of Tripurā, Āssām, Arunāchal, Mizorām, Manipur, Meghālaya, Nāgāland and Bānglādesh are mostly common. The greater part of Tripurā was densely covered with primeval forests even up to the middle of the present century. The various kinds of available flora are : grass, creepers, cane, bamboo, trees and vegetables. The common forest trees include the mythical *Chhāttim* (*Alstonia Scholaris*), the magical *Chāmal* (*Artocarpus chaplasi*), the fibrous *udāl* (*Sterculia villosa*), the heavy *hārgājā* (*Dillenia pentagyna*), the stately *garjan* (*Dipterocarpus turbinatus*), the light *popā* or *Toon* (*Toona ciliata*), the red *roynā* (*Aphanomixias polystachya*), the sturdy *sonālu* (*Cassia fistula*), *karai* (*Albizia procera*), *gāmāir* (*Gomelina arborea*), *kumirā* (*Careya arborea*) and *jārāil*, the thorny *māndār* (*Erythrina indica*), the ever green *jir* (*Ficus retusa*), the sacred *aswaththa* (Peepul), the famous *vaṭ* (*Ficus bengalensis*), the stout *kanak*, the inflammable *āoāl*, etc. The varieties of bamboo generally available are *barāk* (*Bambusa balcooa*), *dalū* (*Neohouzeaua duloa*), *jāi*, *khāllāi*, *mittingā* (*bambusa tuloba*) and *muli* (*Melocana bambosoides*). The two varieties of cane to be found are *gallā* (*Calamus viminalis*) and *jāli* (*Calamus floribundus*). The two kinds of thatching grass commonly found are *chhan* (*Imperata cylindrica*) and *ulu* (*Imperata* sp.).

There is also a large variety of flower plants, such as, marigold, rose, tube rose, china rose, sun-flower, cape jasmine, lotus, water lily, sacred basil, *Belphool* (*gasminoum sombac*), *Bokphool* (*Agatigrandiflora*), *Krishna Chūrā* (*Pionciana regia*), Cocks Comb (*Celosia cristata*), *Golāchi* (*Plumeria acutifolia*), *Karabi* (*Thevetia peruviana*), *Nāgeswar* (*Mesua ferrea*), *Eucalyptus maculata*, *Kalābati* (Indian shot), *Kadam* (*Anthocephalus cadamba*), *Sandhyāmani*, *Seuli*, *Khumpai*, etc. Those who gather wild roots, tubers, vegetables and fruits get ample materials in the forests, marshy places and valleys of Tripura. The common edible vegetables are *Qrums*, *Āmalaki* (*Emblimyrobalan*), *Āmilani* (*Oxalis corniculata*), *Āmrā* (Hog plum), *Bāgher dogā* (*Amorphallus sylvaticus*), *Battā* (*Artocarpus lakoocha*), *Chālita* (*Dillenia indica*), *Dhekīr Sāk* (*Polypodium*

sp.), *Halanche* (*Enlydra fluctuans*), *Jagna dongar* (*Ficus recemosa*), *Bhâte dongar* (*Ficus hispida*), *Kalamt*, *Kāttas* (*Hasia hetexophylla*), *Māknā* (*Euryle ferox*), *Ool*, *Rāmkalā*, (*Musa rosea*), *Sitā begoon* (*Solanum torvum*), *Tārā* (*Alpinia allughas*), *Thānkuni* (*Cevtella asiatica*), *Vanāloo* (*Dioscoria* sp.), *Van tulsi* (*Ocimum basilicum*), *Vādālt* (*Paderia foetida*).

Tripura is a paradise for those who seek medicinal plants. It is virtually an herbarium. One tribal *ojhāi* aptly remarks that he finds no place to set his foot without treading over a medicinal herb and some of such plants that abound here are : *Arjun* (*Terminalia arjuna*), *Ākanda* (*Calotropis procera*), *Āswagandhā* (*Withania ashwagandha*), *bāsak* (*Adhatoda vasica*), *bhait* (*Clerodendrum sar-ratum*), *chhāttīm* (*Alstonia scholaris*), *halisur* (*Acalypha indica*), *kālmegh* (*Andrographis paiculatus*), *kantakāri* (*Solanum xanthocarpum*), *kshet Paprā*, *satamool* (*Asparagus racemosus*), *pāthar Kuchi* (*Brayophyllum pinnatum*), *dhuturā* (*Datura metal*), *Jabā* (*Hibiscus rosa-sinesis*), *sarpa gandhā* (*Rauvolfia serpentina*), *padma pūrachi* (*Tonospora cordifolia*), *ghrita kumāri* (*Aloe indica royle*), *pūnar-nabā* (*Trianthema portulacastrum*), *nishinda* (*Vitex negundo*), *barun* (*Crataeva religiosa*), *tokmā* (*Hyptis suaveolens*), *Dād mardana* (*Cassia alata*), *morichā* (*Eupatorium odoratum*), *dārbā* (*Cynodon dactylon*), *lajjyāvati* (*Mimosa pudica*), *Baj*, *kaet bel* (*Feronia limonia*). Certain valuable plants like *rudrāksha* (*Elaeo-carpus sphenricus*), *āgar* (*Aquileria agallocha*), *dhup ghilā* (*Entada Scandens*), *baettā* (*Texminelia baterica*) are fast disappearing.

The cultivated plants are no less in number and variety than the primeval plants. New and high-yielding varieties of plants are being constantly introduced by private and public agencies, individuals and institutes. These are apple, banana, bean, beet, brinjal, betelnut, cabbage, cauliflower, betel leaf, bel, coconut, cucumber, date plum, garden pea, guava, garlic, ginger, Indian spinach jujube, jute, jack fruit, lady's finger, lemon, mango, maize, onion, potato, pineapple, palmyra, palm, papaya, parsnip radish, rubber, sugarcane, *sāl* (*Shorea robusta*), *sajnā*, *tejpātā*, tomato, tobacco, turnip, wheat, etc.

The fauna of Tripura, like its flora, resemble the one in the neighbouring states. The terrestrial fauna are richer than the aquatic fauna. There are myriads of microscopic protozoa that cause diseases like dysentery and diarrhoea. *Spongilla* and *Hydra* thrive

in humidity and water. Helminth parasites are common in crops, cattle and human bodies. Earthworms, leaches, butter-flies, locusts, and various insects are found in abundance. Scorpions, centipedes, millipedes, dipterian flies and mosquitoes are a nuisance. There are also prawns, crabs, applesnails, small snails, terrestrial snails, tree-snails, mussels, slugs, *Achatina* and *Helix*.

Tripurā is poor in piscean fauna. It is partly dependent on Bānglādesh for the supply of fish. The fishes commonly available here are *āir*, *along*, *bādā*, *bāchā*, *bālā*, *bālm*, *bajari*, *bhāgnā*, *bhetki* or *meni*, *boāl*, *chāndā*, *chāpilā*, *chakpuni*, *chital*, *dārikā*, *gajār*, *ghania*, *gootham* or *betrangi*, *kātlā*, *kuchiā*, *katkatia*, *kai*, *khalā*, *kāikyā*, *kālbāus*, *kānchi*, *lāthi* or *garai*, *maralā*, *māgur*, *mrigāl*, *pābdā*, *phalai* or *kanlā*, *pothā*, *puhi*, *ruhu*, *saul*, *sepli*, *singi*, *tengrā*, *ugal* etc. Toads and frogs are also commonly found. Of the reptiles there are many species like the python, karait, red snake, *lāudogā*, *sankhini*, *dhorā*, *dārāsh*, *kālnāgini*, *keute*, *chandra-berā*, are found. Besides snakes, catotes, gecko, draco, mabuya, varanus, chameleon, wall lizard, turtle, and tortoise are also found in abundance. Tripurā is very rich in avian fauna. There are : Jungle fowl, crow, crane, stork, bee-eaters, owl, jacana (*dāhuk*), kite, mayna, parrot, parakeet, kingfisher, wood pecker, *bau-kathakao* or *Phānthak Pāka*, cucko, vulture, swallow, *Shama*, golden oriole (*kutumba*), crow pheasant (*kuli*), *bulbul*, babbler, flower pecker, weaver bird, hornbill, large pied wagtail (*khanjan*), sparrow, sunbird, tree-pie, warbler, grey partridge, darter (*pān cowri*), teal (*bālihāsh*), pigeon, racket tailed drongo (*bhringaraj*), magpie robin (*doyle*), tailor-bird (*tuntuni*), etc. The wild mammalian fauna is on the wane but domestic livestock is increasing in number and variety. There are elephant, tiger, leopard, spotted deer, black deer, bear, porcupine, jackal, monkey, mongoose, cat, pig, squirrel, pangolin, mouse, *ud* or *bhodar*, bat, wild dog, wild goat, etc. Bison, rhinoceros and the white elephant are now virtually extinct. The white elephant occurs in the local folktales. A place called Ganda Chara is known for rhinoceroses. The common domestic animals include cow, goat, horse, cat, sheep, buffalo and dog.

The population of Tripurā is heterogeneous. Diverse ethnic elements can be traced in it. People of almost all the provinces of India, are found here. The Bengalees and the tribal people constitute the two major ethnic groups of Tripurā, making the bulk of

the population. The State is densely populated. Of all the seven states of north-eastern India, Tripurā's density (149) is second to that of Āssām (150). The following table shows the population of

TABLE 1.1
CRI (Tripura)

Year	Total Population	Percentage of Decadal Variation	Tribal Population	Percentage of Tribals to Total Population
1874-75	74,523		47,523	64
1881	95,637	28.33	49,915	55
1891	1,37,575	43.85	70,292	51.09
1901	1,73,325	25.98	91,679	52.89
1911	2,29,613	34.48	1,11,303	48.47
1921	3,04,437	32.59	1,71,610	56.37
1931	3,82,450	25.63	2,03,327	52
1941	5,13,010	34.14		
1951	6,45,707	25.25	2,37,953	37
1961	11,42,005	78.71	3,60,070	31.5
1971	15,56,342	36.28	4,50,544	28.95

Tripurā right from 1874-75 to the 1971 Census. The above figures indicate that the total population within a century has increased more than twenty times. The decadal growth rate shows fluctuations. A fall in the growth rate from the preceding figure is probably owing to the spread of epidemics like cholera and small pox. The 1961 figures show an abnormally high rate of growth. There may be some room for surmises about the accuracy of the census reports from 1874 to 1951 because of certain difficulties in the census operations emanating from the factors like the inaccessibility of the hills, poor communication, lack of elaborate administrative machinery, the fear of the people to furnish correct data and also the two world wars. The situation has improved considerably since the 1960s. The figures of 1961 and 1971 census are largely dependable. In addition to accuracy, the influx of the Bengali Hindus from East Pākistān is also responsible for the high rate of increase. During this period, besides the Bengalees, many tribal families also have immigrated from East Pākistān, particularly from the Chittāgong Hill Tracts.

Another important feature that is evident in the table is that within the same period whereas the population in general has increased 20 times, the tribal population has increased only about 10 times. If there is room for doubt for the general figures of earlier census operations, there is greater room for doubt about the correctness of the census figures about the tribals. Since 1961, their growth rate is not only steady, but also above the national level. Speaking comparatively, the Indian population increased by 24.57 per cent between 1961 and 1971 whereas in case of Tripura it increased by 31.92 per cent. The table also shows a gradual decrease in the percentage of the tribals to the non-tribals. Their percentage was above 50 till 1931. The figures are recording a decline since 1951 and the cause of this phenomenon lies in the immigration of the plains people. Though both the tribals and the non-tribals are increasing, the latter show a faster rate of growth because their increase is accelerated by immigration.

The Hindus constitute the major religious group in Tripurā. Most of the Bengalees, tribals, Marwaris, Manipuris, Malayalis, Nepalis, Oriyas residing here are the Hindus. The Muslims were once very powerful; even today they have strong holds in Sonāmūrā, Udaipur and Kailāshar. Many of them have left after exchanging property with the Hindus of Pākistān. The Mogs and the Chākmās are the Buddhists. The Christianity is fast taking roots among the tribals. The following table shows the distribution of the population according to various religions.

TABLE 1.2

CRI (Tripura)

Religion	1941	1951	1961	1971
Hindus	3,47,792	4,80,662	8,67,998	13,93,689
Muslims	1,23,570	1,36,940	2,30,002	1,03,962
Buddhists	7,724	15,403	33,716	42,285
Christians	328	5,262	10,039	15,713
Jains	—	—	195	375
Sikhs	—	—	49	318

The growth of literacy has been rather spectacular. The literacy increased from 2.28 per cent in 1901 to 30.86 per cent in 1971. The

number of schools, colleges and other institutions of education has gone up from 2 in 1874-75 to 3061 in 1973-74. Tripurā could progress more in the field of education but for the British government that foiled the attempts of *Raja Rādhā Kishore* (1897-1909) to establish a College at Āgartalā and extorted funds from him for the establishment of the Victoria College at Comilla now in Bangladesh.

The present malady of the Schools is no less responsible for the slow progress. In urban areas in most of the schools, the number of teachers is far more than required; whereas in the interior, schools have far less number of teachers. Most of the Junior Basic schools have only one teacher who hardly attends school. In the hills, schools hum with activities only when a school Inspector or a government minister are on a visit to the school or in the area.

The hills and forests of this tract abound in various games and are rich in flora. These natural gifts allured the early man to settle here as the food gatherer. The Tibeto-Burmese speaking tribes were, in all probability, the earliest inhabitants of this land and this is evident from certain place-names. They crossed the eastern, north-eastern and south-eastern frontiers and lived in and around Tripurā in successive waves. So these tribes are as much immigrants as any group of the people in the plains.

Out of 18 tribal communities, six aloclthonous tribes, namely, Mundā, Orāon, Sāntāl, Bhil, Lepchā and Bhutiā are numerically insignificant, socially isolated, and politically unorganised. The rest of the communities, such as, Tiprās, Riāng, Jamātiā, Chākmā, Hālām, Noātiā, Mag, Kuki, Gāro, Lushāi, Uchai, and Khāsiā, who claim to be autochthons had actually immigrated from the greater Āssām, Burmā and Chittāgong Hill Tracts. Formerly, they had a self-subsistence economy based on gathering, hunting, shifting cultivation, domestication of animals, basketry and weaving. The following table (No. 1.3) gives the names of the tribes and their numerical strength.

The Tiprās constitute the largest tribe. Their number is likely to suffer decrease in the next census because of the recent delinking of the Laskars from the list of the scheduled tribes. The recent trend of the Noātiās to be enumerated as Tiprās i.e., Dev Barmans, may make up the loss in numerical strength. Nevertheless, besides being the largest tribe, the credit of ruling the state

TABLE 1.3
CRI (Tripura)

S. No.	Tribe	1951	1961	1971
1.	Tiprā	1,50,971	1,89,799	2,50,382
2.	Riāng	8,471	56,597	64,722
3.	Jamātiā	2,764	24,359	34,192
4.	Chākmā	7,277	22,386	28,622
5.	Hālām	1,644	16,298	19,076
6.	Noitiā	1,916	16,010	10,297
7.	Mag	3,789	10,524	13,273
8.	Kuki	2,721	5,532	7,775
9.	Gāro	7,362	5,484	5,559
10.	Mundā	51	4,409	5,347
11.	Lushai	1,947	2,988	3,672
12.	Orāon	—	2,875	3,428
13.	Sāntāl	736	1,562	2,222
14.	Uchāi	—	766	1,061
15.	Khasia	151	349	491
16.	Bhil	41	69	169
17.	Lepchā	5	7	177
18.	Bhutia	19	7	3
19.	Chaimal	—	50	—

for several centuries goes to them. Besides the tribals, other peoples in Tripurā include the Bengalees, Manipuris, Nepalīs, Oriyas, Punjabis, Marwaris, Biharis, Malayalis etc. The Bengalee Hindus constitute the major group (66.94 per cent). In Tripurā, only 10.43 per cent of the total population live in towns and among them only 5.29 per cent of the scheduled caste people and 1.23 per cent of the tribal population are urban dwellers. What is more significant is that the Tiprās, because of their long association with monarchy, constitute the bulk of the tribal urban dwellers. It indicates a correlation between caste and community on the one hand and white collar jobs and urban habitation on the other.

In table 1.4, the number, name and numerical strength of the scheduled castes of Tripurā have been shown. According to the C.R.I. (Tripurā) 1951, 1961 and 1971 they constitute 7 per cent, 10.5 per cent and 12.39 per cent respectively of the total population of the state.

Obviously, there is diversity among the people of Tripurā.

TABLE 1.4
CRI (Tripura)

S. No.	Name of Caste	1961	1971
1.	Nama Sudra	46,383	74,980
2.	Jālā Kaivarta	18,208	29,897
3.	Māli	15,362	21,134
4.	Māhisydās	11,994	28,733
5.	Dhobā	10,887	19,953
6.	Chāmār or Muchi	3,640	4,228
7.	Gour	3,523	2,877
8.	Sabar	2,150	2,094
9.	Pātni	1,687	2,228
10.	Kanda	1,226	1,202
11.	Kol	1,067	519
12.	Bhuimālī	784	315
13.	Kharia	513	744
14.	Mehtor	456	626
15.	Koch	366	650
16.	Ghasi	327	72
17.	Gur	258	1,145
18.	Bāgdi	161	116
19.	Dum	155	143
20.	Keot	133	336
21.	Kahar	125	181
22.	Koir	118	100
23.	Musahar	52	7
24.	Kotāl	51	
25.	Kāilindi	40	30
26.	Khadit	15	
27.	Kora	15	26
28.	Dandasi	10	
29.	Dhenuār	9	1
30.	Kan	5	23
31.	Gunār	4	
32.	Kanugh	1	15
33.	Bhunār		475

Several factors have combined to bring the ethnic groups here. The search for resourceful forests, inter-tribal feuds, and uncanny incidents might have been the reasons for the immigration of the tribal communities. The shortage of land, population pressure, poverty, political oppression and religious persecution were the spur to the immigration of the plains people. In addition, the land-grants by the *Rājās* and opportunity for jobs and business induced many plains people to come and settle down here. Moreover, a large number of them were the *Rājās'* subjects residing in Chāklā Roshnābād. Many people had also emigrated. Following intra-tribal feuds, a large number of Rāngkhals of the Hālām community had left Tripurā for Hāflong in Āssām in the distant past. Failed to cope with the political situation during the communist movement in 1950s, many Garos left for the Garo Hills.

In any way, there were few hands to utilise the fertile fields and forests. When they came, people were required. Tripurā induced and welcomed immigrants. The problem of scarcity in lands, forest and jobs has propped up its ugly face. Now there is little need for additional workers. So rumblings of discontent and dissatisfaction against immigration are heard so much so that the government is discouraging and resisting immigration.

This, in brief, is all that constitutes the perennially charming Tripurā. It is a land with a distinctive character from the mainland of India and so are its inhabitants different from the people of India. The entire north-eastern region of India is uncommon in relation to the other regions of India and Tripura is unique in this uncommon region.

The Historical Past

Nalini Ranjan Roy Chaudhuri

Ancient Times

In ancient period, prior to the establishment of the Muslim rule in Bengal, Tripura had no distinct political status. It had virtually no political significance at that time. The archeological evidences found in the region prove the fact that a large portion of this region, particularly south-western part of the present state of Tripura, was politically attached to the Kingdoms of Eastern Bengal known as Samatata Vanga and Harikela.

Guptas

From the year 507 B.C. to 8th century Maharaja Vainyagupta, a member of the dynasty of Imperial Guptas, ruled over Samatata and granted lands in Tripura region. The seat of his kingdom was situated in or near the Tripura region. At first he was a local governor under an imperial Gupta monarch, but subsequently he became an independent ruler. After Vainyagupta, Gopachandra, Dharmāditya and Samachardeva ruled Samatata between circa A.D. 525—A.D. 575. It appears that these three

kings ruled from a place, wherefrom Vainyagupta also had ruled before them. This locality was somewhere either in the eastern Dacca or in northern Tippera district which formed the central part of the kingdom of these monarchs.²

Huien Tsang who visited India in the first half of the 7th century referred to the Kingdom of Samatata which included the major part of Vanga proper. According to his account, it had included within its political boundaries a part of the Central Bengal in addition to the region of the district Tippera.³ Huien Tsang also tells that a line of Brahmin Kings ruled there in the first half of the 7th century. Silabhadra of Nalanda Monastery belonged to that dynasty.

Naths

The Tippera Copper Plate grant of Samanta Lokanatha brings into lime light a line of feudatory chiefs that ruled East Bengal in the region round Tippera in the middle of the 7th century. According to this inscription Lokanatha, Jivadharana and Jayaturgavarsha were feudatories of a common sovereign whose title was Paramesvara. On behalf of his suzerain Paramesvara, Lokanatha, defeated Jayatungavarsha and Jivadharana. This inscription also contains a short history of four or five generations of the Natha family. They were the followers of Saivism. The first King's name ending in natha is missing in the copper plate because of corrosion but he is described as having sprung from the good family of the sage Bharadvaja and also that he was a renowned King, having the right to the use of the paramount title of *Adhi-maharaja*. The second feudatory of this dynasty whose name was Srinatha, acquired much fame as a matchless warrior. The name of his accomplished and virtuous son was Bhavanatha and Lokanatha came after him.

The Ratas

Virtually, nothing is known about Paramesvara or Jayatungavarsha. However, some details about Jivadharana are contained in another copper plate found at Kailan, a village south-west of Comilla. The charter was issued by Shridharana the Rata ruler of Samatata and son of Jivadharana who is also called the Lord of Samatata. Reference is made to Devapavata, the capital of this

Rata family. This Devaparvata was encircled by the river Kshirode which is identified with modern Khira, a dried up river course still traceable as branching off from the Gumti just west of the Comilla town. The river surrounds the southern end of the Mainamati hills, where the ancient hill-fort of Devaparvata seems to have been situated.⁴ These two Rata Kings, who nominally acknowledged the suzerainty of some overlord, were practically independent. After the Ratas, came the Devas who also had their capital at Devaparvata and the rulers Viradeva, Anantadeva, Bhavadeva and Kantideva belonged to this dynasty. They were the Buddhists whereas the Ratas were the Vaishnavites.

Khargas

The Asrafpur plates of the Khadga dynasty proved the fact that a large portion of Tripura was under the control of the Khadga dynasty. The name of four Kings of the Khadga dynasty known to us are Khadgodyama, Jatakhadga, Devakhadga and Rajarajabhatta, each being the son of the predecessor. From the Chinese evidences it appears that the Khadga dynasty ruled in the later half of the 7th century A.D. and their kingdom comprised nearly the whole of the Eastern and Southern Bengal including Tripura. Two copper plate grants of Devakhadga, were issued from the royal camp of Karmanta Vasaka which was their capital. This city has been indentified with modern Barkāmta, a police station situated twelve miles west of Comilla. The Khadgas were also the Buddhists.

Chandras

Another dynasty with personal names suffixed by the word 'Chandra' ruled in Eastern Bengal from about 875 to 1035 A.D. It is stated that the original home of this dynasty was in Rohitagi which is identified with Lalmai Hills near Comilla by N.K. Bhattasali.

"The fact that quite a large number of inscriptions of this family have been found in the region of Lalmai Hills near Comilla strongly supports the identification proposed by Bhattasali."⁵

It is interesting to note in this connection that one Chandra dynasty was also ruling in the Arakan Kingdom. We do not know

whether the Chandras of Arakan had any relation with the Chandras of the East Bengal. From the coins and inscriptions found in Arakan it is proved that about twenty kings of the Chandra dynasty ruled in Arakan. Whether these Chandras extended their political influence in Tripura or its adjoining regions before the establishment of the Chandra dynasty of East Bengal is not certain. They were seven Kings of the Chandra dynasty of Eastern Bengal, Purna Chandra, Suvarna Chandra, Trailakya Chandra, Shri Chandra, Kalyan Chandra, Ladaha Chandra and Govinda Chandra. Although Purna Chandra and Suvarna Chandra were the followers of Brahmanical religion, the successors of Suvarna Chandra became a Buddhist.

The Baghaura image inscription and another inscription engraved on an image of Ganesa discovered in the village of Narayanpur in the Tippera district shows that some portions of Tripura were included in Samatata, which itself was under the suzerainty of Mahipala I. Probably, he wrested it from Lādahā Chandra. But that Lādahā Chandra recovered it is proved by the Bharellā image inscription. King Govinda Chandra, the last known Chandra King was defeated by the army of Rajendra Chola and finally the Chandra dynasty was defeated and ousted by Karna, the great Kalachari ruler.

Varmans

After the fall of the Chandras, the Varmans became powerful in East Bengal. Jata Varman, Hari Varman, Samala Varman were all powerful rulers who ruled in Vikrampur. Bhoja Varman the last known ruler of East Bengal was overthrown by Vijayasena of the Sena dynasty.

The Kingdoms of Burma and Pattikara

The existence of the small kingdom of Pättikarā in the district of Tippera may be traced back to the 11th century. The Burmese chronicles contain many references to this Kingdom. According to Hmannan, the kingdom of the Burmese king Anartha 1044-1077 A.D. was bounded on the west by Pättikarā. The same text narrates a romantic story of love between the prince of Pättikarā and Sweinthe, the daughter of the King of Burma. There was an intimate intercourse between the kingdoms of Burma and Pättikarā

during the 12th century. The origins of the Pattikara Kingdom can be traced in the accounts of the Burmese chronicles. The Burmese chronicles state that the Shans invaded Arakan in the tenth century, and Northern Arakan was conquered by Anaratha. At this time of political turmoil, the Chandras were ousted from Arakan and a branch of them settled at Pattikara. The existence of the kingdom of Pattikara in the thirteenth century is proved by an inscription engraved on a copper plate found in the neighbourhood of Comilla. It records a grant of land in favour of a Buddhist monastery built at Pattikara, by Dhadi-eba, the Chief Minister of Sri Harikeladeva Ranavankamalla in 1220, which was the seventeenth year of his reign. Harikeladeva Ranavankamalla, who ascended the throne in 1203-04 and ruled till 1220, was undoubtedly an independent ruler. The name of the father of Dhadi-eba was recorded as Mamhedi-eba and the name of the writer of the grant was Madeni-eba. The ending suffix "eba" in the names indicates their Burmese origin. Whether King Harikeladeva Ranavankamalla belonged to the old royal family of Pattikara or to Deva family, is not known and after him there is no mention of the name of the Kingdom of Pattikara. It was most probably absorbed in the growing kingdom of the Deva family.

Devas of Nadiya

Madhumathanadeva, the chief of the Deva family, set up an independent kingdom in the eastern region of the river Meghna shortly after or before the Muslim raid on Nadiyā. His grandson ✓ Damodardeva was a powerful ruler whose kingdom comprised the modern districts of Tippera, Noakhali and Chittagong.⁶ Dasarathadeva, the son of Damodardeva, conquered Vikrampur and came into the possession of the Sena kingdom in East Bengal in the second half of the 13th ✓ century. The title Ariraja Danuja Madhava borne by Dasarathadeva makes it very probable that he is identical with Danujarai, the Raja of Sonargaon who according to Ziauddin Barani, entered into an agreement with Ghiyasuddin Balban that he would guard against the escape of the rebellious Tughril Khan by the water ways. Dasarathadeva was a ✓ Vaishnava and his capital was at Sonargaon near Dacca. This Deva dynasty had lost its power and glory due to the Muslim advance in Eastern Bengal.

Devas of Srihatta

The existence of another Deva family in Srihatta is proved by two copper plates discovered at Bhatara, about twenty miles from the Sylhet town. Govinda Kesavadeva of this family was a powerful ruler whose rule "extended also over the southern part of the district of Sylhet, south of the river Kusiara, portions of Cachar district (including Karimganj subdivision) and possibly portions of northern Tripura also."⁷ This prince was however overthrown by Shahajallal who invaded Sylhet in A.D. 1257.

All these historical facts go to prove that the present state of Tripura was not founded in an ancient period. Most of the western and southern parts of Tripura were politically attached to Eastern Bengal under various dynasties and so had no separate political entity. There might be some tribes in ancient period living in the hilly north-eastern part of Tripura but they had no political importance at that time. Among these tribes, the Tipras were numerous and well organised. After the fall of the Deva dynasty, they were able to establish a kingdom in this region which later on came to be known as the Tripura kingdom. Modern scholars hold the opinion that the name Tripura is a sanskritised form of Tipra, a tribe to which the ruling family belonged.⁸ Some writers believe that the ancient Tripura kingdom was originally situated between north-eastern Tripura and North Cachar.

Rajmala, a chronicle of the Tripura royal family, also narrates that the ancestors of this family shifted their capital from Nowgong district to the district of Cachar on the bank of the river Barak and afterwards proceeded to south-westward and came to Dharmanagar and established a capital on the bank of the river Juri. It was from Dharmanagar that they gradually moved further south-westward and came to the centre of the present Tripura state.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Tipras

When the Deva dynasty was declining in Eastern Bengal, the chief of the Tipra tribe rose in prominence in the hilly region of Tripura. They gradually extended their hold in the plain lands of Tripura region and a collision with the Muslim power, which was

firmly established in Bengal in the meantime, was inevitable. The earliest chief of the Tipra tribe who successfully defended his country against the Muslim power of Bengal as recorded in Rajmala was Chhengthung Fa. According to Rajmala, a large army was sent against Chhengthung Fa from Gour as a retaliatory measure against the Tripura Chief for an incident: one Hiravant Khan was allegedly plundered of his wealth on his way to Gour to present a gift to the Sultan. Chhengthung Fa wished to sue for peace, but his wife protested against such cowardice, and herself led the Tripuri force against the enemy's troops and routed them. The kingdom which they established in this region came to be known as Tripura kingdom. They assumed the title Manikya, dropped the original title Fā, and their dynasty came to be known as the Manikya dynasty. According to Rajmala, this family belonged to the lunar dynasty of the Kshatrya caste. Most modern scholars believe that the Tripuris like the Chacharis and other tribes of eastern India were Mongolian in origin. Suniti Kumar Chatterji classified them under the Indo-Mongoloids or Kiratas. They use the Bodos language. The Bodos who settled on the bank of the river Brahmaputra, gradually occupied the Garo Hills and Nowgong district in Assam. From Nowgong district their area of occupation extended to Cachar (particularly in the North Cachar Hills) and into Sylhet, and from Cachar and Sylhet they moved further to the south, to the Tripura State.⁹ At present it appears somewhat difficult to ascertain the actual date of their migration to Tripura. Only we can presume that they entered Tripura long before the establishment of the Muslim rule in Bengal.

Maha Manikya

Rajmala refers to an inscription dated A.D. 1458 of Dharma Manikya. In this inscription Maha Manikya was regarded as the father of Dharma Manikya and according to Tripura Vamsabali, Dharma Manikya ruled from A.D. 1431 to A.D. 1462.¹⁰ Therefore it can be presumed that Maha Manikya ruled before A.D. 1431 and he was the earliest known king of Tripura having the Manikya title. According to some modern scholars it was Maha Manikya who founded a kingdom during the early years of the

1462
1431
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31

reign of Raja Ganesa of Bengal and his newly founded kingdom was lying between Chittagong and Sylhet. They also presume that the original name of Maha Manikya was Chhengthung Fa.¹⁰ It is not very unlikely that after successfully defending his newly formed kingdom against the Muslim force, Chhengthung Fa assumed the title Maha Manikya.

Dharma Manikya

Dharma Manikya, the son of Maha Manikya, was a powerful ruler and his reign constitutes an important landmark in the history of Tripura. Although we find no coin of Dharma Manikya times the *Rajmala* mentions a copper plate of Dharma Manikya dated 1458. According to Tripur Vamsabali Dharma Manikya ruled from 1431 to 1462. He was a great patron of learning. It is said that he engaged the priest Durlabhendra and two Brahmins, named, Sukreswar and Baneswar, to write a history of the dynasty. He donated lands to a large number of Brahmins in his realm and was himself a staunch and devout Hindu. Dharma Manikya had paternal affection for his subjects. He excavated the famous Dharmasagar Tank at Comilla and built temples.

Ratna Manikya

Ratna Manikya who ascended the throne of Tripura after the death of Dharma Manikya, may be considered the earliest of the coin issuing rulers of Tripura. These coins belonged to the period between 1464 and 1467. These coins bear some common characteristics with the Muslim coins of Bengal. According to *Rajmālā*, he was the youngest son of King Dangar Fa. From chronological point of view, King Dangar Fa and Dharma Manikya were the same person. According to *Rajmala* and local traditions, King Dangar Fa divided his kingdom into seventeen divisions and placed them under his seventeen princes. Ratna Fa, the youngest son of Dangar Fa, was sent to Gour as hostage from Tripura. The Sultan of Gour was highly pleased with the charming manners and uncommon intelligence of the prince. There the Sultan and the Prince came to an unholy alliance. The Prince got military help from the Sultan to capture entire Tripura for himself. With the help of the mercenary forces, he defeated his elder brothers and declared himself the King of Tripura. As a mark of gratitude

Ratna Fa presented the Sultan with some elephants and a valuable ruby. In return, the Sultan recognised Ratna Fa as Ratna Manikya.²¹ The Assamese envoys who visited Tripura in the early part of the eighteenth century stated that Ratna Manikya was conferred with the Manikya title by the Sultan of Gour.²² It is generally believed that during his reign, a large number of Brahmins, Vaidyas and Kayasthas came from various parts of Bengal and settled in Tripura. It is said that he introduced some administrative reforms which were modelled on the pattern prevalent in Bengal. His capital as mentioned in the coins was known as Ratnapur. Sultan Ruknuddin Barbak Shah, 1455 to 1476, of Bengal was the contemporary of Ratna Manikya and it was probably from him that Ratna Manikya secured assistance to usurp the kingdom.

Pratap Manikya

After the death of Ratna Manikya, his son Pratap Manikya became the ruler of Tripura. According to *Rajmala*, he was cruel and unpopular. The leaders of the army who became very much powerful after the death of Ratna Manikya, murdered him.

Mukut Manikya

Pratap Manikya was succeeded by his brother Mukut Manikya. A coin of Mukut Manikya dated 1489 has been found. His reign lasted for a very short time and appears to have come to an end before 1490 because Dhanya Manikya already issued a coin in that year. According to *Rajmala*, Dhanya Manikya succeeded his younger brother Pratap Manikya II. But we find that Mukut Manikya issued a coin just before the accession of Dhanya Manikya. So Pratap Manikya II must be placed before Mukut Manikya.

An inscription issued in the year 1488 mentioned the name of one Vijay Manikya who was a minor king at that time. According to D.C. Sircar, it is possible that Vijay Manikya I, 1410-1488, was Mukut's elder brother who is called Pratap Manikya II in the *Rajmala* and may have ruled for a very short reign.²³ D.C. Sircar is of the opinion that Dhanya Manikya whose coins are dated 1490 just after Mukut Manikya who issued coins in 1489, could have been the son but not the great-grandson of Mukut Manikya as stated by *Rajmala*.²⁴

Dhanya Manikya

Dhanya Manikya who ascended the throne in the year 1490 may be regarded as the greatest ruler of Tripura in the medieval period. He crushed the rebellious feudal chiefs and army officers. Taking advantage of the disorder and chaotic condition in Bengal prior to the accession of Husain Shah, Dhanya Manikya annexed to his kingdom some portions of Bengal such as Pattikara, Ganga-mandal, Meherkul, and Khandal. He also reduced the Kukis to obedience. In the year 1506 he issued a coin and took the title 'Vijayindra' or conqueror. We find a coin of Dhanya Manikya issued in the year 1513 with the words 'Conqueror of Chittagong' which indicates that he conquered Chittagong in that year. It was during his reign that Sultan Husain Shah, 1493 to 1519, of Bengal made strenuous efforts to conquer Tripura.

Muslim Invasions

An inscription found on the door of a mosque at Sonargaon dated 1513 recording the name of the builder as the Sher-e-Laker of Tripura indicates that at least a portion of Tripura was conquered by Husain Shah before the year 1513. According to *Rajmala*, Husain Shah despatched his army on several occasions. But the people of Tripura fought heroically and successfully defended their country. *Rajmala* shows Husain Shah not very much successful in his military expeditions against Tripura. Dhanya Manikya was a great patron of art and literature. He took care to spread the Bengali language among the people by having some Sanskrit works translated into Bengali. He built several temples, the greatest of these being the famous temple of Tripura Sundari at Udaipur in the year 1501. He also constructed a huge tank at Kasba (Kamala Sagar) to be named after his beloved and reputed queen Kamaladevi. According to Tripur Vamsabali, he died in the year 1515. The available coins of Dhanya Manikya prove that he ruled for about 25 years.

Dhwaja Manikya

Practically very little is known about the rule of Dhwaja Manikya who was probably the eldest son of Dhanya Manikya. According to Tripur Vamsabali he ruled for six years. Some writers maintain that he ruled for one year only. The old *Rajmala* does not mention his reign.

Deva Manikya

The earliest available coin of Deva Manikya, the brother of Dhawaja Manikya, dated 1520 proves the fact that Deva Manikya became the ruler of Tripura in the year 1520. In that year he conquered Bhulua or Noakhali. The coins of Deva Manikya dated 1528 and 1530 which described him as the conqueror of Sonargaon (Suvarnagram Vijayi) prove the fact that he successfully led expeditions in Sonargaon. According to *Rajmala*, Deva Manikya a devout Sakta, was murdered in a conspiracy and his son Indra Manikya became the ruler of Tripura. But he ruled only for one year and the army revolted and placed Vijay Manikya on the throne.

Vijay Manikya

Vijay Manikya, the son of Deva Manikya was a capable ruler and had a long reign. Some coins of Vijay Manikya which are available belonged to the period between 1532 to 1563. The existence of these coins indicates that Vijay Manikya reigned for more than thirty years. He made some administrative reforms, reorganised army and recruited some Afghan cavalry in his army. Like Dhanya Manikya, Vijay Manikya was also a great conqueror. He conquered Sylhet and recovered Chittagong from the Afghans. Taking advantage of the Mughal-Afghan contest, Vijay Manikya invaded Sonargaon and plundered it. That his army advanced up to the river Padma during the years 1557 to 1563 of his reign, is proved by some contemporary coins issued by Vijay Manikya. In the words of James Long, "At this time Vijay Raja of Tripura marched to Bengal with an army composed of 26,000 infantry, and five thousand horses besides artillery; he went by 5000 boats along the streams Brahmaputra and Lakhi to Padma."¹⁵ Vijay Manikya was a contemporary of Akbar. The *Ain-i-Akbari* refers to his reign in the following words. "Adjoining Bhati is an extensive tract of territory inhabited by the Tipperah Tribes. The name of the ruler is Vijay Manik. Whoever obtains [the Chieftainship bears the title Manik after his name and the nobles that of Narayan. He has a force of two hundred thousand footmen and a thousand elephants. Horses are scarce."¹⁶

Gopi Prasad

Ananta Manikya, the son of Vijay Manikya was not an efficient ruler. He was completely under the control of his father-

in-law Gopi Prasad who from humble origins rose to the height of position and power. He usurped the throne of Tripura in the year 1567 and took the title Udai Manikya and issued coins in the same year. He changed the name of his capital from Rangamati to Udaipur, excavated a tank known as Chandra Sagar and built a temple of Chandra Gopinath. According to *Rajmala* he ruled for five years.

Amar Manikya

Amar Manikya, son of Deva Manikya, restored the old dynasty to its proper place after ousting Joy Manikya, the son of Udai Manikya in 1577. He was an energetic ruler. He defeated the ruler of Tarap, Bhulua and Sylhet, and issued a coin in 1581 to commemorate his victory over Sylhet. He constructed a big tank known as Amar Sagar and made his residence in a place which came to be known as Amarpur. It is generally believed that the second part of the *Rajmala* was compiled during his reign. Ralf Fitch, a European traveller on his way to Chittagong, visited Tripura during the reign of Amar Manikya and made the following remarks. "From Satagan, I travelled by the country of the King of Tippera with whom the Mogen have almost continual wars. The Mogen which be of the Kingdom of Recon and Rame, be stronger than the king of Tippera ; and so that Chittagong or Portogrande, is often times under the King of Recon."¹⁷ According to *Rajmala*, Amar Manikya conquered Chittagong and invaded Arakan with the help of some Portuguese adventurers. But Sikandar Shah, the King of Arakan, defeated him and occupied Chittagong. The Arakani force plundered Udaipur and massacred people. Amar Manikya left Udaipur and took shelter in the forest on the bank of the river Manu. There also he was harassed by the Kukis. Being mentally depressed, Amar Manikya committed suicide by taking poison.

Rajdhar Manikya

Rajdhar Manikya, the son of Amar Manikya, ascended the throne in 1586 and issued a coin that year. He shifted his capital back to Udaipur which was ransacked by the Mogs. He kept himself away from the battlefield and devoted to religious pursuits. He was a great patron of the Vaishnava cult. According to *Rajmala*, Rajdhar Manikya ruled for twelve years. After his

death one Iswar Manikya ascended the throne and issued a coin in the year 1600; very little is known about him. In the same year Yasodhar Manikya ascended the throne of Tripura.

Yasodhar Manikya

Yasodhar Manikya, the son of Rajdhar Manikya, ascended the throne in 1600 and had a coin issued that year. The image of Krishna with a flute inscribed on his coins indicates that he was a Vaishnava. In order to secure a suitable base for a military operation against the King of Arakan, Ibrahim Khan Fatehjang the governor of Bengal under Jahangir's order launched an expedition against Tripura in 1618. Two land forces and one fleet was despatched against the King of Tripura. According to Baharistan-i-Ghayabi, the King of Tripura resisted the Mughals with an army of "one thousand cavalry, sixty thousand infantry and two hundred elephants."¹⁸ The king was defeated and Udaipur was occupied by the Mughals. The king was caught with his wives in the forest and they were sent to Jahangirnagar alias Dacca to Ibrahim Khan. Probably he was confined within the Mughal territory and died in 1623. Meanwhile the Mughal army continued to hold the country in military occupation of the most cruel king until after two and a half years, they were forced by an epidemic to leave the country. The occupied portion of Tripura entered into the Mughal rent roll as 'Sarkar Udaipur.'

Kalyan Manikya

The Mughals had left Udaipur after two years and six months of occupation. The people selected Kalyan Manikya as their King. He was the son of Kachu Fa, a successor of Gagan Fa who was the son of Maha Manikya. A coin issued by Kalyan Manikya in the year 1626 proves the fact that he became the ruler of Tripura at least in or before the year 1626. Kalyan Manikya restored peace and order, remodelled his army and recovered most of the lost portions of his territory. Petter Heleys, a European visitor, mentioned in 1652 that the rulers of Tripura had frequent fights with the Mughals.¹⁹ Another Muslim account *Naubahari Murshid Quli Khani* noted :

"Tipara is a country extremely strong by reason of abundance of its trees, the loftiness of its forts, and the difficulty of its

roads. The Raja is proud of his strength and the practices of conch blowing and idol worship prevail there. Sultan Shuja during his governorship of Bengal, left his eldest son Zainuddin Muhammad as his deputy in Rajmahal, came to Dacca, and sent his chief minister Jan Bag Khan towards Tipara, but the Khan's men failed to take any of the forts of that country even after labouring for one year. At last he had to content himself with annexing the district of Mirzapur, and making it the frontier of the imperial dominions. Many of his soldiers died from the badness of the air."²⁰

The conquered portion of Tripura was enlisted as Sarkar Udaipur in the Revenue Records of Bengal Subha prepared in 1658. Nakshatra Roy, the second son of Kalyan Manikya, was sent to the court of Shuja as hostage. Kalyan Manikya constructed a big tank known as Kalyan Sagar and built a Kali temple at Kasba. He devoted himself to religious pursuits and donated lands to the Brahmins.

Govinda Manikya and Nakshatra Roy

After the death of Kalyan Manikya, his eldest son Govinda Manikya ascended the throne in 1660. But Nakshatra Roy, the step-brother of Govinda Manikya, secured the help of the Mughals and occupied Udaipur. Govinda Manikya was forced to leave Tripura. Nakshatra Roy took the title Chhatra Manikya and issued a coin in 1661. Chhatra Manikya ruled probably for six years. With the help of the king of Arakan, Govinda Manikya recovered his throne in 1667. According to *Rajmala*, Govinda Manikya became the ruler of Tripura for the second time after the death of Chhatra Manikya. But the Assamese envoys who visited the court of Ratna Manikya II recorded a speech of King Mahendra Manikya which stated that Chhatra Manikya was assassinated by Govinda Manikya.²¹ Govinda Manikya made peace with the Mughals by agreeing to give them five elephants as tribute annually. The name of Govinda Manikya became immortal through Tagore's famous plays *Visharjan* and *Rajarsi*. It is generally believed that the third part of *Rajmala* was compiled during his reign. *Brihannarada Purana* was translated into Bengali under his patronage. After the death of Govinda Manikya, his son Ramdeb Manikya became the ruler of

Tripura in 1676. The temple of Tripura Sundari which had been struck and damaged by lightning was repaired by Ramdeb Manikya in the year 1681.

Tavernier, a French traveller who visited India during the reign of Shahjahan and came to Bengal during the reign of Chhatra Manikya of Tripura, has left some interesting accounts about Tripura and its merchants. He recorded :

"I met with three, one at Dacca and two others at Patna. They were men of very few words ; whether it were their own particular disposition, or the general habits of the country. They cast up their accounts with small stones like agats, as big as man's nail, upon every one of which was a cipher. They had every one their weights, like a steller ; though the beam were not of iron but of a certain wood as hard as Brazile ; nor was the ring that holds that weight, and is put through the beam to mark the weight of iron, but a strong silk rope. Thus they weighed from a dram to ten of our pounds. If all the natives of the kingdom of Tipra were like the two merchants which I met at Patna, I dare affirm them to be notable topers ; for they never refused whatever strong liquor I gave them, and never left till all was out ; and when I told them by my interpreter that all my wine was gone, they clapped there hands upon their stomachs and sighed. These merchants travelled all three through the kingdom of Arakan, which lies to the south and west of Tipra, having some part of Pegu upon the winter west. They told me also, that it was about fifteen days journey to cross through their country; from whence there is no certain conjecture of the extent to be made by reason of the inequality of the stages. They ride upon oxen and horses, which were low but very hardy. As for the king and the nobility, they ride in the palleki or upon their elephants of war. They are no less subject to wens under their throats than those of Boutan ; in so far much that the women have wens hanging down to their nipples ; which proceeds from the badness of the waters. There is nothing in Tipra which is fit for strangers. There is a mine of gold, but the gold is very coarse and there is a sort of very coarse silk which is all the revenue the king has. He exacts no subsidies from his subjects, but only that they, who are not

the prime nobility should work for six days in a year in his mine, or in his silk works. He sends his gold and silk into China for which they bring him back silver, which he coins into pieces to the value of ten sols. He also makes their pieces of gold like to the Aspers of Turkey ; of which he has two sorts, four of the one sort making a crown, and twelve of the other."²²

Ratna Manikya II

Ratna Manikya II, the son of Ramdeb Manikya, ascended the throne in 1685 at the age of five. His reign was full of conspiracy and quarrels among the members of the royal family. It was during his reign, Rudra Singha, the King of Assam, sent Ratna Kandali and Arjundas Vairagi as diplomatic envoys to Tripura. The object of Rudra Singha was to establish friendly relations with Tripura in furtherance of his aim to organise a confederacy of the Hindu rulers against the Mughals. This was probably the first Assamese mission to Tripura. Ratna Kandali and Arjundas were cordially received by Ratna Manikya. Ratna Manikya sent Rameswar Bhattacharjee Nayalankar and Udainarayan Biswas to the Court of Assam in 1710. They reached Rangpur the new capital of Assam where King Rudra Singha received the Tripura envoys amidst pomp and ceremony. Rudra Singha sent Ratna Kandali and Arjundas as envoys to Tripura for the second time. They were formally received by the Tripura King Ratna Manikya on 15th April, 1712. They delivered a secret letter of Rudra Singha in which Tripura king was requested to inform Rudra Singha what assistance he could render against the Mughals. During their stay at Udaipur the Assamese envoys and their camp followers were invited to the celebrations and festivities connected with the worship of Madan—the God of love.

In the meantime Ghanshyam Barthakur, step-brother of Ratna Manikya, had been conspiring with a Mughal named Murad Beg, to seize the throne of Tripura. With the help of Murad Beg and Mamud Sapi, a Mughal officer despatched from Dacca, Ghanshyam dethroned Ratna Manikya and sat on the throne and assumed the title Mahendra Manikya. This event took place on Monday, 10 May, 1712, when the Assamese envoys were staying at Udaipur.²³

Mahendra Manikya

Mahendra Manikya formally received the Assamese envoys on 24 July, 1712 and sent an envoy named Aribhim Narayan with them to the court of Ahom king. Mahendra Manikya expressed his intention to strengthen his friendship with the Ahom monarch. He died in 1713 after a rule of fourteen months.

Ratna Kandali and Arjundas Vairagi who visited Tripura as envoys of King Rudra Singha of Assam on three different occasions between the years 1709 and 1715 recorded their impressions which throw sidelights on the social, economic and political conditions of medieval Tripura.²¹ They recorded that the people living in places adjoining the river Gumti were prosperous. Among agricultural products there were paddy, potato, cotton, sugarcane, oil-seeds, etc. The mango, coconut and jackfruit were found in abundance. They witnessed market places at Udaipur on the bank of the river Gumti. One of these markets was called Rajhat where utensils made of copper, brass, etc., and articles such as cotton, sugar, salt, milk and ghee were sold. They mentioned some areas viz. Meharkul, Khandal, Mandal, Vakachai, Lohagarh, Tisna, Mirzapur, Lomagar, Bhusana, Kulasar and Dharmanagar where paddy, pulses and corn of good quality were grown. The envoys also witnessed men of different professions who lived at Udaipur around a big tank known as Amar Sagar. There were weavers, goldsmiths, carpenters, and washermen. There were also Brahmins, Kayasthas, Vaidyas and Gardeners who lived in between two tanks Amar Sagar and Vijay Sagar. The King lived in a house built with bricks. It housed also an armoury. The nobles also lived in houses built of bricks. Revenue of some parganas were allotted for the expenses of the queens and members of the Royal family. There were many temples in the capital dedicated to Vishnu, Siva and other gods and goddesses. The *sati* system or the burning of the wife with the dead body of her husband was prevalent in Tripura at that time. They recorded that all the wives of Ratna Manikya immolated themselves with their husband, permission being given for that act by their mother-in-law.

Dharma Manikya II

After the death of Mahendra Manikya, his brother Durjoy Singha took the title Dharma Manikya and ascended the throne

in 1713 and issued a coin in the year 1714. The Ahom King Rudra Singha again sent Ratna Kandali and Arjundas as envoys to Tripura for the third time. They were received by Dharma Manikya on 13 May 1715 and were given final farewell from the court on 31 May 1715 with letters and presentation to the King Rudra Singha conveying general assurance of friendship. No envoy was sent this time from Tripura.

The kingdom of Tripura fell from its position of glory during the reign of Dharma Manikya II. Dharma Manikya failed to give regular tribute to the Nawab of Bengal, so the Nawab was displeased with him. The old *Rajmala* stated that the Nawab of Dacca sent an army against him. Dharma Manikya defended his country with the help of his general Ranabhim Narayan for eight months. The Mughal army returned to their own country without achieving success. The old *Rajmala* also states that Jagatram a descendent of Chhatra Manikya, tried to seize the throne of Tripura but was defeated. Jagatram sought the assistance of Aka Sadik, a zamindar of Pātpāshā Pargana. Aka Sadik, being intimately acquainted with an officer Mir Habib by name, recommended the cause of Jagatram to him, and pointed out the favourable opportunity of subjugating Tripura. The Mughal army under the leadership of Mir Habib had crossed the Brahmaputra river and entered Tripura before the King came to know all about it. They were accompanied by Jagatram whose cause they apparently espoused. Aided by such a guide, they had reached the capital before the King could make any preparation for defence. "Absolutely unprepared for such an attack, the Raja fled to the neighbouring hills, whereupon the fort of Chandigarh, which had been his residence, was stormed by the invaders and the whole of his kingdom fell under the latter's control."²⁵ Mir Habib's incursion into Tripura has been corroborated by *Tariki-Bangla* and *Riaz-us-Salatīn*.

Jagat Manikya

Jagatram was enthroned on the condition of paying a substantial portion of the revenue to the Nawab of Bengal. In order to guard Jagat Manikya alias Jagatram against Dharma Manikya, and at the same time to secure loyalty, a Mughal troop was kept at Udaipur under the command of Aka Sadik, who was nominated as Foudar. Nawab Sujauddin being pleased with this incident

honoured Mir Habib and conferred him the title 'Khan' and named conquered provinces of Tripura as Roshnābād meaning 'the land of light.' Sujauddin became the Nawab of Bengal in 1727 and so this incident took place not before this year. Dharma Manikya, however, appealed to the Nawab and recovered his throne. The Nawab granted him the zamindari right of the district of Roshnabad on a yearly rent of rupees five thousand. Since then the king of Tripura had been in possession of Roshnabad simply as Zamindar.

Mukunda Manikya

Dharma Manikya was succeeded by his brother Chandramoni who assumed the title Mukunda Manikya in the year 1729. He was taken possession by the Mughals on the ground that he failed to pay tributes of elephants as required by the Mughals. He committed suicide after ten years of reign.

Joy Manikya

Rudramoni, a descendent of Jagannath Thakur, brother of *Govinda Manikya, organised a national militia against the Mughals and made a surprise attack on Udaipur and occupied it. The Mughals being unable to resist his attack came to terms and left the capital. As a reward for this act of bravery, people selected him as King in preference to the sons of Mukunda Manikya. Rudramoni took the title Joy Manikya and ascended the throne in 1739. In the meantime Indra Manikya, a son of Mukunda Manikya, secured military help from the Nawab of Bengal and occupied the throne and issued a coin in the year 1744. Joy Manikya left the capital and carried on administration from the Motai hills and with the help of some zamindars he repeatedly attempted to regain power.

After the death of Indra Manikya and Joy Manikya, Joy Manikya's brother Vijay Manikya ruled for five years. Failing to give regular tribute, Vijay Manikya was taken prisoner at the court of the Nawab and died at Dacca.

Shamser Gazi

Vijay Manikya died at Dacca and Krishnamoni, Indra Manikya's brother, tried to recover Udaipur, the capital of Tripura.

Shamser Gāzi, an upstart Muslim of Dakshin-sik at the junction of Chittagong, Noakhali and Sabroom, defeated Krishnamoni and occupied Udaipur. The dethroned Krishnamoni wandered in the hills and forests for about a decade. Shamser Gāzi set up Lakshman Manikya, a grandson of Dharma Manikya, as a puppet king for three years and later on took the throne for himself. He excavated many tanks, and granted rent free lands.²⁶ He also committed dacoities in several places.²⁷ According to *Krishnamala*, he was made captive and was shot dead at the mouth of a cannon by the order of the Nawab of Bengal. The *Ghāzināmā*, however, stated that Abu Bakar, the Governor of Chittagong, was displeased with him and shot him dead at the mouth of a cannon at Rangpur Ghoraghat. Taking advantage of this situation, Krishnamoni recovered the throne and was recognised by the Nawab as the ruler of Tripura.

MODERN PERIOD

Krishna Manikya

After the fall of Shamser Ghāzi, Krishnamoni, the son of Mukunda Manikya, took the title of Krishna Manikya and ascended the throne in 1760. Old Agartala became his capital. Very soon Krishna Manikya was involved in quarrels not only with Reza Khan, the Fojdar of Chittagong, but also with the British. Taking advantage of the confusion caused by the revolution of 1760 at Murshidabad, the king of Tripura withheld the payment of revenues. So Reza Khan first sent his *dewan* to Tripura and afterwards he personally came in 1760 but the king refused to surrender.

The people of the East India Company stationed at Calcutta were keen to acquire territory and got interested in this matter and interfered. On 20 January, 1761, Governor Vansittart instructed the President and Council of the Factory at Islamabad to take action against the ruler of Tripura.²⁸ Accordingly, Verlest, the chief of Islamabad, despatched Lieutenant Mathews with two hundred sepoy and two guns to Tripura on 25 February, 1761. Realising that he could not stand against the Fojdar and the British, the two great enemies at the same time, Krishna Manikya submitted. Thus the English flag was hoisted over the plains of Tripura.

Marriot, the Collector, was sent from the Chittagong Council on 15 March to settle and receive the revenues of Tripura. The Collector found the province desolated by the Nawab's troops and was compelled to take payments by instalments as the Raja was very low in cash. The king was made to sign two agreements : in one he agreed to pay the original revenue of Rs. 1,00,001, together with Rs. 45,463 to pay for the charges of the troops, and in the other to pay a Salami or Nazarana of Rs. 1,11,191 annas 6 and pies 3 both the thirteen monthly instalments.²⁰ Ralph Leak was then appointed the first Resident of Tripura and thus, the hitherto independent, Tripura was subjugated by the British.

It is stated in the *Krishnamala*, a life history of Krishna Manikya, that one Balaram Manikya the descendent of Jagat Manikya was recognised as the ruler of Chakla Roshnabad by the Nawab of Bengal. But within a short time Krishna Manikya recovered it with the help of Verlest, the Governor of Chittagong Factory. Abdul Razzak who was appointed as ruler of Chakla Roshnabad by Shamser Gazi began to harass Krishna Manikya by sudden attacks. He was arrested and killed by the Nawab of Murshidabad. The revolt of the Khuchung Chan of the Kuki tribe was also suppressed by the king.

During the later years of his reign a dispute arose with the British over the settlement of Roshnabad. However, this dispute was settled and in 1782, the British Resident, Leak under the instruction of the Government of Bengal, took the Zamindari of Chakla Roshnabad into Khas or direct management for ten years and finally was returned to the ruler of Tripura.

The Temple of Satero-Ratna or Seventeen jewels at Jagannathpur the foundation of which was laid by Ratna Manikya II, was completed by Krishna Manikya. He performed many sacrifices and donated lands to the Brahmins. He died on 11th July, 1783. After the death of Krishna Manikya, quarrels broke out over succession. There were mainly two claimants to the throne—Rajdhar Manikya, the nephew of Krishna Manikya and Durgamoni, the son of Lakshman Manikya. To avoid civil war, queen Jahnavi Devi took the administration into her own hands and ruled for about two years. During her reign the subjects suffered from the worst famine in 1784-85.

1783
1784
1785

Durga Manikya

The dispute between Rajdhar Manikya and Durgamoni Thakur was finally settled by Warren Hastings in 1785, who declared Rajdhar Manikya the king and Durgamoni the Yuvaraj respectively. After the death of Rajdhar Manikya in 1804, the quarrels again broke out on the same issue. The succession of Ramganga Manikya, the son of Rajdhar Manikya, was challenged by Durgamoni. The ministers and members of the royal family were divided into two camps. Ramganga Manikya occupied the throne in 1804, Durgamoni sought the British judgement in the court. In 1808 the British Government recognised Durgamoni as king and ultimately in 1809, Durgamoni ascended the throne under the title Durga Manikya. Durga Manikya died in 1813.

Ram Ganga Manikya

A fresh litigation started in the British court between Ramganga Manikya on the one hand and three other claimants, Ramchandra Thakur, Maharani Sumitradevi and Sambhu Chandra Thakur. The British Government supported the claim of Ramganga Manikya who ascended the throne for the second time in 1813 and died in 1826. Sambhu Chandra Thakur revolted but Kashi Chandra Manikya, the brother of Ramganga Manikya, who ascended the throne in 1826 and died in 1829, made a peaceful settlement with Sambhu Chandra Thakur by offering him a pension of rupees five hundred per month.³⁰

Krishna Kishore Manikya

Krishna Kishore Manikya, the son of Ramganga Manikya, ascended the throne in 1829. He shifted his capital westward to Natun Haveli. During his reign, the Kukis disturbed the British frontier villages on several occasions and the instigators of these raids were the relatives of the King. It was for this reason, that Krishna Kishore Manikya was involved in trouble with the British government of India. Krishna Kishore Manikya spent most of his time in hunting, sports and merry making. As a result the state and zamindari reached the stage of bankruptcy at the time of his death. He died of lightning shock in 1849.

Ishan Chandra Manikya

Ishan Chandra Manikya, the son of Krishna Kishore Manikya, ascended the throne of Tripura on 1st February, 1850. To solve the financial problem, he appointed Balaram Hazari, the *dewan*, who tried to collect taxes from the subjects in a very cruel manner. The result was that some tribal people under their two leaders Kirti and Parikshit revolted against the king. This revolt which is known as Tipra Revolt of 1850 was ultimately suppressed by the King.

The British government's sepoy of the 34th Native Infantry stationed at Chittagong revolted in 1857. They entered the territory of the king of Tripura and sought protection. But the king was not in favour of those sepoys. He issued orders to arrest and to deliver them to the British authorities.

The Kukis accompanied by some dissatisfied subjects of the king raided Tripura in 1860 and 1861. They even crossed Tripura and plundered some villages within the British territory. The British government was highly displeased with the ruler of Tripura because of the latter's inability to prevent the trespass of the Kukis into British territory. To prevent any Kuki raid in future the king agreed with the British authorities (i) to establish five frontier posts of twenty men each, (ii) to establish a stockade of 150 men on the Feni river connected with the posts by a road, (iii) to bear the expenses of six drill sergeants provided by the British Government to drill and train the king's force, and (iv) to provide facilities for a topographical survey of Tripura.²¹

Bir Chandra Manikya

After the death of Ishan Chandra Manikya, his brother Bir Chandra Manikya became the ruler of Tripura in 1862. With the accession of Bir Chandra Manikya, a new age ushered in Tripura. By introducing many reforms in the western pattern, he made Tripura a modern state. The justice was administered more rapidly and systematically than before; the revenue increased; a budget system was introduced, and there were many other signs of progress in the government of Tripura. He abolished slavery and gati system. In internal reforms his chief adviser was Babu Nilmoni Das whom he made his *dewan* in 1873.

It was in the year 1863 that the jamatia tribe under their

leader Parikshit revolted against the government. This revolt was owing to the oppressions of the officials. The king suppressed this revolt with the help of the Kukis.

British Annexation

Taking advantage of the Lushai revolt, the British government took away a tract of 850 square miles from Longai river to Dhaleswari river in an unjust manner. In 1871 a political agent was appointed to reside at Agartala with the special object of protecting British interests on the frontier, which suffered from Lushai raids carried out through the state into British territory. This post was abolished in 1878.

Bir Chandra Manikya was a versatile genius, a linguist and a musician. He composed hundreds of lyrics. It was he who first discovered the genius in young Rabindranath after reading his collection of poems *Bhagna-Hriday* (The Broken Heart). His court was full of great musicians, poets and scholars. Bir Chandra is compared to Vikramaditya²² of ancient India.

Radha Kishore Manikya

Radha Kishore Manikya who ascended the throne in 1897 was also like his father, a great reformer. He introduced modern system of education, reformed the departments of public health, agriculture and police and remodelled them on European patterns. A thorough land reform had been carried out in his times and the result was that during his reign land revenue increased. He was a benevolent ruler who did his best to promote the welfare of his subjects. He established the Victoria Memorial Hospital at Agartala. He also built a temple of Jagannatha, a school and a museum. The old residential palace was badly damaged by an earthquake in 1897 and a new palace called the Ujjayanta was constructed at his behest.

Radha Kishore Manikya was a great patron of literature and learning. The Tripura State Gazette an official newspaper was first published during his reign. While setting up the Santiniketan Brahmacharya Vidyalya and Visva Bharti, Rabindranath got a substantial amount of financial assistance from him. The Bengal Technical Institute of Calcutta which formed the nucleus of the present Jadavpur University, received a handsome donation from

him. Radha Kishore gave financial help to the great scientist Jagadis Chandra Bose for his researches in science. He also gave financial help to the blind poet Hem Chandra Bandopadhyaya. This enlightened and benevolent ruler died in a motor accident at Benaras, in 1909.

Birendra Kishore Manikya

Like his father, Birendra Kishore Manikya was also an enlightened and benevolent ruler. He founded a school for agriculture and constructed a small but beautiful palace on a mound at Kunjaban. The most notable achievement of Birendra Kishore was the introduction of tea industry in Tripura. This industry increased the revenue of the state and gave employment opportunities to the people. He was himself an artist and a painter. He patronised drama, music and literature. He died in 1923 at the young age of forty.

Bir Bikram

Maharaja Bir Bikram, the son of Maharaja Birendra Kishore Manikya, ascended the throne in 1923. He was a minor at that time so the administration was entrusted to a Council of administration. His investiture ceremony took place in the year 1927. He was an enlightened benevolent ruler who did his best for an all-round development of Tripura.

Before the commencement of the Second World War, Maharaja made a world tour and visited several places of Far East, Europe and America. These long tours enabled him to gain first hand knowledge about the thoughts and ideas of the modern world. He improved agriculture and encouraged the Jhum cultivators to take to plough cultivation. He also spent a large sum of money for the development of internal communication. It was due to his initiative that an aerodrome was constructed at Singerbeel near Agartala. He planned to establish not only a college, but a rural university under a scheme known as the "Vidyapathan Plan". For this purpose he acquired a big plot of land now known as College Tilla on the south eastern side of Agartala town. But the Maharaja died before the fulfilment of his dream. His desire for administrative reforms could not be implemented due to the Second World War and during the war, he extended his

co-operation to the British authority. The first Tripura Rifles and the Tripura Mahabir Legion earned undying fame in the Arakan and Burma warfields.³³ To put a check to the tribals' desires to embrace Christianity, the Maharaja gave impetus to Buddhism and founded a Buddha Mandir at Agartala in 1946 known as Benuban Bihar. Nir Mahal, a palace built by the Maharaja on an island in the centre of the lake Rudrasagar, is one of the finest beauty-spots in Tripura.

He composed many songs and wrote a historical drama 'Jayabati'. On the occasion of 80th birthday of Rabindranath the Maharaja held a special Darbar and conferred the honorific title 'Bharat Bhaskar' or Sun of India on the poet. The Maharaja died on 17 May, 1947 at the age of thirtynine.³⁴ Before his death he decided to accede Tripura to the Indian Union.

Kirit Bikram

After the death of Maharaja Bir Bikram, his son and successor Kirit Bikram became the Maharaja of Tripura. He was a minor, so a Council of Regency under the presidentship of Kirit Bikram's mother Kanchan Prava Devi, was formed to run the administration. Within a few months after the death of Maharaja Bir Bikram, Tripura faced a great crisis. The Muslims of Tripura and Comilla headed by Abdul Barik Khan alias Gedu Mia conspired with a few persons of the palace for the annexation of the state to Pakistan and preparations had been made to invade Tripura. The Government of India took timely cognizance of the situation and Tripura was protected and saved.³⁴

On the advice of the Government of India, the Council of Regency was dissolved and Maharani Kanchan Prava Devi became the sole Regent on 12 January, 1948. The Tripura Merger Agreement was signed on 9 September 1949 in New Delhi. Maharani Kanchan Prava Devi signed the agreement on behalf of her minor son as well as in her capacity as the Regent of the state.

After this agreement an administrator was appointed who took up the administration of Tripura as Chief Commissioner on the 15 October, 1949. It became a Part 'C' State of India. There was no mention of the status of the impartible zamindari of

Chakla Roshnabad in this agreement. It was included into erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Under the provisions of the North Eastern Areas Act of 1971, Tripura became a full-fledged State in 1972.

The revolutionary activities and ideas in India had their impact on Tripura and the result was the growth of political consciousness in Tripura in the first half of the 20th century. The political movement in Tripura had two aspects; it gave its full support to the national struggle for freedom in India and at the same time it launched a movement against the oppressive measures of the princely administration.

The wave of the terrorist movement reached and shook Tripura. Many underground activists of Anusilan and Jugantar parties of Bengal used to come to Tripura not merely for political activities but also for the fact that Tripura was a safer shelter for them as the British police had ordinarily no authority to enter Tripura. Regarding the activities of Anusilan Samity in Tripura, R.C. Majumdar remarked :

For the purpose of training its members the Anusilan had two farms at Belonia and Udaipur in Hill Tipperah. These were outwardly, and in part really, agricultural farms but they served mainly as centres for training. During day time the members worked as labourers in the field but at night they were given training in the use of different kinds of arms, and practised shooting in the neighbouring hills. They had to work hard and lived under strict military discipline.²⁵

The *Chhatra Sangha* established probably in 1927 was also a centre of revolutionary activities in Tripura. Its members were supporters of the Anusilan Samity of Bengal. Within a very short time after the martyrdom of Lala Lajpat Rai, some students formed an organisation known as '*Bhratri Sangha*' which was originally a physical and cultural society and later became an important centre for revolutionary movement in Tripura. Most of the members of the *Chhatra Sangha* became the members of the *Bhratri Sangha*. Besides these two *Sanghas* there were also other small pockets in different areas known by different names, viz., *Milan Sangha*, *Matri Sangha* etc.

A political robbery was committed on the 23rd Chaitra of 1932 at 8 p.m. in a shop near Agartala Municipality office. Five members of the Anusilan Samity who belonged to the group of Satish Pakrasi of Dacca committed this dacoity. Money and ornaments were looted from the said shop. Three members of this party were arrested and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment.

On 26 January 1930, the members of the *Bhrātri Sangha* called for a strike in schools and observed independence day. The government expelled some students from their schools and arrested some youth leaders of this organisation. The Tripura Government signed a pact with the British Government by which it was decided that the British Government could arrest any suspected person from the territory of Tripura.

Most of the members of the *Bhrātri Sangha* were released by the Government before 1938. In a meeting held in December, 1938 at Agartala, the members of the *Bhrātri Sangha* made a resolution by which it was decided that they would follow the line of the Congress. Henceforth, a new organisation came into existence in place of *Bhrātri Sangha* and this was known as *Tripura Rajya Gana Parisad*. Sachindra Lal Singha, Hariganga Basak, Sukhamoy Sengupta, Umes Lal Singha, etc. were the pioneers of this organisation. This organisation attempted to make itself popular among the people of Tripura and tried to establish relations with other political organisations of India. Its ideas and objects were those of the Indian National Congress. It gave expression to public resentment against feudal privileges and championed the cause of the poor peasants by putting forward the demands for land reforms. This organisation issued a bulletin from time to time. It sent its representatives, Sukhamoy Sengupta and Tarit Mohan Dasgupta to the All India States Peoples' Conference held at Gwalior in 1946.

The *Janamangal Samity* was formed by some young and energetic youths of Agartala in 1937-38. It raised the demand for 'responsible government under the aegis of the Maharaja'. Bansi Thakur, Biren Datta, Pravat Roy, Sukumar Bhowmik and Kirti Singha were the leaders of this organisation. In 1945, *Tripura Rajya Jana Sikhya Samity* was formed. This organisation had an important role in spreading mass education in Tripura. Many

primary schools were opened at many places. Biren Datta, Dasarath Deb, Sudhanya Deb Barma, Aghore Deb Barma, Nilmani Deb Barma and many others were the members of this Samity. *Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal* was formed in 1946. This organisation was composed of the ex-members of *Janamangal Samity*, *Janasikshya Samity* and of some communist-minded people. It fought for the realisation of responsible government by elected people. Jogesh Chandra Deb Barma and Bir Chandra Deb Barma were the president and secretary respectively of this organisation. This organisation sent Biren Datta, Sudhanya Deb Barma and Bir Chandra Deb Barma as representatives in the All India States Peoples' Conference held at Gwalior in the year 1946. *Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad* also sent their representatives to this conference. Disputes arose between the two delegations as to who really represented Tripura. However, both were allowed to attend the conference as fraternal delegations, without recognition being accorded to any one of them.

During 1938-39 a Harijan organisation was started under the leadership of Sukhamoy Sengupta. Tripura Motor Workers Association was organised in 1940-41 with the initiative of Monohar Bandopadhyaya, Ajamin Das and Girija Chakraborty of Akhaura. *Dharmanagar Hitasadhan Samity* which was formed in 1940 by Kala Chandra Nath Choudhury of Dharmanagar and Makbul Ali Bhuiyan was a socio-economic organisation of Hindu-Muslim unity. Abdul Barik Khan alias Gedu Mia formed *Anjuman Islamia* in 1945 at Agartala. It established its branches in all Moslem majority areas of Tripura. Its aim and objects were to improve the integrity of the Muslims of Tripura in every sphere of their lives. About the same time another socio-religious organisation was formed under the name *Tripura Rajya Moslem Praja Majlish* by Arman Ali Munshi and Farid Mia of Udaipur. This organisation worked as a rival institution of *Anjuman Islamia* among the Moslem agriculturists.

Revolutionary activities increased in the early part of 1939. Many revolutionaries were expelled from Tripura. Some of them like Sachindra Lal Singha, Sukhamoy Sengupta, Umesh Lal Singha and Ashu Mukhopadhyaya began to deliver their speeches against the government of Tripura in its bordering places. So they were

arrested by the British Government and handed over to the Tripura State Police who kept them in Agartala Central Jail without any trial and they were released in the early 1945.

All political meetings and agitations were declared illegal during the Second World War. On 6 September 1942, the Government of Tripura issued a notification by which (i) the Congress Working Committee, (ii) The All India Congress Committee, and (iii) All Provincial and District Congress Committees were declared unlawful associations. To meet the effects of public agitation, the Maharaja passed Tripura Constitution in the year 1941. But these reforms failed to pacify the people who demanded a democratic government responsible to the public. In 1942-43 the Reangs led by Ratanmani started their movement against the oppressions of the feudal system of society. However, their movements were suppressed ruthlessly by the royal forces.

The year 1946 saw the formal inauguration of the Tripura State Congress. The Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad was merged with Tripura State Congress. Sachindra Lal Singha, Sukhamoy Sengupta, Umesh Lal Singha and Tarit Mohan Dasgupta and many others were in the leadership of the Congress. It was then functioning as a district unit under the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. They pleaded against untouchability, for spinning with *Charkha* and demanded a responsible government in the State. Their movement along the line of Indian freedom movement continued.

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3

Patterns of Administrative Organisation

Bani Kantha Bhattacharya

Ancient Times

The history of governmental control and administration in Tripura has its moorings in an ancient past though the various accounts of administrative control found in ancient chronicles and based mainly on myths and legends can hardly stand the test of scientific scrutiny today. A stable kingdom based on an efficient government came into being for the first time in the beginning of the fifteenth century during the reign of Ratna Manikya who was assisted in the establishment of his supremacy over his people by the Muslim rulers of Bengal. In ancient times, there was no powerful monarchy with effective command over the entire tract. Various tribes had migrated to this land in successive waves in the past and they found their abode in different parts of the hilly regions.

These tribes were sometimes independent and sometimes subjugated by one another. Each community had its own

elementary social and administrative organisation starting from the village level and going up to the chieftainship of the whole tribe. These were age-old systems, the remnants of which may be found even today. During the reigns of the earlier Tripura *Rājās*, the tribes enjoyed their traditional freedom based on the concept of self-administration, the relation between the king and the subject tribes was maintained through the tribal chiefs or *Sardārs*. This relation was also limited and in most cases it was confined to the paying and collecting of taxes and occasional *Nazrānās*. The ancient administrative system, had at its core the tribal self-governing institutions which differed from tribe to tribe.

Administrative System of the Tripuris

The Tripuris or the Tipperas are the largest and were till recently the ruling tribe in Tripura. Each Tippera village was self-governing. Women had no share in the government. They were even forbidden to set foot in the *Chaudhuri Naksār* (Council Room) except when they were involved in a case. The men in the villages could participate in the affairs of the Council.

The designation of the Chief varied from village to village. Somewhere he was called *Chaudhuri*, while in certain areas, he was called *Sardār*. The village council was constituted of the chief of the village known as *Chaudhuri* or *Sardār*, *Kārbāri*, (the secretary to the chief), and *Khāndal*, a peon-cum-sepoy. The main functions of the council were to administer justice, collect taxes, perform community worship and to solve the common problems of the villagers. Justice was quick, perceptible and cheap.

The upper stratum of the tribe was composed of the *Rājā*, the princes and the *Thākurs*. Omesh Saigal, in his account of Tripura observes that the 12 classes of Thākurs, who enjoy the highest status amongst the Tripura Kahatriyas, are said to be continuing from the days of Trilochan, a mythological king of Tripura. Since the time of Kalyan Manikya, the members related to the royal family were given the title of *Thākurs*, who were also known as *Bara Ghariā*. The *Thākurs* enjoyed status and prestige only next to the Maharaja and lived in and around the capital.

Administrative System of the Riangs

The Riangs are the second largest tribe in Tripura. It is presumed that it was also a ruling tribe in a part of Tripura. They had the traditions of an integrated three-tier administrative set-up at the village, clan and tribe level. The village level administration was conducted by the *Chaudhuri*, chief of the village, *Kārbāri*, secretary and minister to the chief, and *Dāoā*, serving as a messenger.

Next there were 14 *dafās* or sections among the Riāng tribe. Each *dafā* had its own administrative head. These heads were also the ex-officio members of the government for the whole tribe. The following list gives the designation of the heads of different *dafās*.

<i>Dafā or Section of the Riāng tribe</i>	<i>Designation of the heads of the Dafā.</i>
1. Tuinmi	Roy and Karma
2. Mursui	Chapia Khan and Yak-Chung
3. Mechka	Chapia and Yak-Chung
4. Apet	Kachkau (Kachak) and Darkalim
5. Charki	Kachkau (Kachak) and Daiya-Hazra
6. Masa	Hazra and Kanda
7. Rai Kachak	Doloi and Khaskalim
8. Taqma Yakcha	Muria and Khaskalim
9. Oaring	Daoa and Kangreng
10. Nak-qam	Karma and Dukaria
11. Champerong	Sengatrak and Khandal
12. Sagaroy	Bhandari and Hazra
13. Riāng	Kachkau (Kachak)
14. Darbang	Karma and Kangreng

In all there were 27 administrative heads for the 14 *dafās* and they had 19 different designations. These heads together formed the central administrative machinery for the Riāngs. The *Roy* was the king for the whole tribe, while the *Kāchkau* (Kachak) acted as the minister to him. The *Roy* and *Kachkau* had separate groups of people to serve under their direct supervision, the details of which are given below :

The Office of the Roy

1. Roy—The King of Riangs
2. Chapia Khan—Prince ; acts as Roy in his absence
3. Chapia—The would-be Chapia Khan
4. Darkalim—Priest
5. Doloi—Prosecutor
6. Bhandari—Store-Keeper
7. Kanda—Attendant of Roy
8. Daiya Hazra—Attendant of Roy
9. Dukaria—Drummer
10. Muria—Shehnai-player
11. Daoa—Assistant to Darkalim
12. Sengakrak—Royal Umbrella-bearer

The Office of Kachkau

1. Kachkau—Minister
2. Yakchung—Treasurer
3. Hazra—Attendant of Kachkau
4. Kangreng—Umbrella-bearer of Kachkau
5. Karma—Attendant of Yakchung
6. Khaskalim—Umbrella-bearer of Yakchung
7. Khandal—Man incharge of food supply

Each tribe had an elaborate system of self-governing institution of their own. At present only the remnants of such institutions are found in the village councils and the respect shown to the old men holding a few designation of the past. Two factors account for the decadence of these age-old tribal organisations, (i) modernisation of the administrative system during the last hundred years, and (ii) the attempt of Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya to centralise the tribal administration through the *Mandali Act* during the thirties of this century. Modern research workers collected the facts of these systems from the meagre accounts left by the officials of both the British and Tripura governments and mainly from the hearsay evidence of the aged tribal sardars of different regions. So their descriptions do not tally with one another in some cases and sometimes seem to be incomplete. However, it may be safely concluded that before the rise of a

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stable kingdom in Tripura, each tribe had their own socio-political organisations.

The Medieval Period

A long period of about five hundred years from 14th to the 18th centuries saw the rise and development of a monarchy. Ratna Manikya was sent to the Durbar of the Nawab of Bengal by his father, Dāngar Fā. He spent a few years there at the Court of the Nawab. It is said that the Nawab helped him to occupy the throne of Tripura after his father's death and bestowed the title of Manikya on him. Henceforth the traditional title of 'Fā' was cast off by the rulers of Tripura, who began to spread their monarchical authority over the other tribes and parts of this territory.

Ratna Manikya brought from Lakshanabati three Bengalees, Bara Khandab Ghosh, Pandit Raj and Joynarayan Sen to man his nascent administration. It combined in itself the features of Hindu and Muslim administration. He created the posts of 'Seristas' and introduced both the Bengali and the Persian as the official languages to be used in the administration.

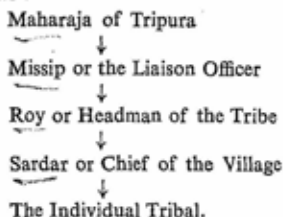
In the *Rajmala*, there is also the mention of appointment of regional administrators.

"Distant or newly-conquered provinces were ruled by 'Laskars'. Nasul and Chhambalnagar (Kailashahar) were administered by such rulers. Laskars were held in great esteem and wielded overall authority over their regions."¹

But the position of the Laskar appears to have been exalted. Usually he appears to have been a police officer responsible for the collection of taxes from the tribal chiefs. The *Tripura Desher Katha* written in 1724 by two Assamese envoys describes the skeleton administrative set-up of a village called Rāngrung situated in northern Tripura. The village is inhabited by about 300 people. They have their own sardar called *Halamecha* who is the representative of the Maharaja of Tripura. Under him, there is one *galim*, one *gāboor*, one *chāpiā* and one *doloi*. There is a Laskar also sent by the king of Tripura. The Laskars could be transferred from one place to another. This description gives an idea of the king's authority over the distant hills of Tripura. The

tribal villages enjoyed freedom under their age-old self-administrative system. The king would wield his authority by collecting taxes from the subjects through village chiefs, and officials who were members of the police force and posted in different regions.

At a later date the post of Missip was created and the Missip acted as a liaison officer between the Mahārājā and the headman of a tribe. He was generally a trusted man of the Mahārājā and was one of his kith and kin. The hierarchy of the system may be represented as follows :



The individual tribal was the subject of the Mahārājā of Tripura and not of the Sardār or Roy of his tribe ; but the tribe as a whole enjoyed much of freedom as the Roy or headman of a tribe was treated as a subordinate king by the Mahārājā. In the British period, when the ruler of Tripura was designated as Rāja by the British government, the Mahārājā objected to it and realised his demand to be called as Mahārājā by citing the customs of the above system.

The administration in the centre was not very complex during this period. As late as 1808, the report of the special commissioner quoted by Alexander Mackenzie relates, "The Officers of the raj were four in number. First, the Soobah who acted as commander-in-chief ; second, the Vizir, in-charge of the revenue ; third, the Nazir, who managed the police ; and lastly, the Dewan, who controlled the accounts. These offices, though is the Rāja's gift, were practically hereditary." This was the condition in the beginning of the nineteenth century, which indicated that there was little change in the system of administration initially introduced by Ratna Manikya in the fifteenth century. The model introduced by Ratna Manikya is analogous to the concept of partrimonial political system mentioned by Almond and Powell in their work

Comparative Politics. In this system, "there are specialised political elites such as kings, sub-chiefs, and a relatively specialised officials." All or most of them were located in the ruler's household. Afterwards, it was considerably reformed in the pattern of British administration when the princes came in contact with the British system.

Modern Period

The case of Chakla Roshnabad brought the British in contact with Tripura in 1761. Leeke was appointed the resident in the court of Krishna Manikya and his assignment was to look after the affairs of Chakla Roshnabad. But the British government could exercise little influence in the internal administration of Tripura until 1871 when a Political Agent was appointed to the court of Birchandra Manikya for suppressing the Kukis. To deal with the Kukis, the establishment of a strong internal administration was felt necessary. The financial condition of the State was also to be improved. So with the advice of the Political Agent, Mahārājā Birchandra introduced administrative reforms between 1872-96 on the model of British administration and with the help of the officers loaned from British India. For the first time, Mahārājā Birchandra appointed a minister who was given overall charge of the government. Earlier, the executive powers were exercised by the Vizir and the Dewan, the highest executive officials in the state. In the later period of his rule, he established a Council of Ministers in place of a single Dewan or Minister and assigned portfolios to its members. He also introduced the features of district administration. During his time north and south sub-divisions were created for better administration of the regions and the officers administering them were vested with the powers of a Deputy Commissioner in British India.

On the legal side, there were a lot of improvements during his time. His Dewan, Nilmoni Das, introduced excise duty, stamp duty and the system of registration of documents. Rāi Bahadur Mohini Mohan Bardhan, who was appointed Minister for a brief period, compiled the Tenancy Act, formulated leave rules for the officers and laws for the protection of the properties of minors. Ishan Chandra Gupta, Dewan of Chakla Roshnabad, compiled the criminal and judicial laws. Thus the first written code of Tripura appeared during the reign of Mahārāj Birchandra. The

system of examination for lawyers was also introduced by an order in 1876. According to the advice of the Political Agent, a reform was introduced in the Judicial administration of Hill Tripura. Till then, the King had acted as the Supreme Court of appeal. In 1872, Mahārāj Birchandra established the *Khas Appeal Adalat* (Royal Court of Appeal) for final judgment of the civil and criminal cases. It was constituted with two judges, to some extent on the model of the Privy Council. In 1886, the post of Chief Justice was created. The *Pāhārī Ādālat* (Hill Court) was abolished in 1878. Thus some features of bureaucratic system of administration on a somewhat imperial model were introduced in Tripura by Mahārāj Birchandra.

✓ Radhakishore Manikya, who ruled for twelve years (1897-1909) formed Executive and Legislative Councils with rules of procedure. An *Amātya Sabhā* (Advisory Council) consisting of five members including *Jubrāj* (Crowned Prince) was also created for the first time. During his rule, the Police and Revenue Departments were separated. The Police Department was thoroughly reorganised in 1907 and the Revenue Officers were relieved of Police duties. The whole state was divided into a number of Police *thānās* (police stations) and *Tehsil* circles. During his rule the secretariat was reorganised. The *Khās Sheristā* was separated from the Private Secretary's office, rules were framed for the Department of Royal Household. Several post offices were also opened in the State. With the efforts of the *Mahārājā's* able minister, Roy Umakanta Das Bahadur, the judiciary was thoroughly modernised. A number of judges was appointed. At the lower level the executive and the judiciary were separated by creating the posts of the Munsiff Magistrate and the Collector of Revenue. Honorary Magistrates were also appointed for trying cases under the Chairmanship of Sadar Magistrate. A long hierarchy of courts was established to cover the mofussil areas. Some of these courts were abolished later by the *Mahārājā* to relieve the people from the hazards of too many appeals for a final decision in a single case.

14 *Mahārājā Birendra Kishore Manikya, who ruled from 1909 to 1923,* introduced some novel features in the administration. Sometimes the *Mahārājā* attempted to rule through a group of advisers instead of a single Minister as the overall head of the

administration. For this purpose, he reconstituted the *Amātya Sabhā* with rules of procedure. Later, he constituted the State Council, a large body having both official and non-official representatives. Out of the State Council, a smaller body called the Executive Council was framed afterwards to constitute the *Durbār* on the model of a Cabinet. Select Committees were formed from the members of the State Council for preparation of budget and for retrenchment for the sake of economy. The greatest contribution of the *Mahārājā* towards modernisation of administration was the creation of Tripura Civil Service, a systematized bureaucracy, in 1916. He also created the post of Chief Secretary for the first time in Tripura. On the legal side, the New Arms Act and the Penal Code Amendment Act were promulgated. In the case of judiciary, the *Mahārājā* took a retrograde step regarding the highest court of appeal. Following his grandfather Bir-chandra, he constituted the Privy Council on the British model with some members of the State Council.

The last ruling *Mahārājā* was Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya who reigned in Tripura from 1927 to 1947. He was the most enlightened ruler of Tripura and attempted decentralisation in the administration. He constituted three bodies for better administration of his territory, (i) *Mantraṇā Sabhā* or the Advisory Council, (ii) *Byabasthāpak Sabhā* or the Legislative Council, and (iii) *Mantri Parisath* or the Executive Council. The first council had the power to give final decisions on the most important matters placed before the *Mahārājā* for consideration. The second organ was to consider the bills drafted by the Executive departments. The third body had the administrative powers with portfolios divided among the Ministers of the *Parisath*. The Advisory Council would run the administration under the title of the State Council during the absence of the *Mahārājā*. He attempted to reconstitute the traditional tribal organisations for self-administration by passing the *Mondali* Act. The *Mondalis* covered all the self-administrative systems of the tribes in the State in 1941. The structure became hierarchical with a Central Assembly at the apex. The *Mahārājā* also declared a semi-popular constitution for the state in 1939. The constitution, though much praised by *The Naresh*, an organ of the Princes of Native States, did not come into operation, perhaps due to the World War II.

Tripura was integrated with India on 15th October, 1949. The Chief Commissioner took over the reins of administration from the Regent Mahārāni, Kanchan Prava Devi, ruling on behalf of her minor son, Kirit Bikram.

Tripura was incorporated as a Part 'C' State in the Union of India in 1950. It came to be administered by a Chief Commissioner under the direct control of the Union Government. The State was turned into a centrally administered area. After the first general election in 1952, an Advisory Council was formed with three advisers, two of whom were popular leaders of the Congress party in Tripura and one, a retired government servant belonging to the Tripuris. Their function was only to advise the Chief Commissioner in 19 subjects of administration distributed among them. They were appointed by an order of the President of India on 14 April, 1953.

The States were reorganised in 1956. Tripura was turned into an Union Territory by the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. According to the provisions of the Territorial Council Act, passed by the Parliament in 1956, Tripura Territorial Council was formed with 32 members, of whom 30 were elected by the local people and 2 were nominated by the President of India. The Council began to function from the 15 August, 1957. It was entrusted with 9 state subjects and 1 concurrent subject only. It was empowered to pass bye-laws on those subjects which would come into force after the approval of the Parliament. The Council had a Chairman as political chief and a Chief Executive Officer as the head of the bureaucracy. The Chairman was to be elected by the Council, while the Chief Executive Officer was appointed by the Chief Commissioner, redesignated as Administrator. This was the first representative body in Tripura on the model of a municipal administration dealing with a few local subjects under the supervision of the Administrator.

The next change came into effect in 1963 when the Union Territories Act was passed. It provided Tripura with its first Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers. The number of elected members in the Assembly remained unchanged but that of nominated members rose to three. The Assembly could pass laws on all the State and concurrent subjects. The Parliament ceased to exercise its authority over the administration which came

to be directly controlled by the President of India through the Administrator. A bill passed by the Assembly would require the assent of the President to become a law. The Assembly took the full form of a State legislature with a Speaker, a Deputy Speaker and a ministry responsible to it. But according to the Act, the ministers were practically the advisers of the Administrator, and in case of a difference between the ministers and the Administrator, the decision of the President was to be final. Thus in spite of the creation of a responsible ministry, the authority of the President remained final and supreme over the administration in Tripura. This arrangement continued to exist up to the 21 January 1972, the date on which Tripura attained full-fledged Statehood under the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act passed on the 30 December 1971. Small changes occurred from time to time during the period 1963 to 1972. For example, the designation of the Administrator was replaced by that of Lieutenant Governor in 1971. With the fourth general election in 1967, the number of ministers was raised from three to five.

Thus the patterns of administrative organisation have undergone kaleidoscopic changes through the centuries. This reflects the co-existence of tradition and modernity in the style and approach to administration. The progressive change towards modernisation has been inherent in the political system of the state because of its unique geographical location, the fast changing circumstances, an enlightened monarchical tradition as well as equally enlightened Tripuris for whom administrative changes meant the welfare of the state.

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Art and Archaeology

Priyabrata Bhattacharya

TRIPURA has flourished as a repository of ancient religion and sculpture for centuries. It has archaeological evidence to show the presence of Buddhism, Brāhmanism and various indigenous tribal religions at one time or the other in its history. The fact that Buddhism flourished in different parts of Tripurā from very early times has been attested by the discovery of various archaeological materials. The immigration of the plains people ushered in the rise of Brāhmanism and its diverse sectarian beliefs and practices in Tripura. This has also been substantiated by the archaeological materials.

The religious history of ancient Tripurā is in fact the religious history of Samatata, the kings who ruled the region up to the twelfth century. The religious history of Tripurā prior to the twelfth century is inextricably mixed up with the religious history of ancient Sylhet, Samatata, Noākhāli and Chittāgong.¹ Hinduism is the earliest religion of Tripurā and its various sects in their full-fledged form flourished here for long.

Vaisnavism

The facts of Hindū religious history like the rise of the *Bhāgavata* cult.² The dedication and worship of *Vāsudeva* and his identification with *Kṛṣṇa* are all shrouded in obscurity. It is difficult to ascertain exactly the antiquity of *Vaiṣṇavism* in Tripurā. In the *Paurāṇic* period, the worship of *Viṣṇu*, *Nārāyaṇa* and *Vāsudeva* were intermingled and formed the later *Vaiṣṇavism*. *Bhāgvat* and *Pañcharātra* sects, the two streams of religious thought have been mentioned in *Harṣhacharita*.³ The image inscriptions⁴ show that no distinction existed between *Nārāyaṇa* and *Vāsudeva* or *Viṣṇu*. The God of the *Purāṇas* was the popular deity of the *Vaiṣṇava* form of Hinduism, and *Paurāṇic Vaiṣṇavism* was the most widely prevalent and popular religion of Tripurā region from the sixth century A.D.⁵ A copper plate inscription of Gunāigarh in Comillā speaks of a temple of *Pradyumnacēvara* in Tipperā. The discovery of a copper-plate of *Loknāth*⁶ from Tipperā proves that the worship of *Ananta Nārāyaṇa* was prevalent in Tripurā region during the seventh century. Another copper-plate inscription of Kailan also indicates that *Sṛtdhārāṇarāta* was a *Paramavaiṣṇava* and a worshipper of *Purpushottam*, a king of Tipperā during the seventh century A.D. Therefore *Viṣṇu* in his different forms represents the existence of *Vaiṣṇava* sect in this region from the sixth and seventh centuries A.D.⁷

From the eighth century onwards, the development of *Vaiṣṇavism* may be proved by a number of *Viṣṇu* images of the *Pālā* and *Śeṇṣ* periods, discovered in different parts of Tripurā. For the want of sufficient materials, it has not yet been possible to identify the exact nature of early *Vaiṣṇavism* in Tripurā. During its formative period, *Vaisnavism* was probably influenced by *Viṣṇu* of *Vedic Brāhmanism*, *Nārāyaṇa* of the *Pāñcharātras* and *Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva* of the *Sātvants*.⁸ *Vaisnavism* was the predominant religion during the ancient and medieval times.

The doctrines of *Vaisnavism*, in course of time, have undergone changes and one of the great changes in *Vaisnavism* came about by the addition of the concept *Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa*. The earliest image of *Radha-Kṛṣṇa* in Tripurā dates back to seventeenth century only. A copper-plate inscription of *Bhajavarma*⁹ of Samatata, belonging to the 11th century has been found at Balaba



1. Uma-Maheswara in Sukhasana pose of c. 12th century A.D.



2. An image of twelve-handed Nataraja of 11-12th century A.D.



3. Head-worship of 14 deities



4. A Tripura family in a leisurely pace drinking and smoking

in Dacca, thereby, attesting that *Samatata* was accustomed to *Brajallā* since this period.

The worship of *Avatāras* of Vishnu, no doubt, is a remarkable feature of Vaishnavism. A few specimens of the *Narasimha* icon from Tripurā indicate that the devotees of Vishnu in Tripurā, had not forgotten the *Avatāra Narasimha*¹⁰. In Tripurā, the discovery of the icons of *Kurmāvatāra* of Vishnu testifies to the prevalence of the worship of this *Avatāra* during 11th and 12th centuries. In iconography, *Kurmāvatāra* has not been represented in hybrid form but in the sculpture the actual tortoise is carved.

An interesting image of monkey-god *Hanuman*¹¹ is found standing in the *Virāsana* pose at Unakoti in Tripurā. This image shows the prevalence of the cult of Rama in Tripurā during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. A very important noteworthy fact is that a big slab of stone with two human foot prints is shown at Unakoti and this has been traditionally revered as a symbol of the *Visnupāda*.¹²

Saivism

Vedic religion did not spread over Tripurā during the ancient period. The indigenous religious life of ancient Tripurā centered round the worship of the fourteen gods of the tribals¹³ and the aboriginal *lingas* and afterwards Brahmanical religion penetrated into Hill Tripurā. The non-Aryan god Siva's worship might have been prevalent in Tripurā even before the arrival of Brahmanical religion.

Linga worship of the non-Aryans was not only popular in Tripurā, but during the early historical period it had also radiated its influence on people of the neighbouring states. The *Vratyas*¹⁴ have proceeded to Tripurā from other areas and they absorbed the religious thought of *linga*-worshippers in the name of *Pāsupata* cult.¹⁵

Saivism also attained a predominant position along with Vaisnavism in Tripurā during the 6th century A.D. The copper-plate inscription of *Gunāighar* in *Comillā* also informs that the cult of Siva had secured royal patronage, in *Tipperā* region. Saivism, as identified in the above inscription, is a federation of cults, which had combined in it the various cults of *Rudra*, *Siya* and the *Lingas*.¹⁶ So far as Tripurā is concerned, a collection of Siva, antiquities, attributable to the period from A.D. 700-1200

has come to light from Unakoti, Pilak and some other parts of Tripurā. Throughout the historical period, the various kinds of Śaiva images and Śiva *lingas* are excellently carved in sculpture.

Saktism

Sakti has been popular since very early times among its devotees seeking her grace for granting them good fortune. Saktism is the blend of Aryan and non-Aryan streams of thought. It is a federation of cults,¹⁷ where the main principle is the *tāntric way* to reach the goal. Sakti worship prevailed originally among the Indo-Mongoloid¹⁸ race of Tripurā as *Mataikatarāmā*. *Tāntricism* was practised in Tripurā and this tāntric worship gradually developed in iconography. Tāntricism was the predominant religion of Tripurā from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries.

The gods and goddesses of the Śaiva form of Hinduism became the deities of the Śākta-Tantra. But, it is difficult to establish conclusively the beginnings of this Śākta tendency in Śaivism. In the religious history of Tripurā Sakti seems to be the active goddess who enjoyed wide popularity in the 7th century.¹⁹ An excellently carved bronze image of Sarvāni has been discovered in Tripurā and it belongs to early centuries of the Christian era. A large number of sculptures found in Tripurā bear evidence to the popularity of the Śākta cult.

Minor Sects

Gaṇeśa is not a Vedic god but a Pauranic deity.²⁰ People took to his worship sometimes in the eighth century and this deity became considerably popular in Tripurā by the 11th and 12th centuries. It is very interesting to note that there is evidence to prove the existence of the Gaṇeśa cult in Tripurā. The sculptures of Tripurā also indicate that Gaṇeśa has been worshipped as the elder son of Śiva-Dūrgā. He accompanies his parents.

There is also ample evidence to the popularity of the Sūrya cult in Tripurā. The cult of the Sun appears to have come from North India where the Śākadvipi Brahmins²¹ first introduced the solar cult. The inscribed image of Sūrya discovered from Deulbādi²² in Tripurā belongs to the seventh century and it appears to have become important during the medieval period. The images of Sun-god discovered in Tripurā indicate the wide worship of Sun-god from eighth to the fifteenth century A.D.

Iconography

The system of icon-worship had its origin from the non-Aryan devotion or *Bhakti*. The people have been paying homage to the icons of countless deities all over India. It is very difficult to ascertain exactly the antiquity of icon-worship in Tripurā but it, however, occupied an important place in the religious life of the people of ancient Tripurā.

Visnu Cult Icons

The majority of *Visnu* images have four arms bearing *sankha*, *chakra*, *gada* and *padma*. According to the disposition of the four attributes in different arms, twenty four various forms of *Visnu* have been identified²³. The *Sayana* types of extant *Vishnu* images have not yet been discovered in Tripurā. The *Samapada Sthānaka* types of *Vishnu* images are found everywhere in Tripurā. The earliest *Vishnu* image made of stone found at *Pilāk* is an interesting variety of *Trivikrama*. It is a four-armed figure, its back right and back left hands are placed on the heads of the *Gadadevi* and *Chakrapurusa* respectively; the right front seems to have been in the *abhaya* pose, the left one probably holding a conch shell. This image is assigned to the eighth century. The commonest form of the *Vishnu* image in Tripurā belongs to the variety known as *Trivikrama* as laid down in the *Agni Purana*, *Padma Purana* and the *Rupamandana*²⁴. An image of *Vishnu* of the eleventh and twelfth centuries discovered at *Bāddārgat* near *Āgartalā*, is a specimen of black stone sculpture; and the arrangement of attributes in its four hands follows the order of *Trivikrama*. The *gada* and *chakra* are held by the right upper and left upper hands, and *padma* and *sankha* by the lower right and left hands. The stone image of *Vishnu* of the 11th and 12th centuries from *Unakoti* belongs to the *Acyuta*²⁵ variety. The god stands in the *Sthānaka* pose. The *padma* and *chakra* are held by the right upper and left upper hands, and *gada* by the lower right hand, while the rest is missing²⁶. The contemporary image of ten-armed *Vishnu*²⁷ standing in *Sthānaka* pose, accompanied by *Lakshmi* and *Sarasvati*, is of great iconographic importance. This image was found at *Noāgāon*. The god carries in his eight hands *chakra*, *hala*, *dhanuk*, *sankha*, *gada*, *khadga*, *sara* and *padma*. Its back right and back left hands are placed on the heads of *Lakshmi* and *Sarasvati* respectively. An independent carving of *Narasimha*²⁸ in a well preserved condition has been found at

Unakoti. The god has a visible face of a lion and six hands. The god stands in the *alidha* pose on a half-round plain pedestal; has an ornamental crown over head, and the usual ornaments, necklace with a hanging locket, *vanamālā*, sacred thread etc. are displayed. His upper pair of hands hold *chakra* and *sankha*. With two hands he is ripping open the entrails of *Hiranyakasipu*. The middle left hand holds the head of the demon, while the right is in the *Abhaya mudrā*. This image may be assigned to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The tortoise-incarnation, the second *Avatāra* of *Viṣṇu*, was found at Unakoti. In iconography *Kurmāvata* has not been represented in hybrid form; but in the sculpture the actual tortoise is carved.

Saiva Icons

Among the Unakoti sculptures are to be found two representations of *Chaturmukha Lingas*²⁹, and both the specimens are assigned to the eighth and ninth centuries.³⁰ A *Chaturmukha Linga* is now worshipped at an elevation of the Unakoti hills. The three faces of Siva are carved on the three sides of its *Rudra-bhaga* and the back-face is damaged. Another *Chaturmukha Linga* of Unakoti bears four well carved figures shown up to the waist on the four sides of its *Puja-Bhaga*. There is uniformity in the four figures of *Yogi Siva*. In *Ekamukhalinga*³¹ of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is now placed on the upward slope of the Unakoti hills. The shape of this *Mukha-Linga* is spherical and the face of Siva is carved on it.

Though *Nṛtyamurtis* of Siva were found all over India, yet Southern India is really rich in the images of the dancing Siva. An unique image of a twelve-handed Nataraja³² of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was found at Khowāi. The image consists of a conical stele, with *Kirtimukha* in the centre, Ganga — on the right and Gauri on the left are also present. Between them, the god is shown dancing on the back of his mount. The two normal hands hold the *veṇā*; two other hands are clasped over the head and two more hands make a canopy over the head with the *Naga-sesa* holding it by the head and the tail. The remaining three right hands have *damoru*, *akṣamālā* and *varadā mudrā*; of the three left hands the lower one holds *kamandulū* and the rest contain *trīśulā* and *kapala*.

Uma-Mahesvara murtis have been discovered from different

parts of Tripurā. This type of composite Siva icons had gained popularity in Tripurā. A finely executed image of Uma-Mahesvar, made of black stone was found at Udaipur, in which Siva is shown in *Sukhāsana* with his consort Umā. The god and goddess are represented as embracing each other. He has the *utpala* in his upper right hand, while the normal right hand is placed on the right breast of Umā. The left normal hand embraces the goddess's waist below her left breast. The other left hand holds the trident. The right hand of the goddess embraces the neck of the god and the left hand holds a mirror. This image is of the twelfth century A.D.

Vaivāhika or Kalyanasundara³³ types of composite Siva icons indicate the story of Siva's marriage with Umā. A broken Kalyanasundara *murti* of Siva made of sand-stone was found at Unakoti. The image is badly mutilated and the lower portion of the god along with the figure of goddess is damaged. The god stands on *Padmapīṭha* in the middle of a stele. The goddess stands in front of Siva; their feet partly rest on the two feet of the god. Near the waist of the god and on its left side stand the figures of a male and a female, representing probably Himavat and Menaka pouring water from *Kusha*; this illustrates the *Abhisekakriyā*. This image is also attributed to the eleventh-twelfth centuries.

Siva's images of both *Ugra* and *Soumya* types, are illustrated by icons. The god Aghora-Rudra, *Ugra* form of Siva, has been represented in a medieval sculpture of Tripurā. A unique colossal head-image of Aghora-Rudra³⁴ is carved on the rock-wall of the Unakoti-hills and this gigantic head bears the terrific aspects of Rudra-Siva. It has a vertically set third eye marked on the forehead. It wears an ornamented conical crown and ear-rings. The right half of the moustache is prominent while the left half is missing. The upper lip and the lower lip are indicated by the two horizontal lines only. The vertical teeth are shown in between these two horizontal lines. The face bears the double contour lines on the upper part of the eyes and the brows are absent. The nose is flat and the nostrils are flaring. This image also belongs to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Siva as Bhairava represents himself in a terrible form as the healer of all evils. The image of Bhairava with his consort Bhairavi was found carved on the stone-wall of the Unakoti-hills facing the stream Unakoti Chhauā. The colossal panel of the god and the goddess measures 12 m × 10 m × 70 cm × 25 cm. The three-eyed god presses the rosary against his breast with his left

and while the right hand is missing. He wears the decorated crown, ear-rings and a pectoral round the neck. He bears a garland of skulls. Bhairavi is also sitting cross-legged in a *Padmāsana* posture on the left side of Bhairava. She has a mirror in her right hand.

Sakti Icons

Images of Sakti in both *Ugra* and *Soumya* types are carved on bronze or stone as the consort of Siva by the devotees who have organised a distinct cult after the eighth century³⁵. Besides the *Ugra* form of Sakti different varieties of *Soumya* aspect have also come to light. An exceedingly charming bronze image of Sarvani is discovered at Hrishya-Mukha³⁶. The eight-handed goddess stands in *Sthānaka* pose on the central *Padmapīṭha*. The front surface of the pedestal below the lotus seat is fully covered by floral and vegetal devices and a figure of conch lion with one of its paws raised in the right corner. On the left, all arms are missing excepting the lower one which holds a *ghaṇṭā*. On right, four hands are partly extant, and the first, third and fourth hands hold a conch, a discus and a sword respectively, while the rest is missing. This image is assignable to the seventh and eighth centuries.

A fine specimen of two-armed *Dūrgā*³⁷ (*Soumya*) found at Unakoti is shown standing on the back of a lion. She wears a short neck-lace and a *Sāri* fastened with an ornamental belt at the waist. This image is attributed to eleventh and twelfth centuries. The most important icon is the *Mahisa Mardini* type whose independent worship is still popular throughout Tripurā. Many images of *Dūrgā* in her *Ugra* form have been discovered in Tripurā. The goddess is almost invariably represented with ten-arms, but in the early medieval sculptures found in Tripurā, she is very often found having only eight arms. A unique image of eight-armed *Mahisa-Mardini*³⁸ in stone was found at Pilak and is now housed in the temple of the Rājesvari Āsram at Muhuripur. The goddess stands in *alidha* pose. The right leg of the image is firmly placed on the head of the buffalo-demon and the left one rests on a plain pedestal. In the four hands on the right, the goddess carries the *asi*, *chakra*, *sara*, and *trisula* thrust into the body of the buffalo and the four hands on the left holds the *dhanu*, *tanka*, *sarpa* and tail of the buffalo-demon. This image is dated to circa eighth century A.D.

An exceedingly charming image of ten-armed Mahisa-Mardini of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was found at Amarapur and is now worshipped in the house of Chandramohan Shil of Amarapur. The *Devi* stands in the *Pratyālidhā* pose. The left leg of the goddess is placed on the body of Mahisasura, while the right leg is on the back of the lion. Armed with various weapons, she has plunged a trident into the body of the Asura.

An interesting sand-stone image of Mahisa-Mardini of the twelfth century is erroneously worshipped as Kali in a temple near Kamalāsagar at Kasbā.³⁹ The ten-armed goddess holds in her hands *nakusa*, *trisula*, *sakti*, *chakra* and *abhaya*, but other attributes are not clear. She wears *jatāmukuta*, and the *Jaṭās* are spread over both the sides of the head in an orderly manner. The *vāhana*, the lion is shown in the middle portion of the stele. The kneeling demon with folded hands rests on a plain pedestal. A *śivalinga* is present in front of the demon and this is a rare evidence in the field of Hindu iconography. This image is assigned to the 15th century A.D. An interesting sand-stone image of eight-armed Vaisnabī⁴⁰ of the fifteenth century A.D. from Amarapur is shown seated in the *lalitāsana* pose with Garuda below her seat. The goddess gracefully holds *sankha*, *chakra*, *gadā*, *khadga*, *dhanu*, *sara*.

The famous image of the four-armed goddess Kālī, locally called Tripurāsundarī⁴¹ is worshipped in the temple of the Tripurāsundarī at Udaipur. The goddess stands in *Sthānaka* pose on the body of *Siva*. She wears the *jatāmukuta*, a *mundamālā* consisting of thirteen human skulls. The upper and lower hands on the right hold the *vara* and *abhaya* and those in left, *Khadga* and *Munda*. This image is attributed to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Miscellaneous Icons

Numerous images of the Sun-god have been discovered from different parts of Tripurā. A very important image of Sūrya⁴² was found at Pilāk and is now worshipped in the Rājesvari Āsram at Muhuripur. This image consists of a semi-circular stele. The lower part of the Sun-god is hidden up to thigh by the body of the car. The Sun chariot is drawn by seven horses. The central horse placed in a rectangular shaped niche faces outwards and the remaining six, three on each side, are represented as prancing. Aruna is placed in front of the deity and the two side-figures have their knees and legs uncarved and shown as inserted in the pedestal.

In the present example the Pāla style of the eighth century is well marked.

A sand-stone image of Sūrya of the eleventh century found somewhere in Tripurā presents some development in the treatment of the iconic type. This image is now preserved in the house of Mahārāj Kumar Sahadev Bikram Kishore Debbarman of Āgartalā. The chariot is drawn by seven horses. It is interesting to note that two swords are carved on both sides of the Sun-god. Pingala to his right and Dandin to his left are well carved. His consorts Usā and Pratyusā are also presented with their arrow-shooting-kneeling posture. God's additional wives—Sanga and Chhāyā—stand in their usual Bhanga poses. Mahesveta stands between the Sun-god and Aruna.

Four images of Gaṇeśa were found at Unakoti. Of them, the two *Saḍra-Bhuja* and *Aṣṭabhuja* Ganeśa deserve attention. They are rather unusual⁴³ and are of considerable iconographical interest. They stand in *Sthānaka* pose. *Saḍra-Bhuja* Gaṇeśa has three tusks and *Aṣṭa Bhuja* Gaṇeśa has four tusks. They hold *Narakapala*, *Akṣhamala*, *Gadā*, *Khaḍga*, *Trisula* and *Pāsā*, etc. The images are datable to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Another seated Gaṇeśa⁴⁴ is found on the same rock-wall of Unakoti. His four hands are very small. The god holds the *trisula*, *gadā*, *sankha*, and *padma*. In the sculptures of Unakoti, another finely executed image of four-armed Gaṇeśa⁴⁵ made of sand-stone is shown seated and he holds *Parasu*, *Sankha*, *Aksamālā* and *Vara-Mudrā*. Both the images are assignable to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. A stone image of four-armed Gaṇeśa⁴⁶ of the eighth and ninth century from Pilāk deserves special attention in this connection. It appears that the upper right and left hands hold *Kalpalatās* and the lower right hand *Modaka* and the lower left hand is not clear. The long trunk is lying across the chest and belly and is turned towards the right, perhaps touching *Modaka*. Below *Padmapitha*, a rat vehicle is extant.

Buddhism

Tripurā and its adjoining regions became an important centre of Buddhism since the period of Asoka and continued to be so for several centuries thereafter. A copper-plate of Gunāighar proves that Buddhism flourished here around A.D. 507-508⁴⁷. Before the sixth century, the *Mahāyāna* form of Buddhism, had found its way

all over Tripurā. The renowned Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang, came to India during the seventh century A.D.⁴⁸ During his visit of Bengal, he found in Samatata thirty *Sangharamas* with about 2000 priests, all of the *Śthavira* school.⁴⁹ Another Chinese pilgrim Sen-Chi stayed in Samatata, and he noticed that Mahāyāna Buddhism had been established in different parts of Samatata mainly through the patronage of the Khadga dynasty.

In this connection, a copper-plate of Sridharana Rāta⁵⁰ gives us the information that, at the request of Joyanatha, a royal gift was made in favour of the Ratanatraya, although Sridharana Rāta was a Vaiṣṇava. It is from the eighth century onwards that Tantric Buddhism flourished and it became the most widely prevalent and popular religion of Tripurā from the eighth to the twelfth centuries. Tāntricism gradually found expression in iconography and the gods and goddesses of Tantric Buddhism became the common deities in the Tripurā of the eighth century. The art and iconography of the same period prove that this time the *Mahāyāna* sect began to be eclipsed by Vajrayāna Buddhism.

Viharas

Vihāras have been a symbol of religious sculpture and these may be said to be cloisters of Buddhist monks. The Buddhist Vihāra became an important religious and cultural centre throughout Tripurā from the sixth century onwards. The monasteries were the centres of education and religion. The monastery at Gunāighar was a great centre of Buddhist learning around A.D. 507-508.⁵¹ Gunāighar is a place near Comillā where there was evidently an ancient Vihāra.

Sālavana Vihāra was another such centre situated inside the Lālmāi-Maynāmattī mountain range. The archaeological excavations under the auspices of the Government of Pakistan have traced this Vihāra. It was established by the Deva dynasty in the seventh or eighth century A.D.⁵² A great Buddhist establishment existed in the ancient Pāttikerā near Comillā⁵³ in the eleventh century.

There is yet enough scope of study as regards the Pilāk Vihāra which was situated at Beloniā in South Tripurā. On the evidence of the mounds still found at Pilāk we know that this holy place was

a Mahāyāna Buddhist centre during the eighth and ninth centuries. This Vihāra is infested with various mounds, icons of Buddhist and Hindu deities and ruins of temples. A number of old images, gold coins, terracotta temple-plaques and sealing with the depiction of the *stupa* and the Buddhist creed have been found here.⁵⁴

Stupas

A *stupa* is generally constructed as part of the religious architecture particularly relating to the Mahāyāna sect. The inscribed terracotta seals found at Pilāk depict the Buddhist *stupas* in miniature. These antiquities of Pilāk, inform us that the *stupa* was as popular here as elsewhere. However, in Tripurā *stupa*-worship was not probably given due importance. The icon, instead, became the main object of worship.

Iconography

Numerous standing and seated images of Buddha of the mediaeval period have been discovered at different places in south Tripurā. These icons indicate the great popularity of image-worship. In stone, the most notable example is the standing image of Buddha⁵⁵ at Pilāk. The image consists of a conical stele of which right half is broken along with right arm. The left hand holds the hem of the garment. The head is depicted with an *Uṣṇisa* and the conventional close-curved hair is not clear. A miniature *stupa* is placed on the left side of the head of Lord Buddha. The image may be dated to circa the eighth century A.D.

A sand-stone image of seated Buddha is also found at Pilāk. The Buddha is shown seated in *Buddha-Padmāsana* on a semi-circular *Padmapitha* with his hands in *Yoga-Mudrā*. The figure is depicted with an *Uṣṇisa* and the conventional close-curved hair and ear-lobes hang downward. The image may be attributed to the ninth century A.D.

Avolokitesvara, the god of love and compassion, was a favourite god of Tripurā and in it the traces of the grace and attributes of Viṣṇu and Śiva of Hinduism are discernible⁵⁶. Avolokitesvara was popular in Mahāyāna and Vajrayana sects of Buddhism. A broken image of standing Avolokitesvara⁵⁷ endowed with two arms was found at Pilāk and is now preserved in the Tripurā Government Museum. This bronze image consists of a semi-circular background with a beaded and edged border. The border is

ornamented with flames at intervals and a conical motif in the top is properly placed. The god stands in the *Sthānaka* pose on a double petalled lotus resting on a plain pedestal. The left hand holds a lotus with a stalk and the right being in *Varada-Mudrā*. This image also may be assigned to ninth century A.D.

The terrific god *Hevajra*⁵⁸ is associated with *Akshobhya* and in him one finds resemblance with the terrific aspect of *Siva*. A fine image of *Hevajra*,⁵⁹ *Saktibirahita*, found at *Dharmanagar* in north-east *Tripurā* is of great iconographic interest. The image has a thin coating of gold. The god is shown standing in *Ardha-parvanka-Nrtyasana* pose. On left, the palms of the five hands are missing. He has eight heads, and sixteen hands, which carry skull-caps containing various animals and a deity. Miniature dancing figures of eight goddesses are placed in eight directions round the god. This image belongs to the eleventh century A.D.

The terrific god *Vajrahunkara* is a deity of the *Akshobhya Kula*. A stone image of *Vajrahunkara*⁶⁰ was found somewhere in *Tripurā* and is now housed in the Royal Palace at *Āgartalā*. He stands in *Pratyālīda* pose on a double petalled lotus. He is three-faced and six-armed. His two hands hold a *Ghantā* and a *Vajra* and are locked in *Vajrahunkaka Mudrā*. The top most right hand holds a sword, and other hands are not clear. It is datable to the early medieval period.

Mārīchi has a place in the *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* pantheon and she is *Vairocanakulodbhava*. An interesting stone image of *Mārīchi*⁶¹ of the eighth and ninth centuries was found at *Pilāk* and is now worshipped in a temple called *Vāsudev-bādī* at *Muhuripur*. The goddess stands in *Pratyālīdha* pose on a plain pedestal. The image of this three-faced and six-armed goddess is badly mutilated and has suffered extremely from peeling. The three right hands hold possibly the *śara*, *vajra* and *paraśu* while *ghanu*, *parnapiechhika* and *Tarjani Mudrā* are in her three left hands.

An image of the goddess *Chunda*⁶² made of sand-stone was found at *Pilāk* and is now worshipped in the *Rājesvari Āsram* at *Muhuripur*. The image is badly mutilated. This eighteen-armed goddess is shown seated in *Vajraparyankāsana* on the central *Padmapītha*. The two normal hands hold *Dharmachakra Mudrā*, *Vajrasattva*, *Ghanthapani* and five *Dhyāni* Buddhas with their

individual halos are carved on the upper part of the stele. This image is datable to circa eighth and ninth centuries.

Tripurā, thus, has been a haven for the coexistence of several religious sects and denominations such as Vajsnavism, Saivism, Śāktism, Buddhism along with their respective cults of animatism, animism, magic and fertility etc. The kings from time to time took active interest in the diffusion of religion. Archaeological evidence further proves that there was toleration among the various sects. A king of one religion is often found donating land for the cause of another religion. Religious bigotry never did vitiate the atmosphere. In spite of the existence of several religious sects, the people led a peaceful life. The rise and fall of these sects had never been at the cost of bloodshed. It stands in sharp contrast to the horrible state of affairs in medieval Europe caused by genocide in the name of the Inquisition.

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The Rich Resources of Tripura

Jalad Baran Gangopadhyaya

CULTURABLE land is the most basic wealth of a State for it is available for perennial use to yield products year after year. The quantum of reproducible resources does not depend simply on what is given in nature but also on the efficiency with which these are put to productive use conserving their total stock and improving upon their productive capacity.

The land surface in Tripura can be broadly divided into hilly terrain and low and flat valleys. The latter, being more easily culturable, can obviously support more persons per hectare than the former. Therefore, the population concentration in Tripura reflects the relative abundance of flat valley lands. This accounts for the fact that the density of population is not evenly distributed among the three districts of nearly equal size in area as shown by the following table.

TABLE 5.1

District-wise Distribution of Area and Population

District	Area in sq km	Total Population (1971 Census)	Density per sq km
1. West Tripura	3,359	7,51,605	224
2. North Tripura	3,541	4,05,009	113
3. South Tripura	3,577	3,99,728	112
4. Tripura	10,477	15,56,342	149

Each district in Tripura is so small in size that the district may conveniently be taken as the unit for the purpose of delineating the spatial distribution of resources. Land, rivers and forests are the main natural resources in the state. The Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) has undertaken drilling operations only recently in search of mineral oil and natural gas. Table 5.2 shows the broad pattern of the district-wise distribution of natural resources in Tripura.

Physiographically, the lands in Tripura may be broadly classified under river valleys, mid-uplands with intermittent broad/narrow *loongas* i.e. broken plateau and hill ranges/sub-ranges. The soil texture in the flat river basins ranges from sandy clay loam to clayey and is suitable for cultivation of *aus amon* and *boro* paddy sugarcane, jute, potato, mustard, *rabi* and *kharif* vegetables, etc. These are the main agricultural crops produced in the state. It is, therefore, easy to discern that the district having the largest area of flat river basins will also be agriculturally most resourceful and prosperous. These are mainly rain-irrigated lands and there is scope for providing other types of irrigation facilities. West Tripura with the largest area of river valleys is, therefore, most densely populated and intensively cultivated as is evident in Table 5.3.

For cultivation purpose, next in importance are mid-uplands with intermittent *loongas* i.e. broken plateaus with coarse sandy loam to loam in soil texture. On uplands of normal slope up to 15° land slope, the *aus* paddy, mesta, sugarcane, ground nut, chillies and *kharif* vegetables can be raised. These lands are exclusively rain-irrigated and there is little scope for any other type of irrigation and also for raising more than one crop in a year.

TABLE 5.2

District-wise Distribution of Natural Resources in Tripura

Description of resource	West Tripura	North Tripura	South Tripura
1. Hill Ranges	Parts of Baramura and Atharamura Ranges.	Longtarai, Shakhnunokoti and Jampai ranges.	Debtamura Bara-mura (major parts), Kalajhari—Atharamura (Small part), Takka Tuli Ranges.
2. River Valleys	Khowai, Howrah and part of Gumti major river valleys and Kalachara, Sonainala, Jahar Nala, Burima and Rangapania Nala etc. minor river valleys.	Dhalai, Manu, Deo and Juri	Larger part of the Gumti (above 90%), Muhari and Manu Nala (Minor)
3. Hydro-electric Project and Water/River power potential.	Dam on Khowai river to control floods and improve irrigation.	Earth Dam on river Manu to control floods and improve irrigation.	Gumti Hydro-Electric Project: already installed with 10 M.W. power production capacity.
4. Average Annual Rainfall.	250 cm.	231 cm	307 cm.
5. Forests Reserved and Protected forests.	1,434.88 sq km.	2,364.39 sq km	2,161.30 sq km 5,960.57 sq km
6. Mineral Deposits (as estimated by Geological Survey of India).	Glass sand 200,000 tonnes) Plastic clay 914 tonnes, Natural gas and oil.	Lime-stone (not economically exploitable), Lignite (not economically exploitable), Clay deposits suitable for ordinary pottery and roofing tiles.	Lignite (not economically exploitable), small pockets of plastic clay and several gas seepages.
	Ground Water (artesian condition)	Ground water (artesian condition)	Ground water (artesian condition)

Sources : (1) Department of Agriculture, Govt. of Tripura.
(2) Geological Survey of India.

The uplands having more than 20° land slope are suitable only for horticultural and forest plantations. The soil in flat valley lands at the foot of hills and hillocks ranges from sandy clay loam to clayey loam. These lands are quite fertile where *aus* and *amon* paddy, sugarcane, jute, groundnut, sesamum, chillies, pulses, *rabi* and *kharif* vegetables are generally grown. Sandy loam to silty clay soil dominate the major hill ranges and sub-ranges. These are suitable for forest and horti-plantations. The slopes of the ranges are, of course, put to use for raising agricultural crops by the shifting cultivators. This is possible because top soils on the hill slopes become fertile as a result of accumulated leaf falls though this is mined out, so to say, in one agricultural operation by the *Joomias* (shifting cultivators). Therefore, after one agricultural season the plot becomes barren.

District-wise Distribution of Land Resources

In the West Tripura District fall parts of Barramura and Atharamura ranges and the Khowai, Howrah and parts of Gumti Major river valleys besides five minor river valleys, named, Kala Chara, Sonainala, Johar nala, Burima nala and Rangapania nala. This district contains the largest area of plains watered by river basins. No wonder, almost one-half of the total population of the State is concentrated in this district. The other half of the population is nearly equally divided between the North and South Tripura Districts.

The South Tripura District contains Deotamura—Baramura (Major part), Kalajhari—Atharamura (small part) and Tulsi hills ranges. The river valleys falling in this district are the larger part of Gumti (above 90 per cent) and Muhari and the minor river valley, Manu Nala.

Most of the hilly terrain covers the North Tripura District where lie the major hill ranges, named, Longtarai, Shakhan—Unakoti and Jampai. Five rivers—the Dhalai, Manu, Deo and Juri flow through this district but their basins are of narrower dimensions. There are 1,212 villages in the district inhabited by 4,05,009 persons according to the 1971 census.

The district-wise distribution of agricultural area, irrigated area and production of agricultural crops are indicated in Table 5.3 and it can be seen that the West Tripura District

TABLE 5.3

**District-wise Distribution of Agricultural Area, Irrigated Area and Production
of Agricultural Crops (1974-75)**

*Area in 1000 hectares
Production in 1000 tonnes*

Description	West Tripura		North Tripura		South Tripura		Tripura	
	Area	Production	Area	Production	Area	Production	Area	Production
<i>Food Crops</i>								
Rice	132.59	146.65	80.05	83.40	86.29	94.00	298.93	324.05
Wheat	0.12	0.26	0.25	0.47	0.21	0.55	0.58	1.28
Pulses	1.03	0.37	1.07	0.40	1.09	0.45	3.19	1.22
Potato and Sweet potato	1.55	13.64	1.48	10.83	1.23	15.20	4.26	41.67
Oilseeds	1.37	0.49	2.45	1.04	1.84	1.04	5.66	2.57
<i>Cash Crops</i>								
Jute	2.31	3.44	1.37	2.18	2.76	3.38	6.44	9.00
Mesta	3.77	4.38	2.06	2.07	3.46	3.45	9.29	9.90
Cotton (Ginned)	0.40	0.06	1.20	0.25	0.40	0.08	2.00	0.39
Sugarcane	0.39	15.00	1.09	37.50	0.69	33.50	2.17	86.00
Irrigated Area	12.766		4.969		11.925		29.660	
Irrigated area as percentage of total irrigated area	43.05		16.75		40.20		100.00	

Source : Statistical Department, Govt. of Tripura, *Some Basic Statistics of Tripura, 1976*.

produces the largest amount of rice which is the staple food in the State. Since the density of population is also the highest here, a large amount of food is imported into area from the other two districts.

The total irrigated area in the state is very meagre, being just about 10 per cent of the total area under rice production. Because of the predominance of flat lands, both the West and the South Districts are better irrigated than the North District. In both these districts, there is still vast scope for expansion of irrigation facilities and to raise 3 crops in a year in larger areas in the districts. It is also possible here to further diversify the crop pattern, particularly, in growing *rabi* crops, such as, wheat, oilseeds, pulses and potato. Sugarcane has been successfully raised on the flat mounds (*tillas*) in the state so that with availability of finance, the production of this crop can be increased substantially in the North and South Districts. This will, of course, depend on the development of sugar and/or *gur* making industries. The one sugar mill recently started in the South District has raised demand for sugarcane in the area, but it is facing stiff competition with the *gur*-producing cottage industries in the matter of sugarcane procurement. Jute and mesta production is concentrated in the West and South Districts which will further go up with the growing demand for raw jute and mesta from the jute mill under construction near Agartala in West Tripura District.

The pattern of development that has been emerging clearly indicates that while West Tripura grows more rice, *rabi* and fibre crops, the North Tripura will have to produce more rice and *rabi* crops besides sugarcane and the South Tripura should produce more rice, *rabi* crops, sugarcane and fibre crops. The distribution of land resources further suggests that both the North and South Districts have considerable prospects for the development of various kinds of plantations on the hill slopes.

Though land is one of the most important and scarce resources of the State, yet it has been subjected to heavy erosion on account of the practice of shifting cultivation on the hill slopes. The adverse effects on soil are not limited to the hills alone. Even the plains are affected as these are subjected to frequent floods when the silted up rivers burst their banks following heavy rainfall. Therefore, any plan for proper management and utilization

of lands must essentially be based on proper soil conservation measures including the solution of the problem of shifting cultivation.

Livestock Wealth

Tripura has a large number of livestock population consisting of cattle, buffaloes, goats, ducks, pigs, fowls, pigeons, rams, etc. The district-wise distribution of livestock as shown in the following table closely resembles the proportionate distribution of human population. This is because, livestock rearing is still not undertaken on a commercial basis but as a part of subsistence economy by the rural households who generally combine agriculture, animal husbandry and poultry to provide for the subsistence needs of the family. This is the reason why the breeds are all indigenous and of poor quality. Therefore, under the plans several schemes have been undertaken to improve the breeds, as large areas on the uplands can be suitably developed as grazing fields, and fodder production can be augmented by using hill slopes which are otherwise unsuitable for agricultural operations.

TABLE 5.4

District-wise Distribution of Livestock and Poultry (1966 Census)

	Tripura	West Tripura	North Tripura	South Tripura
Cattle	5,88,290	2,44,653	1,73,411	1,70,226
Buffaloes	49,737	17,099	10,988	21,710
Goats	1,32,212	58,098	29,081	45,033
Pigs	36,627	15,503	7,057	14,067
Total livestock	8,06,866	3,35,293	2,20,537	2,51,036
Fowls	5,48,050	2,08,311	1,34,427	2,05,312
Ducks	1,15,307	31,962	32,421	50,924

Source : Statistical Abstract Tripura 1970.

Fisheries

Because of hilly terrain, very few rivers in Tripura provide perennial water resource for fishing purpose. It is estimated that

the state has a total impounded water area of 4480.55 hectares distributed among the districts as follows :

	Tripura	West Tripura	North Tripura	South Tripura
Impounded water area	4,480.55	2,055.48	1,057.25	1,367.82
Gumti Reservoir	1,500.00	—	—	1,500.00

In respect of the water area the South District leads, particularly following the construction of Gumti Water reservoir as a part of the Gumti Hydro-Electric Project. In the North District, at Kumarghat, the Regional Fish Breeding Farm, under the North Eastern Council scheme has recently been started over an area of 20 hectares to produce 40 million fish seeds per annum for distribution among the North Eastern States.

Forests

Large parts of the hill ranges having slopes above 20° are not suitable for permanent form of cultivation. These ranges were once covered by virgin forests. But as a consequence of reckless felling of trees, particularly during the Second World War and afterwards, and the widespread practice of shifting cultivation, valuable forest resources have been very much depleted. Most of the hill ranges are now without any good tree forests but are covered by unproductive low vegetal cover of shrubs and coarse grasses. Only some fire-hardy species of trees stand in isolated patches ; 3,885 sq km of reserved forest area represents 36.4 per cent of the total geographical area of the State but tree forests cover only 370 sq km area while the rest, 774 sq km, is under unproductive low vegetal growth and bamboo forests. Therefore, there is vast scope for undertaking plantation of valuable forest species in the catchment areas of the rivers. This is also necessary to stop erosion of hill slopes and silting up of river beds and recurrent floods in the plains. From the time of the first Five Year Plan, the stress was laid on the afforestation programme. The District-wise distribution of reserved and protected forests and new plantations raised are shown in following table.

TABLE 5.5
District-wise Area Under Forests in Tripura

Classification	West Tripura	North Tripura	South Tripura	Total
1. Reserved (including proposed reserved) forests.	921.00	1,595.00	1,359.00	3,885.00
2. Protected forests.	503.88	769.39	802.30	2,075.57
3. Total (1) + (2)	1,434.88	2,364.39	2,161.30	5,960.57
4. Total geographical area	3,359.00	3,541.00	3,577.00	10,477.00
5. Proportion of forest area to total area (per cent).	42.69	66.76	60.00	56.88
6. Area of new plantations raised (as in 1976-77)	119.64	228.30	130.31	478.25
7. Proportion of new plantation area to total forest area in the District/State.	8.29	9.64	6.01	8.02

As most of the major hill ranges fall in North Tripura, the area under forests is the largest there 66.75 per cent and South Tripura comes next with 60 per cent. West Tripura, having the largest area of river valleys and plains, has the largest area under agricultural crops and the smallest area under forests 42.6 per cent.

According to the Forest Department's estimates, the growing stock of forests in Tripura is 8,54,271 cubic metre of plywood, 41,303 cubic metre of match-wood, 19,91,557 cubic metre of other hard wood, 80,67,165 tonnes of bamboo and 10,00,000 tonnes of thatch grass. The estimated annual current yield of timber is 94,290 cubic metre and this is quite inadequate for the population of the state. With the progress of economic development and

urbanisation, per capita consumption of timber will steadily rise from the present level of 0.05 cubic metre per capita per annum. The physiographical characteristic of the state clearly indicates that forestry, besides agricultural cash crops, will have to serve as the main base for industrialisation programme in the state. Already, wooden furniture industry has emerged as one of the most flourishing cottage industries. The state government has also planned to start one paper mill in the North District and a plywood factory in the South District.

There are bright prospects for the development of rubber-based industries which will thrive on the recent rubber plantations in the state. Over the last ten years, the state sponsored the raising of rubber plantations in about 625 hectares with an investment of Rs. 22 lakhs. These plantations yielded 20,600 tonnes of rubber in 1978 and it is expected to go up to 25,000 tonnes in 1979. It is being planned to raise high-yielding rubber plantations over an area of 5,000 hectares. Most of the rubber plantations are now concentrated in the South District though in future it may be raised in the other two districts too.

For meeting the growing needs of timber and fire-wood and industries, as also to serve as the main soil conservation and *joomla* rehabilitation measures, development of forests almost holds the key to achieving a steady socio-economic development of the State. Tripura's undulating terrain has a heavy annual rainfall suitable for tea and other plantations. The best form of use of lands on the hill slopes and mounds would be through the raising of plantations. For this would make it possible to raise annual crops continuously without causing soil erosion. But for a variety of reasons, excepting some small-sized tea plantations, no other organized plantation industry was developed till recently. Under the Five-Year Plans, some schemes have recently been undertaken for raising rubber, cashew nut, citronella, coffee, and horticulture plantations. Except for rubber and horticulture, other plantations are still in the very nascent stage.

Whatever development has taken place in this regard, a distinct locational pattern has already emerged. While most of the tea plantations are concentrated in the North and West Districts,

most of the rubber plantations fall in the South District. Pineapple is the most important item in horticultural plantations, and the West District leads in its production, though the North and South Districts also produce substantial quantities. The following table gives a picture of the district-wise distribution of tea plantations in Tripura.

TABLE 5.6

District-wise Distribution of Tea Plantations in Tripura

District	Tea		Rubber plantation (Area in hectares)	Pineapple (area in hectares)
	No. of planta- tions	Area in hectares		
West Tripura	22	2,043	—	1,311
North Tripura	25	2,074	—	710
South Tripura	2	34	625	805

Shifting cultivation vis-a-vis soil conservation

The entire gamut of land-use planning in Tripura is vitally linked with the soil conservation measures particularly aimed at checking soil erosion caused by shifting cultivation. In fact, the scheme for settling the *joomias* by setting up colonies in plains was undertaken right from the First Five Year Plan, so that they could take to plough cultivation. The scheme continued up to 1968-69 settling 21,747 *joomia* families in 59 *joomia* settlement colonies. By and large, they were allotted valley-lands suitable for paddy cultivation. Though a good number of families deserted the colonies, yet it cannot be denied that many *joomia* families have since taken to wet rice cultivation.

But the problem of *joomia* rehabilitation still remains. Since the beginning of the Fourth Five Year Plan, it has been the practice of settling the *joomias* on *tilla* lands through adoption of suitable soil conservation measures, such as, bench terracing and graded bunding of the plots. Besides, the Forest Department has also been rehabilitating the *joomias* in the forest lands under the *taungia* system of plantation.

North Eastern Council (NEC) Scheme

In the Fifth Plan, NEC's *joom* control scheme has been undertaken in a few river catchment areas in the state. It is an integrated approach to the problem of settling the *joomias* in permanent cultivation as a part of soil conservation measures. It covers all aspects of agriculture, horticulture, forestry and soil engineering. The Forest department is engaged in executing the scheme in the upper reaches of the following river catchment areas in the North and the West Tripura Districts :

North Tripura

1. Kewribari sub-catchment of Juri catchment (2 units)
2. Dasda-Anandabazar sub-catchment of Deo catchment (2 units)
3. Chailangta sub-catchment of Manu catchment (2 units)

West Tripura

1. Ganganagar sub-catchment of Khowai catchment.

In each unit will be developed 62.5 hectares of orchards, 10 hectares of forest plantations, 2 hectares of water area for pisciculture, 5 hectares of rubber plantation, 40 hectares of homestead land, one school, one ringwell, 50 units of poultry, 50 units of piggery and approximately one km of approach road from the main road and 30 hectares of reclaimed land for permanent cultivation. The Agriculture Department on the other hand, has been executing the scheme in the West Tripura District on the 4 units Howrah River Catchment area at Patni, Belabari, Sib-thakurpara and Jarulbachai.

Here each family will be provided with 1.4 hectares of developed land fit for raising two crops a year. The *tilla* lands will be developed by bench terracing or graded bunding, depending on the degree of the slope. In addition, one hectare of land will be allotted for homestead, poultry farming, kitchen gardening and horticulture. For each unit, thirty hectares of horticultural crops and twenty hectares of other plantation crops will be developed. The water reservoirs will be constructed for providing irrigation and pisciculture.

The NEC scheme may be quite suitable for the river catchment areas but this alone cannot solve the problem of shifting

cultivation and the solution to this problem has to be sought within the larger context of planning proper soil use. It is an accepted fact that any plan for Tripura's land use must tackle the problem of putting the hill slopes and uplands to continuous productive uses. All such lands are not equally suitable for all types of uses. Some are suited to agriculture, some to horticulture and other plantations and some to forestry. These lands, therefore, require to be classified into capability classes on the basis of slope, soil texture, soil structure, soil depth and the susceptibility to erosion. Pending the detailed survey, lands may roughly be classified according to the degree of slope alone. Agriculture may be undertaken on lands up to 20° slopes under appropriate soil conservation measures. Beyond this and up to 45° slopes orchards and pastures may be raised. For forest plantations all lands having above 45° slopes may be used.

Power

Tripura's power resources are very meagre. The Gumti river in the South Tripura District is the only source of hydro-electricity in the State. The Gumti Hydro Electric Project, completed in 1976, has a capacity of 10 MW. Because of non-availability of coal, the thermal power potential can also not be explored in the state. If, however, natural gas is found commercially exploitable, the thermal power may be generated in West Tripura District from the natural gas. At present the power needs of North Tripura and parts of West Tripura Districts are met from power supplied by Assam.

Human Resources

Tripura has a vast quantity of manpower resources, but considerable proportions of the population belong to scheduled castes (12.39 per cent) and scheduled tribes (28.95 per cent). These sections of the population are generally behind others in literacy and education. So long as their backwardness cannot be removed, the potential human resources will remain underutilized. The district-wise distribution of scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, literate, urban and working population is shown in Table 5.7.

It shows that while the proportion of scheduled caste population is the highest in West Tripura (13.10 per cent) followed by

TABLE 5.7

District-wise Distribution of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Literate, Urban and Working Population

	Tripura	West Tripura	North Tripura	South Tripura
1. Percentage of urban to total population.	10.43	14.58	6.78	6.33
2. Percentage of scheduled caste population to total population.	12.39	13.16	10.94	12.42
3. Percentage of scheduled tribe population to total population.	28.95	26.46	26.80	35.80
4. Percentage of literate and educated to total population	30.98	32.61	32.17	26.69
5. Percentage of literate and educated to total population (India)	29.95			
6. Growth rate of literate and educated persons : 1961-71	108.52	92.53	110.65	153.85
7. Percentage of workers to total population	27.79	26.73	29.59	27.95
8. Percentage of workers to total population	32.93			

Source : CRI (Tripura) 1971.

South and North Tripura in that order, the proportion of scheduled tribe population is the highest in South Tripura followed by West and North Tripura in that order.

The rate of literacy in Tripura is 30.98 per cent which is slightly higher than the all-India ratio of 29.45 per cent. While the proportion of literate people is almost the same in the West and North

Districts (32.61 per cent and 32.17 per cent) it is much lower in South District (26.69 per cent). But the growth rate of literacy during the last decade was the highest in South Tripura (153.85 per cent) and the lowest in West Tripura (92.53 per cent). The percentage of workers to the total population in Tripura (27.79 per cent) is lower than in the country as a whole (32.93 per cent) which is an indication of under-utilization of human resources even by Indian standards. The proportion of the working population is the lowest in West Tripura (26.73 per cent) and the highest in North Tripura (29.59 per cent).

The land-use pattern and general demographic characteristics do not yet indicate any sharp differences in the levels of development of the three districts. One of the reasons for this is that, since Tripura's overall development is as yet extremely low, the regional disparities within the State have not yet been exposed. The development of the three following sectors, however, contain possibilities for the West District's development at a quicker pace than for the other two.

Agartala, located in the West District is the capital and is a sprawling urban agglomeration. The pace of development of urban amenities in this town in respects of communication, transport, education, treatment of disease and water-supply is the highest. Institutions of higher education and hospital facilities are all concentrated heavily in West Tripura as is evident in the following table.

TABLE 5.8
District-wise Distribution of Educational Institutions and
Hospitals (1974-75)

	Tripura	West Tripura	North Tripura	South Tripura
1. Number of high and higher Secondary schools	127	66	27	34
2. General colleges	6	4	1	1
3. Professional colleges	8	6	1	1
4. I.T.I.	2	1	1	—
5. Hospitals	11	4	3	4
6. No. of beds	933	673	130	130
7. No. of doctors	121	95	13	13

Source : Tripura, Statistical Department, *Some Basic Statistics of Tripura 1976*.

Tripura is industrially backward. Without any mineral deposits and an adequate transport network, whatever industries have so far been developed are all in the cottage and small industrial sector. In the Fifth Plan, of course, the setting up of three medium-scale industries was planned. And accordingly one *Khandeswari* mill has been set up at Bagafa in the South District ; one Jute mill is under construction near Agartala in the West District while the proposed paper mill to be set up at Kumarghat in North District is yet uncertain. The district-wise distribution of medium-scale and small-scale units and industrial estates as shown in Table 5.9 indicates the disparities in development. Unless positive steps are taken to jack up the industrialization programme in the two other districts, the regional disparities within the state will continue and may be further accentuated.

TABLE 5.9
District-wise Distribution of Industrial Units (1974-75)

	Tripura	West Tripura	North Tripura	South Tripura
1. Medium scale units				
(a) Number of units	2	2	—	—
(b) Number of workers	358	358	—	—
2. Small scale units				
(a) Number of units	542	424	59	59
(b) Number of workers	5,592	3,874	1,264	454
3. Industrial Estates				
(a) Number of estates	3	1	1	1
(b) Number of occupants	22	20	1	1

Source : Tripura, Statistical Department, *Some Basic Statistics of Tripura, 1976*.

This trend is, however, likely to be somewhat counter-balanced by the development of the infrastructure in which the North District has an edge over the two other districts. When Tripura joined the Indian Union in 1949, its infrastructure was so precarious that even the state capital, Agartala, was not linked with the sub-divisional headquarters. Communication between the

capital and mofussil areas, during the princely rule, was maintained through the neighbouring districts of Bengal which were located in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Therefore, in the Five-Year Plans high priority has consistently been given to the building of roads. With the construction of the 200 km long Assam-Agartala road, Tripura's isolation from the rest of the country has ended. It also helped in establishing a link between Agartala and the sub-divisional headquarters in the northern part of the State, such as Khowai, Kamalpur, Kailasahar and Dharmanagar by constructing feeder roads. Next in importance was the completion of the building of all-weather Agartala-Sabroom road which links the state capital to the different sub-divisional headquarters in the South District.

The construction of a network of roads has helped in the exploitation of resources which are widely spread out. The railway lines are almost non-existent except for a short stretch of 12.35 km. from Patharkandi in Assam to Dharmanagar. The linking of the remote interiors with the centres of growth, markets, towns and the national highway is of vital importance. At the same time, the construction of roads in Tripura is very difficult and costly on account of the hilly terrain, and the problems of availability of road building materials and workers. Yet, over the last 30 years road development in Tripura has been quite impressive. The total length of all kinds of roads now exceeds 4000 km as against just 300 km when Tripura joined the Indian Union.

The districtwise distribution of non-municipal P.W.D. roads stands as follows :

West Tripura	898.15 km
North Tripura	1274.77 „
South Tripura	1408.24 „
Total	3581.16 km

The expansion of roads may appear as a levelling up of inter-district disparities in economic development. South Tripura, otherwise lying behind West and North Tripura, is much ahead of them in respect of roads.

A look into the road map of Tripura clearly shows that vast areas of all the three districts lie without roads. While the urban

centres e.g., Dharmanagar, Kailasahar, Kamalpur (in North District), Khowai, Agartala and Sonamura (in West District) and Udaipur, Amarpur, Belonia and Sabroom (in South District) are connected by roads, the vast stretches of rural areas, widest in West Tripura District, still lack road connections with the nearby main roads. This is mainly because of the hilly terrain.

Tripura's infrastructure development plan is now aimed at greater integration with Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and other units of the North-eastern region. The Railway lines are also likely to be laid up to Kumarghat in the North District. As a result of this, prospects for infrastructure development are the brightest in the North followed by the West District. The South District's distance from the nearest railhead in Tripura may continue to remain a handicap.

Planned Economic Development

Arun Kumar Gangopadhyaya

ECONOMIC planning is essentially a process of adjustment between economic ambition and limitations. The adjustment may not only be a painful experience but quite often it is so. Tripura today presents a poignant scene of a grim compromise between economic ambitions and limitations. This situation serves as the back-drop of the development drama that goes on in Tripura.

The Tripura of yester year had a stagnant, semi-feudal and subsistence economy in the pre-independence period. But the princely state was free from economic stresses and strains at that time. The reasons are not far to seek. With a small population and still smaller economic aspirations, it did not experience the strangling hold of the severe limitations of resources. There was neither the pressure of population on land, nor the pressure of unemployment on the social structure and economic potential. Tripura was self-sufficient in food, and did not feel the need for

industrial enterprise. Before 1949, it was all quiet on the economic front in Tripura despite a very backward economy.

Since its merger in the Indian Union in 1949, Tripura has made a gradual and almost uninterrupted progress in all sectors of its economy. Though the process of developmental planning of the successive five-year plans has made itself felt, yet the state is in the grip of serious economic problems even till today. A rapid increase of population and an even more rapid rise of economic aspirations of the urban people have starkly exposed the scarcity of resources in Tripura. A steeply increasing population includes a section which aspires to enjoy greater and greater economic well-being. But the capacity to achieve larger additions to income and employment opportunities is becoming more and more restricted because of limitations of physical and financial resources. As a result, the rates of growth of income and employment tend to lag increasingly behind the needs and desires of the people. It is no wonder, therefore, that economic problems have multiplied while the economy has moved forward. What has made the situation all the more critical is that the rate of increase of money income has far exceeded the rate of increase in the supply of goods and services. This has resulted in a huge excess of demand for goods and services. The excess demand, in turn, pulls up prices and encourages unscrupulous trading practices.

Agriculture

Tripura is primarily dependent on agriculture. But the growth of agricultural output has been inadequate to meet the increasing demand. Before 1949, Tripura felt itself secure from the scarcity of foodgrains. This was, however, due to low demand and not due to agricultural prosperity as such. The yield per acre was exceedingly low. The proportion of land utilized in agriculture was very small, and modern farming techniques were not known to the agriculturalists. But, unfortunately, Tripura has gradually lost self-sufficiency in food since 1949 and has instead become a food-deficit area. The present food deficit is not due to stagnation in agriculture. Agricultural output has increased but this increase does not compare favourably with the sharp rise of demand resulting from the growth of population and the desire of the urban people for a better life.

Since the inception of economic planning in our country in 1951, measures have been taken in Tripura to make cultivation more extensive as well as more intensive. During the first five-year plan, the efforts were directed towards extensive cultivation. The reclamation of waste land, construction of minor irrigation projects, and activization of horticulture were the measures taken for extending agricultural activity during this plan period. The emphasis in the second plan shifted to intensive cultivation through the use of improved farming techniques, better seeds, manures and insecticides. Because of these measures, the output of rice, pulses, sugarcane and potato increased appreciably. The Third plan laid still greater emphasis on the expansion of agricultural output. The rising trend in the production of agricultural output and particularly in the production of foodgrains also continued in the Fourth Plan period. Efforts to conserve soil had been intensified and the use of improved varieties of seeds and manures had been stepped up in the fourth plan. There had been considerable fluctuations in the output of rice between 1973-74 and 1976-77. In order to increase the production of foodgrains substantially during the fifth plan, more areas have been brought under cultivation of high-yielding varieties of paddy and wheat. The use of fertilizers has been increased. Plant protection services have been extended. Mechanized cultivation and the adoption of improved farming techniques have tended to become more and more acceptable to the farmers.

While agricultural production expanded, the population shot up sharply from 6,45,707 to 15,56,342, an increase of about 141 per cent, between 1951 and 1971. The gains in agricultural productivity were neutralized by population growth and also an upward trend in demand. What is, therefore, needed now is accelerated growth of agricultural output in general and of foodgrains in particular. In spite of the deficiency in physical resources, some improvements in the rate of growth of agricultural output may be effected through the simultaneous implementation of a few measures. There is ample fallow land in Tripura. No efforts should be spared to cultivate the hitherto uncultivated land. Even to-day many cultivators in Tripura do not get improved varieties of seeds and manures nor any know-how to make use of these. It is essential to make more seeds and manures available to cultivators.

Increased distribution of improved varieties of seeds and fertilizers will be economically meaningful only if farmers can effectively utilize them. This requires expansion of education and training in agriculture. Farming techniques must be modernized as far as possible. But changes in farming techniques should be closely in unison with the experience of the farmers. Endeavour should also be made to bring about a change in the outlook of tribal cultivators inculcating a liking for a switch over from shifting cultivation to settled cultivation. The flow of institutional credit into the agricultural sector must be expanded substantially and speedily.

Some of these measures have already been taken. Firstly, several minor irrigation projects have been commissioned to bring as much area under irrigation as possible through the construction of seasonal bunds, distribution of pump-sets at subsidy, and the installation of artesian flow tubewells and shallow tubewells. Secondly, the implementation of rural electrification programme has already begun. Thirdly, an area of 1,04,300 hectares has been brought under high-yielding varieties of paddy by 1975-76 and this area has further increased to nearly 1,16,000 hectares by 1977-78. An intensive campaign was launched during 1975-76 for bringing more area under wheat cultivation by providing farmers with required inputs resulting into an increase in such area from 550 hectares to 2044 hectares. Fourthly, the liquidation of rural indebtedness was invoked because it is a pre-requisite for improving productive efficiency in the agricultural sector. The Tripura Agricultural Debtors Act 1975 has been enacted for the purpose of liquidating rural indebtedness and the Tripura Agricultural Debtor Relief Rules 1976 came into force from March, 1976. Moreover, the Tripura Agricultural Credit Operations Act 1976 has been enforced in order to expand the flow of institutional credit to the rural sector. A State Level Co-ordination Committee has been set up to ensure adequate flow of agricultural credit. Fifthly, the implementation of agricultural land ceiling and speedy distribution of surplus land are an integral part of the scheme of agricultural development and rural reconstruction. The Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Fourth Amendment) Act 1976 has been enforced for the purpose of effective implementation of agricultural land ceiling and speedy distribution of surplus land. Moreover,

1644.18 hectares of land in tea estates of Tripura had been declared surplus. The government has ensured the distribution of 49,000 hectares of land among 48,750 landless families. The government has also issued temporary licences to unauthorised occupants of government land in order to permit them to cultivate such land temporarily. These land reform measures are expected to remove some of the motivational and other impediments. Sixthly, the two Forest and Agriculture Departments of the Government of Tripura have been implementing a scheme of *joomia* settlement since 1974-75 for curbing shifting cultivation in Tripura.

Industry

The key to economic growth is rapid industrial development. Tripura can never be expected to achieve economic prosperity unless ways and means are found to promote industrial activity. The organised industrial units in Tripura are very few. Before 1951, there was hardly any industrial enterprise worth the name. This lack of industrial enterprise did not cause any concern at that time as there existed no pressure of demand for large increases in income and employment opportunities. But, with the rapid growth of population and the multiplication of needs of the people, the continued creation of additional income and employment opportunities has become imperative.

It is true that attempts were made in the course of the five plans to create a base for industrial activity in Tripura. The attempts made during the first four plans were too modest to make any noticeable impact on the economy of the state. During the first plan period, industrial institutes were set up to provide training facilities and financial assistance was given to small industrial units. Obviously, these modest measures did not give a thrust to industrial activity and nor were they expected to do so. In the second and third plans, the promotion of industrial training facilities and the development of village and small-scale industries became the hall marks of industrial development. The only improvement in these periods was an increase in the intensity of the stress laid on village and cottage industries, special attention was paid to developmental activities in the handloom, sericulture, Khadi and village industries, and handicrafts sectors. Training facilities were expanded. Financial assistance to small industrial units was also enlarged during the third plan period. Apart

from these, a raw material depot was set up to ensure a regular supply of raw materials to industrial units, and arrangements were made to sell products of industrial units, through government sales emporia. Two industrial estates were set up to facilitate planned development of industries. The industrial programme in the fourth plan was more or less a somewhat magnified version of that in the third plan. These developmental efforts in the industrial sector were virtually insignificant relative to the ever increasing demand for additional income and employment opportunities. Little attempt had been made in the first, second, third and fourth five-year plans to add new dimensions to the very small industrial sector of Tripura. The lack of a dynamic approach and obsession with stereotyped programmes were manifest in plans for industrial development.

The paucity of capital, deficiency in the supply of power, scarcity of raw materials, transport and communication bottlenecks, and the absence of entrepreneurs rule out the possibility of broad-based industrialization in the near future. However, there is scope for modest expansion. Firstly, there is a good scope for industrial operations based on forest resources. Secondly, the possibilities of developing agro-based industries like dairy and poultry farming, fruit canning, sericulture, rice-milling, oil and flour-milling, etc., should be fully explored. Thirdly, the steps may be taken to encourage unemployed educated youth for self-employment in service industries. Fourthly, the plantation industry should be patronised and promoted. The planners should seriously consider whether it is feasible to take measures for expanding the rubber industry in Tripura. Fifthly, there is scope for the expansion of certain small-scale and cottage industries like handloom, saw-mills, brick kilns, tanneries, leather goods, glassworks, etc. The National Council of Applied Economic Research recommended investment for the development of such industries. The government of Tripura has taken steps to set up a jute mill, a spinning mill, a sugar mill, a paper and pulp factory, and a plywood factory and steps to start large-scale and medium-sized industries were also initiated during the fifth plan period.

The strategy of the government to develop large-scale and medium-sized industries, is definitely a proper strategy from the point of view of long-run growth of income and employment.

But the priorities in an economic plan should be fixed by reference to both the long run considerations and immediate requirements. Just as a big push to dynamize the economy is a necessity, so also is an immediate improvement of the employment situation. The blue print for large-scale and medium-sized industries has been designed to dynamize the economy but not to effect a substantial increase immediately in the level of employment. There is always a time-lag between the making of investment decisions and the implementation of these decisions in the case of large-scale and medium-sized industries. This time-lag must be quite long in a backward region like Tripura. Before investments are made in large-scale industries, and medium-sized industries, the infrastructure for the availability of raw materials, skilled labour, electric power and transport facilities has to be ensured. Tripura is beset with problems of deficiency in the supply of power, extreme shortage of skilled labour and inadequacy of transport facilities. These deficiencies are to be corrected before substantial investments are made in such enterprises. It will take considerable time to overcome the deficiencies in transport facilities and in supplies of skilled labour and electric power. The supply of power has improved, to some extent, because of the commissioning of one unit of 5 MWs of the Gumti Hydel Project and because of the implementation of an accelerated power programme. But the supply of power is still far from adequate for meeting the requirements of cheap electric power to large and medium industries. Thus the steps to establish these industries will yield results only after a few years, provided, in the meanwhile the basic deficiencies are rectified. But the pressure of unemployment should be reduced immediately.

It is in the context of the need for immediate creation of additional employment that village and small-scale industries assume special importance. In a region like Tripura, which has a predominantly rural economy, the village and small scale industries help to achieve maximum utilization of local resources and ensure maximum local consumption in the short-run. The deficiencies in transport facilities and supply of power and shortage of skilled labour rule out large-scale industrialization in the short-run. But village and small-scale industries can be developed despite these deficiencies. The best strategy for a rural economy is a strategy in which the emphasis in the short run is on the development

of village and small-scale industries and the rectification of basic deficiencies.

Transport and Communications

The lack of adequate transport and communication facilities is a serious obstacle to economic development in Tripura. The extension of transport and communication facilities is vital for the future growth of the economy. It is, therefore, necessary to build up a network of transport and communications.

About a century ago, there was no road worthy of the name in Hill Tipperah. In the pre-independence days, the network of railways running through the eastern region of Bengal adjoining Tripura was the only means of external communication. As this region became part of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Tripura became isolated from the rest of India after the rigid partition. Moreover, Tripura's internal communications were extremely undeveloped at the time of its merger with India. Under five year plans, the programmes of road construction have been implemented for developing Tripura's internal communications. In the first three plans, many roads were constructed in the densely populated areas of Tripura. In the fourth and fifth plan periods some roads were constructed to join backward and hilly areas with the main centres of economic activity. The construction of bridges has also progressed simultaneously with the road construction. Tripura now wears a somewhat new look because of roads and bridges constructed since the inception of economic planning in 1951. But there are still many areas which are practically cut off from the main places of economic activity. With the increase of population and the rise in demand, the trading activities have also expanded considerably. The development of internal transport facilities has not been commensurate with the growth of the internal trade. While internal transport and communication facilities leave much to be desired, the external transport and communication facilities are still extremely limited.

Social Services

An index of economic development is the rate of growth of social services. Without substantial expansion of educational, medical and housing facilities, economic growth loses much of its significance. It is, therefore, necessary to take account of the extent to which these facilities have so far been expanded in Tripura.

During the first three Plans a remarkable improvement took place in the facilities for education at different levels. There was an impressive increase in the number of schools and teachers. The total enrolment of students multiplied several times. New colleges, including an Engineering College, were started. Moreover, facilities for physical education were enlarged. The expansion in educational facilities continued during the fourth and fifth Plans. A Post-graduate Studies Centre has been set up. It is expected that increased facilities for education will effect a qualitative change of manpower. Such a qualitative change is an essential ingredient in economic development. However, in spite of the large increase in educational facilities, the available facilities still remain far from sufficient. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the educational facilities in Tripura were very limited before 1951. Secondly, the demand for educational facilities has increased at a very fast rate because of a growing desire for a better life. Since initially, the facilities were very limited and since the demand has subsequently increased steeply, even a striking expansion of educational facilities has not been enough for meeting the demand for such facilities.

The case with medical facilities is similar. The government of Tripura has taken various steps for promoting public health. Yet, the medical facilities that are now available here are far from adequate for providing proper medical care to the people. The reasons are again utter deficiency of such facilities before 1951 and the sharp rise in demand for these year after year.

The Bane of Unemployment

The problem of unemployment has assumed critical proportions. One aspect of this problem is the high incidence of under-employment among the rural working force and the educated young persons. The number of job-seekers registered in the local employment exchange was 56,758 in 1977 and it stands at about 60,000 at present. The absorption of the unemployed educated youths in productive employment is impossible without industrial development. But we can hardly expect any substantial development of industries in Tripura in the near future. The service industries, and agro-based and forest-based industries may, to some extent, provide additional employment immediately, if these industries are developed in a planned manner. Moreover, if unemployed

young persons are absorbed only in government offices and educational institutions, money income increases without a corresponding increase in output. Our inability to broaden the sources of employment opportunities has forced us to reconcile ourselves to a precarious compromise between our aspirations and limitations. This poses a threat to social peace and security in Tripura.

TRIPURA'S FIVE YEAR PLAN

The Perspective on the Plan

In the light of the foregoing analysis, the perspective on Tripura's Five Year Plan for the period 1978/79—1982/83 may be considered. The perspective of development in Tripura's Sixth Five-Year Plan has been formulated in the light of the performance of the economy during the fifth plan. It will incorporate the outlook for the immediate future and the long-run considerations of growth of income and employment.

Three imperatives stand out from an appraisal of the performance of the fifth plan. Firstly, there is the need for creating as much activities as possible within the state for reducing the economic dependence of Tripura upon other states. Exhorting the State Planning Board, the State Chief Minister Nripen Chakraborty commented that the "... money is being pumped in, but, at the same time, the same money is being pumped out through imports of essential commodities ..." With a view to reduce imports and the outflow of financial resources, efforts must be directed towards promoting as much economic activities as possible within the state. The principal reason for excessive dependence on imports is the negligible existence of industries in the state. Secondly, the removal of poverty is a pressing need. The percentage of population living below the poverty line has been on the increase. The efforts in this direction call for the rapid generation of additional income and employment and the reduction of inequality in the distribution of income and wealth. Thirdly, the problem of unemployment has assumed so serious proportions that the employment objective must, of necessity, be an explicit objective in the sixth plan. The steps must be taken to mitigate the incidence of both underemployment in rural areas and unemployment of the educated youth in urban and semi-urban areas.

In addition, some imperatives emerge from the outlook for the immediate future. Firstly, there is the need for rapidly expanding

the state's capacity for both capital formation and adequate consumption. The emphasis should be on the satisfaction of local demands. Secondly, there should be maximum possible mobilization of local resources for investment. Thirdly, the developmental activities should be labour-oriented and attention should be paid to the absorption of the local labour force in development projects. Fourthly, a high priority must be accorded to the promotion of economic welfare of the tribal population. In particular, the tribal *Joomias* must be provided with land, credit facilities, and inputs for agricultural and allied activities.

Besides, three imperatives follow from long-term considerations of growth of income and employment. Firstly, there is the need for annual monitoring and evaluation of developmental activities and the consequent readjustments of sectoral allocations and targets. Also, long-term considerations of growth of income and employment call for close links between successive five year plans. Secondly, the application of science and technology in the promotion of economic activities will assume importance in the context of long-term planning. Thirdly, decentralisation should be the characteristic feature of long-term economic planning in Tripura, as also in any other state of India.

The Approach to Future Planning

Given the perspective of the Fifth Five Year Plan for Tripura for the years 1978/79—1982/83, we would formulate an approach to the Sixth Five Year Plan of the state. The Planning Commission has tentatively fixed an outlay of Rs. 125 crores for the Sixth Five Year Plan of this state. So, on an average, an annual outlay of Rs. 25 crores has been tentatively fixed for the State Plan. In addition to this, more money will be made available to the state. Amounts that will be spent under the North-Eastern Council schemes, Central Government aided schemes, and Centrally-sponsored schemes transferred to the state for economic development. The tentatively fixed size of the State Plan is obviously small in the context of the high incidence of poverty, the severe pressure of unemployment and under-employment, the glaring deficiencies in the infra-structure of the economy, the over-dependence on other states for supplies of essential goods, and the deplorable economic conditions of an overwhelming majority of the tribal population. Since the proposed size of the State Plan is small, when judged in

the context of massive problems faced by the state, it is imperative that the limited financial resources be fully utilized. When the size of a Plan is small, it is desirable and necessary that the level of implementation of the Plan should, in financial terms, reach cent per cent or nearly cent per cent of the approved outlay. In Tripura, where paucity of financial resources is a major constraint in planning exercises, the implementation of development programmes has so far been none too satisfactory even in financial terms. In 1977-78, the total expenditure under the annual State Plan was Rs. 1340.182 lakhs out of an approved outlay of Rs.1638 lakhs; actual outlays under North-Eastern Council schemes and Central and Centrally-sponsored schemes were Rs.102.317 lakhs and Rs.271.046 lakhs respectively out of respective approved outlays of Rs. 179.830 lakhs and Rs. 488.576 lakhs. The levels of implementation of programmes relatively to approved outlays were 81.8 per cent for the State Plan, 56.90 per cent for North-Eastern Council schemes, and 55.50 per cent for Central and Centrally-sponsored schemes.

The levels of implementation had been particularly low in the case of North-Eastern Council schemes and Central and Centrally-sponsored schemes, while the level of implementation had been far from satisfactory in the case of the State Plan. Taking the State Plan, North-Eastern Council schemes and Central and Centrally-sponsored schemes together, there was a shortfall of nearly Rs. 593 lakhs in expenditure out of an approved outlay of about Rs. 2306 lakhs; the shortfall amounted to about 25.7 per cent of the approved outlay. Thus, ironically enough, a state, which suffers from a chronic paucity of financial resources, had failed to utilize even two-thirds of the small quantum of funds provided for the financing of development programmes in 1977-78. Such a poor performance should be abstained in future because poor implementation of a small plan robs the economic planning of much of its significance. Hence, the first point to be stressed in an approach to the Sixth Five Year Plan for Tripura is that, given the serious constraint of paucity of financial resources, there should be full or nearly full utilization of funds provided for development programmes from all sources.

Apart from the financial constraint, there are several physical constraints also which are obstacles to planning exercises in Tripura. One formidable constraint is the deficiency in the availability of cement. In 1977-78, several projects could not either be completed or taken up because of the shortage of cement. It is high time that

the planning authorities in Tripura should identify whether shortage of cement is a recurring bottleneck or a random disturbance. If it is just a random disturbance, then there may not be much cause for concern regarding the availability of cement during the Sixth Plan period. But, as it appears from past experience, the deficiency in the availability of cement for construction activities of the development projects appears to be of recurring nature. Hence, the availability of cement should be treated as a strategic variable in the Sixth Plan.

The second physical constraint is the extreme dearth of capital goods and accessories and spare parts. This rules out broad-based industrialization in the organized sector and the application of sophisticated technology in agriculture and allied sectors even on a very limited scale during the Sixth Plan period. A third physical constraint is the scarcity of raw materials except for certain types of agro-based and forest-based industries which must constitute the core of the industrialization in the Sixth Plan. The fourth physical constraint is the severe shortage of power. Both in respect of the consumption of electricity in industries and irrigation and in respect of rural electrification, Tripura is one of the most backward states in India. During 1975-76, the per capita consumption of electricity in Tripura was only 8.8 units as compared with the all-India average of 120 units. Even at present, the per capita consumption of electricity in Tripura is only 10 units or so. The shortage of power is a major hindrance to the development of agriculture, irrigation and industry.

Fifthly, there is the deficiency of transport and communication facilities both within the state and also with the other states. One of the pre-requisites of self-sustained economic development is that various modes of transport be available for carrying inputs into production units in different sectors of the economy and for carrying their outputs to different markets. But there is a glaring deficiency of transport facilities, particularly in rural areas of Tripura. In the remote villages, there are practically no roads. Therefore, the construction of new roads and expansion of road transport are a pressing necessity for the development of Tripura's rural economy. The expansion of railways in Tripura is also needed to give a push to the rural economy. If a new railway line is constructed in Tripura for connecting Dharmanagar to Kumarghat, there will be an impact on the villages in the

neighbourhood of the railway line, and this will, in turn, bring in many effects in the economy. Further more, the hilly areas are more backward than plain areas and these areas should, therefore, receive special attention in the matter of development of transport and communications during the Sixth Plan period.

The sixth physical constraint is the low availability and the still lower utilization of irrigation facilities. This partly accounts for the low productivity in agriculture and the wide prevalence of the system of single cropping in Tripura. About 90 per cent of the population of Tripura (to be precise, 89.57 per cent, according to 1971 Census) lives in villages. As stated in the state's 'Draft Five Year Plan 1978-83', 83.8 per cent of the population of Tripura was below the poverty line in 1973-74. The incidence of poverty is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Therefore, the development of the rural economy must be the focal point of economic planning in Tripura. Since, according to 1971 Census, 74.37 per cent of the working force in Tripura is employed in agriculture, while another 2.23 per cent is employed in allied sectors, the highest priority in Tripura's Sixth Five Year Plan must be accorded to agriculture. Agricultural labourers, marginal farmers, small farmers, and tribal families practising shifting cultivation constitute target groups in the agricultural sector.

In order to relieve the pressure of under-employment in the agricultural sector, to increase output in the rural economy, to raise incomes of agricultural labourers, marginal farmers and small farmers, and also to promote economic conditions of the tribal population, a part of the manpower engaged in agriculture should be transferred to allied sectors like forestry, horticulture, dairy farming, poultry farming and animal husbandry. In development programmes relating to agriculture and allied sectors, the major emphasis must be laid on the promotion of infra-structural facilities, the provision of inputs for agriculture and allied sectors, and the inflow of credit into the rural economy.

The communication and transport facilities must be improved for connecting villages with main markets. The irrigation facilities must be expanded and fully utilized for effecting better utilization of land, seeds and fertilizers, reclamation of cultivable waste, and the extension of the system of double or multiple cropping. The rural electrification must be undertaken on an impressive scale, both for expanding irrigation facilities and for developing agro-

based and forest-based rural industries. Manure, fertilizers and high-yielding varieties of seeds must be supplied to cultivators at controlled prices. They should also be taught to make the best use of these inputs. Agricultural marketing facilities must be promoted and institutional credit must be provided to farmers, village artisans and others engaged in primary economic activities on liberal terms. The educational facilities in rural areas should be so oriented that education becomes related to the needs of the rural people, and educational programmes should be functional in nature and correlated to employment and production programmes in rural area. The co-operative societies must play an active role in promoting productive activities in villages. These societies must pay constant attention to the needs of farmers, artisans and others engaged in primary production. They should provide finance, seeds, fertilizers, non-agricultural inputs, marketing facilities, etc., to villagers. A pool of common funds of agricultural inputs under the control of co-operative societies should be developed, the people have very sad experience of the co-operative movement in Tripura where it is almost imposed from the above and the people participation is virtually non-existent. The loans extended by the co-operative societies are considered as non-refundable help from the government. A range of additional causes like the misappropriation, mismanagement, lack of earnestness and bureaucratic mentality of the managerial staff have operated behind the liquidation of so many local co-operative societies. Unless such cases are properly dealt with, the co-operatives will continue to be in the red.

Village-level workers should play a crucial role in the development of the rural economy. They should be readily available for rendering assistance to villagers. In order to dynamize the rural economy, the village and small-scale industries should be promoted as a key instrument of diversification of economic activities. There are prospects for industrial operations based on forest resources like teak, *sal*, *garjan*, *chamal*, *karai*, *jam*, bamboos and canes. Secondly, the opportunities for promoting agro-based industries like fruit canning, sericulture, production of *gur* and *khandsari*, rice-milling, oil-milling, flour-milling, etc., should be fully exploited. Thirdly, proper arrangements should be made for the expansion of the handicrafts sector. There is a demand for the products of Tripura handicrafts in different parts of the country and

there are trained artisans in various crafts. Fourthly, there is the scope for expansion of small-scale and cottage industries like handloom, blacksmithy, saw mills, brick kilns, potteries, tanneries, leather goods, soap factories, match factories, bakeries and ceramics. Small-scale industries should be promoted in urban areas also with a view to reduce the incidence of urban unemployment.

It will be necessary to ensure active participation of the people in the formulation and implementation of plan programmes. The planning from below is of fundamental importance for making economic planning meaningful and the participation of the rural people in planning exercises should be organized through village *panchayats*.

It may be noted, finally, that the deplorably under-developed state of the economy of Tripura is substantially due to the underlying relations of production. The means of production are directly and indirectly owned mainly by a few rich families. Economic power is more or less concentrated in the hands of a few rich land-owners and businessmen. The vast majority of the rural poor has only marginal control over the means of production. Without social control over ownership of the means of production, it may not be possible to achieve optimum utilization of the forces of production. The tenancy rights in lands must be protected. Share-croppers must be freed from exploitation by land-owners and the land should be provided to landless agricultural labourers. There should be speedy restoration of the possession of land alienated by tribals.

More important than the question of land-ownership is the question of ownership of capital in the economy of Tripura. Both finance capital and real capital in the private sector are concentrated in the hands of a few rich land-owners and businessmen. There is neo-colonial exploitation of farmers and artisans in rural areas by urban traders who have massive control over the rural economy. Therefore, the social control over trade and the use of capital are necessary for achieving a desirable pattern and a satisfactory rate of economic growth in Tripura.

Land Reforms

Narendra Chandra Datta

THE OBJECTIVES of land reforms have been "to remove such motivational and other impediments to the increase in agricultural production as arise from the agrarian structure inherited from the past, and also to eliminate all elements of exploitation and social injustice within the agrarian system". For achieving these objectives, the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 (hereinafter referred to as Tripura Land Reforms Act) provides for :

- (i) The abolition of intermediaries,
- (ii) The tenancy reform designed to scale down rent and confer on *under-raiyats* including share-croppers the security of tenure till they are brought into direct relationship with the government,
- (iii) The fixation of ceiling on land-holdings and distribution of surplus land,
- (iv) The prevention of fragmentation of agricultural holdings, and

- (v) The restriction on transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals and restoration of illegally transferred land to the transferors.

The Tripura Land Reforms Act also provides for the preparation of cedestral maps and uptodate record of rights showing the rights of the *raiylats* and *under-raiylats* including share-croppers.

Pre-Reform Land Tenure System

Before going in for an analysis of the provisions of the land reform legislation and an evaluation of its impact of land reforms, let us examine the land tenure system which had been prevalent in Tripura at the time of the enactment of the Tripura Land Reforms Act and also the structural defects in the agrarian system of the state.

The land tenures evolved in the pre-independence period might be said to be mere by-products of various kinds of settlements made from time to time for the purpose of revenue collection. Till 1880, there was no regular land revenue system in Tripura. In many cases, the Maharajas made grants of land in perpetuity at a fixed rent and in cases where no grants were made, the usual custom was to farm out the collections. Where the grantee was the actual cultivator, he virtually enjoyed the position of a peasant proprietor. The rates of revenue were very low and the cultivating tenants used to pay their revenue either in cash or as a share of the produce. In many cases, the grantees were exempted from the payment of land revenue in lieu of their free service to the state.¹ After 1880, a number of *Ain* (Act) and *Niyamabali* (Rules) came into force for regulating land tenure systems in the state. These Acts and Rules recognised the following types of land tenures :-

(a) *Kayemi taluk* : The right of the *talukdar* is permanent, heritable and transferable, and the rent is fixed in perpetuity.

(b) *Taskishi taluk* : The right of the *talukdar* is transferable and heritable, but the rent can be revised after a stipulated period of 10 to 15 years.

(c) *Dar taluk* : The intermediary right held under a *kayemi taluk* or *taskishi taluk*, or under a revenue-free tenure-holder.

(d) *Niskar* : The tenure holder holds land free of revnue.

(e) *Jote* : The right of a holder of *Jote* (*Raiyat*) is permanent, heritable and transferable, but the rent can be revised after a stipulated period of 7 to 12 years.

(f) *Korfa* : Persons who hold and cultivate land as *under raiyat* or '*bargadar*' (share-cropper).

In the hilly areas, where shifting cultivation (*Jooming*) is practised, no regular land revenue system could be introduced, and, therefore, fixed royalty per holding was realised by the state.

The former rulers of Tripura constituted a Tribal Reserve Areas within the state of Tripura under Tribal Reserve Orders of 1931 and 1943 for the settlement of five specified classes of tribals, namely *Puran Tripura*, *Noatia*, *Jamatia*, *Reang* and *Halam*. These areas covered about 42 per cent of the total area of the state. The transfer of land to any person not belonging to the specified five tribes is not valid unless such transfer has been made with the previous permission of the state.

The Defects in the Agrarian Structure

The outstanding features of the agrarian structure in Tripura, as in many other states of our developing economy, are the existence of intermediaries between the state and actual cultivators, the rack-renting and insecurity of tenure, an increasing number of uneconomic holdings, the fragmentation of holdings, the landlessness of a large part of the rural population, and the illegal transfer of land by tribals to non-tribals. The *talukdars*, tenure-holders and holders of revenue-free estates were intermediaries and most of them acted as functionless buffer between the state and the cultivators. They leased out their land for a term of years to tenants and took little interest in the land beyond the collection of rent.

The *under-raiyats* and '*bargadars*' (share-croppers) were exposed to rack-renting and eviction. The heavy influx of refugees, who were mostly cultivators, from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) caused heavy demand for cultivable lands. Taking advantage of the limited supply of cultivable land in the plains, the substantial land-owners, both *talukdars* and *raiyats*, succeeded in exacting a very high rate of rent from the landless cultivators and owners of dwarf holdings. Before the enactment of Tripura Land Reforms Act, 1960, the *under-raiyats* and '*bargadars*' did not get any protection against eviction and rack-renting. As a result, the unregulated tenancy system lowered farmers' standards of living and stood in the way of any long-term improvement in land and any increase in agricultural production and productivity.

Tripura welcomed cultivating immigrants from the neighbouring states as there was plentiful supply of virgin land in the valleys. But the influx of refugees resulted in the two and a half times increase in population during the period 1951 to 1971 (from 6.5 lakhs in 1951 to 15.56 lakhs in 1971). The rapid growth of the population caused heavy pressure of population on land in this industrially backward state. The pressure of population on land, combined with the effects of transfer, partition and forced sale to money-lenders, has led to the systematic increase in sub-division of holdings. As a result, the general tendency has been for the number of uneconomic holdings to increase. The percentage of operational holdings below 1 hectare increased from 62 in 1961² to 70 in 1972.³ In 1971 about 89 per cent of the operational holdings in the state were below 2 hectares⁴. The smallness of the holdings caused a bottleneck in the utilisation of certain indivisible resources, such as manpower, bullock-power and resulted in all kinds of dis-economies and deterioration of economic condition of the owners of uneconomic holdings. Another serious defect of the agrarian structure in Tripura is the inequality in the distribution of land. The Agricultural Census (1970-71) revealed that while 70 per cent of the households operate only 28 per cent of the total area of operational holdings, 11 per cent of the households operate 46 per cent of the total area of operational holdings.

In the plains of Tripura, as in other states, the land-holdings are not only small in size but also fragmented. The fragmentation of holdings stood as a serious obstacle to agricultural development and fuller utilisation of the land. Along with this factor, a large number of rural households in Tripura are landless. The landless people mostly depend on employment in agriculture which is not only seasonal but also irregular. Only some of them cultivate leased-in land under share-cropping system. The extent of land hunger in the state can be understood from the fact that in 1973 about 2.59 lakh people in rural areas including scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were landless.⁵

With a view to protect the interests of the tribal population, the tribal reserve areas were created by the erstwhile rulers of the state, but the boundaries of the reserve area were not well-defined and a large number of tribals have been living outside these areas. Taking advantage of the ineffective enforcement of law and poor

financial condition of the tribals, the non-tribals have acquired land from the tribals both within and outside the tribal reserve areas. Then again, the refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan acquired land from the tribals without observing legal formalities and restrictions. As a result, a large number of the economically backward tribals have become either landless or holders of tiny plots of land.

Thus far the review shows that the agrarian structure of Tripura has developed many defects which are obstacles to the improvement of agricultural efficiency as well as economic lot of the agriculturists. The Tripura Land Reforms Act, 1960 was enacted and subsequently amended substantially 'with a view to removing the impediments against increase in agricultural production and removal of social injustice in agrarian system of the state'. Now an attempt will be made :

- (i) to analyse the provisions of land reform legislation and to evaluate its implementation,
- (ii) to study the impact of land reforms on the rural economy, and
- (iii) to suggest the appropriate measures for improving land reform legislation and its enforcement.

Abolition of Intermediaries

There existed different types of intermediaries between the state and the *raiya*t under the land system prevailing in Tripura prior to its integration with the Indian Union in 1949. The present Tripura Land Reforms Act provides that the Government may, by notification, acquire all estates and all rights, title and interest of every intermediary in such estates free from all encumbrances. After acquisition, every tenant holding any land under the intermediary shall hold the same directly under the government as a *raiya*t. The intermediaries are entitled to retain homestead lands, lands under their personal cultivation, lands held as mortgaged, lands comprised in orchards or used for the purpose of live-stock breeding, poultry farming or dairy farming, lands comprised in and required for tea garden, mill, factory or workshop. All lands possession of which is retained by the intermediary will be offered for settlement with him as a *raiya*t under the government and he will be liable to pay land revenue at full rate applicable to similar

lands in the locality. The intermediaries are entitled to compensation on a sliding scale varying inversely with the amount of income from 2 times to 15 times of the net income, depending on the income group to which the claimant may belong to.

In Tripura all intermediary interests were abolished. The tenants of the erstwhile intermediaries have become *raiya*s under the state and as a result now their rights are permanent, inheritable and transferable. The intermediary rights of about 29,000 intermediaries were abolished and as many as 70,000 tenants occupying nearly 35,000 hectares of land have acquired *raiya*ti rights under the government. The abolition of intermediaries and the direct settlement of land have created a stronger sense of ownership in the minds of the tenants and provided the much needed incentive to them for the improvement of land. The land records maintained by the officials of the former rulers were incomplete and unreliable. Now, under the provisions of the Tripura Land Reforms Act, the government has prepared a record of rights for the whole state. The record of rights is not only beneficial for the *raiya*s but also useful to the state for effectively implementing the land reform measures. Thus, the abolition of intermediaries has resulted in the establishment of direct contact between the state and the tenants, an improvement in the tenurial status of the tenants, the achievement of a uniform system of land revenue administration in the state and increase in land revenue.

Tenancy Reform

In Tripura leasing of land under *barga* system (share-cropping) is a common feature and an extensive area is cultivated under this system. During the course of the 1961 Census, an intensive study of sample households engaged in cultivation was conducted and 17 per cent of the cultivating households cultivated leased land held from private persons or institutions for payment in money, kind or share and more than 16 per cent of the cultivating households cultivated land partly held from the government and partly from private persons for payment in money, kind or share. Though the proportion of *bargadars* (share-croppers) is not shown separately, yet it is estimated that the percentage of *bargadars* to total number of persons cultivating leased land is considerably high. Till the enactment of the Tripura Land Reforms Act, 1960 the under-

*raiya*s and *bargadars* had no legal protection against rack-renting and insecurity of tenure.

Under the Tripura Land Reforms Act the rent payable by a *bargadar* has been fixed at one-fourth of the produce where the *raiya*t (landlord) supplies plough, and cattle and one-fifth of the produce where the *raiya*t does not supply plough and cattle. In case of rent payable by an *under-raiya*t in the upper limit has been fixed at four times the land revenue. The interest of an *under-raiya*t including *bargadar* in any land held by him as such is heritable but not transferable. An *under-raiya*t cannot be evicted from land except under any of the following grounds :

- (i) if the land has been reserved for personal cultivation of the *raiya*t and is within the 'permissible limit',
- (ii) if the *under-raiya*t has intentionally and wilfully committed such acts which impair the value or utility of the land for agricultural purposes,
- (iii) if the *under-raiya*t has failed to pay rent within the prescribed time, and
- (iv) if the *under-raiya*t has sub-let the land without the consent of the *raiya*t.

The *under-raiya*t holding land *under-raiya*t owning more than a 'basic holding' (0.80 standard hectare in area) is allowed to retain some land. Then again, the *raiya*t, who has taken possession of land after evicting an *under-raiya*t therefrom, on the ground of personal cultivation, fails to cultivate such land personally in any year during a period of four years next following, the *under-raiya*t is entitled to be restored to possession of land from which he has been evicted.

In order to prevent the malafide surrender of land, the Act provides that the *under-raiya*t shall surrender land held by him only to the government which shall lease out the surrendered land to any other deserving person and the lessee shall acquire the rights of the *under-raiya*t. The Act further provides that the government may, by notification with effect from any specified date, declare all lands held by *under-raiya*s in any local area to be their non-resumable lands. The amount of compensation payable by an *under-raiya*t for the non resumable land will be determined by the government.

The Tripura Land Reforms Act aims at the protection of *under-raiyats* and *bargadars* against rack-renting and eviction. But the legislation, in the absence of effective implementation, failed to lower the rates of rent and change the traditional system of sharing the costs of cultivation and the produce of the land. The Act fixed rent between one-fourth and one-fifth of the produce, but even after eighteen years of its implementation, the half of the produce is the common rate of rent in all the districts. Though the rights of resumption of land by the *raiyats*, owning more than the basic holding, have been restricted yet the eviction of a *bargadar* is a very common feature. In the absence of a record of rights of the *bargadars* and the effective enforcement of the legislative measures, the landlords are in a position to realise exorbitant rents from the *bargadars*, who are competing for the use of land, and evict them taking advantage of their inferior financial and bargaining capacity.

During a field study of the Sekerkot village,⁶ it has been identified by the author himself that the landlords realise from the *bargadars* half of the produce as rent and evict them according to their whims and fancies. What is worst is that most of the *bargadars* are not even aware of the legal provisions regarding rent or their rights in land.

It is important to note that in order to evade the law, most of the landlords conceal the fact of share-cropping and take sufficient precautions to prevent the possibility of their leased-out land being recorded. Taking advantage of the existing land hunger and weak bargaining capacity of the *bargadars*, the landlords are able to lease-out land under 'concealed share tenancy' or 'off the record arrangement.'⁷ The collected data revealed that in 1974, 28 per cent of the cultivators in Sekerkot village were *bargadars*. In Tripura, there are about 2.5 lakh operational holdings and if 5 per cent of them are assumed to be under share-tenancy then the number of operational holdings under share-tenancy will be about 12,500. But according to the Agricultural Census (1970-71), in 1971 the number of operational holdings under share tenancy was only 454-90 in North Tripura District, 116 in South Tripura District and 248 in West Tripura District. This indicates that there was either large scale eviction of *bargadars* or widespread concealment of share tenancy after enactment of Tripura Land Reforms Act, 1960.

The Tripura Land Reforms (Second Amendment) Act, 1974 provides for the recording of interests of the *bargadars* in the record of rights for effective implementation of the legislative measures but this belated attempt with the existing implementation machinery failed to achieve much success. In view of this the government has recently launched a programme *Operation Barga* for recording the rights of *bargadars*. This programme is being implemented with the active co-operation of the officials of the Department of Settlement and Land Records, the Sub-Divisional Officers, the Block Development Officers and the Village Panchayats. The government has decided to pay to the *bargadars* legal expenses up to Rs. 350 to enable them to establish their *barga* rights.

As indicated earlier, in the absence of record of rights of the *bargadars* and sincere and serious attempts on the part of the administrative machinery, the *bargadars* are exposed to rack-renting and eviction. Then again, in the absence of security of tenure, the *bargadars* are not in a position to get loan on easy terms for purchasing agricultural inputs. Thus, the legislative measures could neither safeguard the interest of the *bargadars*, nor could they create the necessary conditions for improving agricultural productivity. Now an attempt is being made by the government for recording the rights of the *bargadars* in the land records to ensure security of tenure to the *bargadars* till ownership right is conferred on them.

Indeed, the legislative measures for protecting the interests of *bargadars* and *under-raiyats* are ambitious, but the effective enforcement of these measures will remain a complicated and difficult task so long as the *intense* demand for land continues to exist. With the past experience, it may be said that even if the existing share-tenancy is abolished legally by transferring ownership right to the existing *bargadars*, it will reappear in a different form only to complicate and confuse landlord-tenant relations. A lasting solution is possible only if the pressure of population on land can be reduced by orderly transfer of landless people from agriculture to non-agricultural pursuits.

Ceiling on Land-holdings

The un-economic size of the great majority of land-holdings, inequality in ownership and use of land, and landlessness of a

considerable portion of the population are some of the serious defects of the agrarian system in Tripura. So the ceiling legislation in Tripura, as in other states, seeks to impose limits on the amount of land that may be held by a family.

The Tripura Land Reforms Act, 1960 fixed the ceiling limit at 10 standard hectares for a family of five members. For each additional member above five, the ceiling could be raised by 2 standard hectares subject to a maximum of 20 standard hectares. For the purpose of ceiling a standard hectare means one hectare of *loonga* or *nal* (low land) or three hectares of *tilla* (high land) land. Subsequently the Act was amended and the Tripura Land Reforms (Second Amendment) Act, 1974 lowered the ceiling limit to 7.20 standard hectares with retrospective effect from the 24 January, 1971. The Act provides for the fixation of ceiling at different levels, varying between 2 and 7.20 hectares, for families of different sizes. The ceiling has been fixed at 2 standard hectares for an adult unmarried person or a sole surviving member of a family and 4 standard hectares for a family consisting of 5 members. In case of a person having a family of more than 5 members, the ceiling limit can be raised by 0.60 hectare for each additional member subject to a maximum of 7.20 standard hectares.

It is important to note that while under the principal Act a family of a person included all children and grand-children, under the Tripura Land Reforms (Fourth Amendment) Act, 1976, the family does not include married and unmarried adult sons who hold any land. The following kinds of land have been exempted from the operation of the Act :

- (i) The lands held for the cultivation of tea, coffee or rubber and purposes ancillary to the cultivation of these products,
- (ii) The sugar-cane farm operated by a sugar factory,
- (iii) Farm used for cattle breeding, dairy or wool raising,
- (iv) An efficiently managed farm on which heavy investments have been made,
- (v) The land in compact block used as orchard, and
- (vi) The land held by a co-operative society.

The fixation of ceiling on land-holdings is expected to reduce the disparities in the ownership of land, to increase the size of un-economic holding by redistribution of land, and to make

available surplus land for rehabilitation of landless cultivators. But the fixation of ceiling at a very high level, the relaxation of ceiling limit for orchards, the efficiently managed farms and the inordinate delay in the implementation of legislative measures rendered ceiling legislation ineffective; in that it failed to achieve its objectives. It is estimated that the net available surplus land will be only about 800 hectares in the state.⁸ Thus, the fixation of ceiling, which is the most radical land reform measure, proved to be of little importance.

According to 1961 Census, about 89 per cent of the holdings in Tripura are below 2 hectares and only about .05 per cent of the holdings are above 12 hectares.⁹ The Agricultural Census conducted by the Department of Settlement and Land Records revealed that 89 per cent of the operational holdings are below 2 hectares and only about .02 per cent of the operational holdings (excluding tea gardens) are above 10 hectares.¹⁰ So there was no justification in fixing ceiling limit at 10 standard hectares for a family of five members with the provision of additional 2 standard hectares for each member in excess of five, subject to the maximum limit of 20 standard hectares.

It is a common experience that the intensity of cultivation is higher in smaller farms than in the larger ones. A family holding which coincides with a 'plough unit' is likely to be most productive if intensive method of cultivation is practised. A family holding is equal to 2.5 standard hectares under section 2(h) of the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960. In Tripura, a holding of 2 standard hectares may be taken as a family holding and on the basis of this ceiling limit may be fixed at 6 standard hectares, i.e. three times the family holding.¹¹ To ensure a reasonable standard of living to the cultivating family, some relaxation is necessary in case of *tilla* land which is of inferior quality. But too much relaxation not only stands in the way of making available sufficient land for redistribution but also takes away incentives to improve land.

On the basis of the recommendations of the Chief Ministers' Conference held in New Delhi on 23 July, 1972, the State Government has amended the Land Reforms Act and fixed the ceiling limit for families of different sizes at different levels ranging between 2 standard hectares and 7.2 standard hectares. But

lowering of the ceiling is not likely to make sufficient land available for redistribution because of following reasons :

(1) 'Standard hectare' has been defined as one hectare of *loonga* or *nal* or three hectares of *tilla* land. The big land-holders in Tripura in most of the cases, own, both *loonga* and *tilla* land. Information regarding the number of holdings and total land likely to come under the operation of ceiling is not available. The intensive study of the sample households engaged in cultivation conducted during the 1961 Census shows that only 1.1 per cent of the holdings are of the size, 5 hectares and above including both *loonga* and *tilla* lands. According to the Agricultural Census only about 1.6 per cent of the operational holdings including both *loonga* and *tilla* lands are of the size of 5 hectares and above. So the available information indicates that much land will not be found surplus even after lowering of the ceiling limit.

(2) It is quite likely that many substantial land owners have transferred land in anticipation of fixation of ceiling limit at a lower level. By lowering the ceiling with effect from 24 January, 1971 the legislation failed to eliminate the possibility of such anticipatory land transfer. Then again, the change in the definition of the term 'family' enabled many substantial owners to retain land in the names of their adult sons, who may or may not be interested in farming. It is also possible that unscrupulous persons may take advantage of inactive enforcement of legislative measures and evade law by resorting to *benami* i.e. transfer of land to friends and relatives.

Now the problem is that sufficient surplus land will not be available even after lowering the ceiling limit. Whereas the land is needed for the rehabilitation of the landless agricultural workers, for the enlargement of the size of un-economic holdings and also for the settlement of the *joomias*. So it is desirable that the government should acquire from the tea estates all land in excess of their bonafide requirements. The fixation of ceiling is not an appropriate measure in case of tea plantations, but there is no justification in allowing the tea planters to keep vast area un-utilised under their possession and to dispose of land at the market price after it ceases to be used for the cultivation of tea. Out of 19,827 hectares of land settled with the tea estates, less than 5,600 hectares are under the cultivation of tea. So sufficient land

will be found surplus in the tea estates even after meeting their requirements of land for cultivation of tea and purposes ancillary thereto. The redistribution of surplus and un-utilised land under the tea estates together with the available culturable waste land of about 98.8 thousand hectares¹² will make for the rehabilitation of the landless people.

This appraisal leads to the broad conclusion that the impact of the fixation of ceiling on land-holdings has fallen far short of the expectations. However, there is the possibility of further reducing the ceiling limit and acquiring sufficient land from the tea estates.

Prevention of Fragmentation

The Tripura Land Reforms Act seeks to prevent fragmentation of holdings by prohibiting partition and transfer of land by way of sale, exchange, gift, bequest or mortgage with possession which create fragments, meaning thereby, a holding of less than 0.80 standard hectares. It is common knowledge that smallness of a holding results in high cost of cultivation and consequently low returns. So prevention of fragmentation is a very important land reform measure. But available information shows that the provisions of the Act relating to prevention of fragmentation have not been strictly enforced. Of course, the regulation of partition is not free from administrative difficulties. The co-sharers, unwilling for joint cultivation, may avoid formal partition and sub-divide land informally and it will be administratively difficult to prevent this. The regulation of transfer by sale or mortgage, which are generally to be registered, is easier if the Department of Settlement and Land Records is serious about it.

It is indeed surprising that neither the principal Act nor the subsequent Amendments provide for consolidation of holdings. It is well-known that fragmentation of holdings is a serious obstacle to the fuller utilisation of land and development of agriculture. A meaningful and enthusiastic implementation of the consolidation programme, after conferment of ownership right on the tenants of the erstwhile intermediaries and *under-raiyats* (in respect of non-resumable land), and distribution of surplus land in excess of ceiling limit, will contribute considerably to the increase in agricultural productivity and output.

In Tripura, the problem of fragmentation of holdings is not as serious as it is in many other states. In the hilly areas, where *jooming* is practised, the question of partition or transfer does not arise and in the plains people have been living permanently for few generations with right to transfer interest in land. But in the plains adjoining Bangladesh, where both Hindu and Muslim immigrants started taking settlement of land since the enactment of *Rajaswa Sambandhiya Niyamabali* in 1880, most of the holdings are fragmented. The unrestricted right of transfer, partition and insistence of each co-sharer on getting plots in each type of soil area resulted in fragmentation of holdings.

The advantages of consolidation of holdings have been widely recognised and laws have been passed in most of the states for the consolidation of the holdings either on voluntary basis or on compulsory basis and considerable emphasis has been laid on the consolidation of holdings in the plans. So in Tripura, legislation should also be enacted for the consolidation of holdings with a view to estimate the wasteful use of labour, draught animals and implements, making possible fuller utilisation of land, and facilitating better irrigation, road system etc. for agricultural development. In the initial stage consolidation programme may be implemented in selected areas, where record of rights has been prepared and made up-to-date, with government initiative and fullest participation of the people. If the villagers are convinced that the programme is entirely for their benefit, they will readily agree in the later stage to accept the scheme of consolidation.

Special Provisions for Scheduled Tribes

Taking advantage of poor financial condition of the tribals, the non-tribals acquired land both within and outside the tribal reserve areas. As a result, a large number of the economically backward tribals have become either landless or holders of dwarf holdings. With a view to impose restriction on transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals, the Tripura Land Reforms Act, 1960 provided that no transfer of land by a person who is a member of the Scheduled Tribes shall be valid unless : (i) the transfer is to another member of the Scheduled Tribe, or (ii) where the transfer is to a person who is not a member of any such tribe, it is made with the previous permission of the government, or the transfer is by

way of mortgage to a co-operative society. Thus, the Act prohibited transfer of land by tribals to non-tribals without previous permission of the government. But due to ineffective implementation of this legislative measure, an indiscriminate transfer of land from tribal to non-tribal took place in contravention of the legal provisions. Subsequently, the Tripura Land Reforms (Second Amendment) Act, 1974 provided for the restoration of all lands transferred on or after January 1, 1969, in contravention of the Act, to the transferor or his successor-in-interest.

By keeping the lands transferred before 1 January, 1969 outside the scope of the Land Reforms Act, legal recognition was given to the transfers of land made before that date. This has been done as it is very difficult to restore to the tribals possession of lands transferred long ago. The problem of restoration of tribal land is also highly complicated in view of the fact that in many areas the boundaries of the tribal reserve areas are not well defined. Then again, in many cases the present land-holders purchased land from non-tribals who earlier acquired land illegally from members of Scheduled Tribes. It is also a fact that tribal lands have not only been grabbed by unscrupulous persons and money-lenders, but in many cases poor refugees from Bangladesh acquired such lands without necessary permission from the government due to their ignorance and contributed greatly to the development of land. If they are evicted from land, they will be displaced for the second time. Socio-economic considerations demand that the interests of the economically backward tribal population of the state should be adequately safeguarded and at the same time care should be taken for a proper settlement of the poor non-tribals.

The state government is quite aware of the problems of both the tribals and non-tribals. The work of restoration of alienated lands to the transferors is progressing satisfactorily. A resettlement scheme for the rehabilitation of about 3000 non-tribal families affected by restoration of alienated lands, has also been finalised. Thus, the state government is implementing the legislative measure regarding the restoration of illegally transferred land to the members of the Scheduled Tribes without causing any serious hardship to the poor non-tribals.

The Tripura Land Reforms (Second Amendment) Act, 1974 repealed the orders of the former rulers (Tribal Reserve Orders of

1931 and 1943) under which the 'tribal reserve' was constituted. The 'tribal reserve' was created to safeguard the interests of only five classes of tribals. There are nineteen classes of tribals in Tripura and majority of the tribals are living outside the tribal reserve. So the creation of the tribal reserve was discriminatory in nature. Then again, the tribal reserve was not serving any useful purpose as transfer of land took place on wider scale in the reserved area. Even the ruler dereserved a part of the tribal reserve in 1948 for increasing land revenue and rehabilitation of the refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan. As the Tripura Land Reforms Act prohibits the transfer of land throughout the state from tribals to non-tribals without previous permission of the government, there is no need for retaining the concept of the tribal reserve.

In order to protect interests of the members of Scheduled Tribes in the areas predominantly inhabited by tribals, the Tripura Land Reforms (Third Amendment) Act 1975 provides that if any person not belonging to Scheduled Tribes intends to sell land within 42 *tahsils* and 133 villages specified in the Act, then the members of the Scheduled Tribes shall have the preferential right to purchase such land. The Act also provides for financial accommodation on easy terms for purchase of land by economically handicapped persons belonging to Scheduled Tribes. The right of pre-emption will not, however, bring immediately any tangible benefit to the tribals, though in the long run it will give them an opportunity to acquire land with financial assistance from the government.

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Bill, 1979 has been invoked for the purpose of constituting an Autonomous District Council for the areas predominantly inhabited by the tribals. The Bill is yet to receive assent of the President of India. It is expected that the proposed Autonomous District Council will be able to safeguard the interests of the members of Scheduled Tribes in a better and more effective way.

Land Records

The preparation and maintenance of an up-to-date record of rights are essential pre-requisites for effective implementation of land reforms. The land records prepared during the rule of the former Maharajas were neither complete nor reliable. In view of

this the Tripura Land Reforms Act provided for preparation of a complete record of rights for the whole state. But the land records prepared during the last two decades do not reflect correct and up-to-date position. So it has been decided by the state government to make a complete revision of record of rights in a phased manner over a period of 5 years beginning from 1978-79. Apart from updating the land records, the revision operation will be oriented towards recording of interests of the *bargadars* and *under-raiyats*.

The broad conclusion that emerges from the foregoing analytical study of the land reform measures and their implementation is that the impact of land reforms has fallen short of the expectations. The legislative provisions for the abolition of intermediary tenures have been implemented fairly effectively, but tenancy reform failed to bring any tangible benefit to the *bargadars* and *under-raiyats*. The fixation of ceiling on land holdings, which is the most radical land reform measure, proved to be of little importance. In the absence of any legislative measure for the consolidation of holdings, the agricultural holdings remained fragmented. For a considerable period after enactment of land reform legislation, the Scheduled Tribes failed to get the protection they had been granted by law.

It has been observed that the implementation and enforcement of the legislative measures in most of the cases, are slow and ineffective. Legislation was enacted without creating the proper atmosphere, studying the likely impact and strengthening adequately the implementing machinery. A large section of the villagers are still ignorant about the reform measures and the benefits flowing from them, and as a result there is the lack of the needed local support for the implementation of land reforms. The preparation of complete and up-to-date record of rights, (including the record of rights of the *under-raiyats* and *bargadars*), which is a pre-requisite for the implementation of land reform measures, did not receive the importance it deserved. Thus, the defective legislation and its ineffective implementation led to the frustration and disappointment of the small land-holders, share-croppers, landless agriculturists and economically backward Scheduled Tribes on the one hand, and enabled the well-to-do section to evade law, on the other.

The law has been amended with a view to plugging the loopholes and removing the shortcomings, and there is still further scope for improvement. But even an ideal legislation is likely to remain a dead letter if it is not effectively implemented and enforced. It is also to be realised that delay in the implementation gives scope for evasion, creates feeling of uncertainty and retards agricultural development. So a separate and well organised Land Reforms Wing should be created in the Revenue Department for a speedy implementation of land reform measures, keeping watch over the working of the land reform legislation and tackling future problems relating to land reforms. Land Reform Committees of the beneficiaries should be constituted at the village and block levels for enlisting local support and well-planned educative propaganda should be launched in order to make the villagers conscious about their rights and responsibilities. The record-of-rights of the *bargadars* should be prepared as speedily as possible. In case of any dispute regarding share tenancy, the onus of proof should lie on the landlord. Surplus land over the revised ceiling limit should be taken over immediately without giving any scope for evasion. The lands found surplus over ceiling limit, culturable waste lands and surplus lands in some tea-estates should be distributed in a planned way for the rehabilitation of landless people (including Scheduled Tribes) and enlargement of the size of dwarf agricultural holdings. The work of restoration of illegally transferred land to the members of Scheduled Tribes should be completed as early as possible. This will have a salutary effect on the tribal population from psychological point of view. Due care should be taken for the re-settlement of the non-tribals affected by restoration of land to the tribals. The Tripura Land Reforms Act should be amended to restrict transfer of land from a tribal to another tribal with a view to checking land transfer from poor tribals to rich tribals. Suitable measures should be taken to prevent *benami* transfer of land in the name of a tribal for the benefit of a non-tribal. Law should be enacted for the consolidation of fragmented holdings and in the initial stage consolidation programme should be implemented in selected areas. As a supplementary measure, adequate financial provisions should be made to meet the credit requirements of the beneficiaries of land reforms. A sound agrarian economy can be ushered in through scientific farm management,

extension of credit facilities and judicious price policy, only after necessary ground is prepared by implementing fully the programmes of land reforms.

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The Electoral System

Jagadis Gan-Chaudhuri

DURING the period of 25 years from 1952 to 1977, the elections to the Tripura Electoral College/Territorial Council/Legislative Assembly were held six times in 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967, 1972, and 1977. Based on official data and field-survey, this study is an attempt to have an analytical look at the six elections in terms of their background, features, causes and consequences.

The location and political status of Tripura made it a late participant in the drama of Indian politics. Politics, as a mass activity, made its impact only from the second quarter of the twentieth century. This does not imply that Tripura had a smooth sailing in the past. During its medieval period, *circa* 1565—1765, troubles were rife in the nature of attacks and annexations from Bengal, Arakan and Manipur but during the modern period (1765—1949) Tripura was free from external oppression though it faced interference in administrative affairs from the British overlords. Thus every period had its political problems. The relations

between the kings and their subjects were, on the whole amicable. The grievances of the people against the benevolent kings were very few. Nevertheless, in the Indian freedom movement Tripura played a unique role. Considering Tripura as a part and parcel of India, the local patriots participated in the struggle. The Bengal terrorists on the other hand took shelter in independent Tripura over which the British Government had no legal control. The King Bir Bikram (1923—1947), in whose times the masses slowly became politically conscious, had the intelligence, foresight and patriotism, to maintain a double-faced policy. Externally, he supported the British, but at heart he had a genuine sympathy for the freedom-fighters. The fact that some local fighters like S.L. Singh, S. Sengupta, U.L. Singh, H.G. Basak, Purnima Mukhopadhyaya were expelled from Tripura may not be taken as a proof of the king's pro-British policy or as an anti-Indian National Congress step. Some irrational propaganda of the over-enthusiastic young workers against the constructive work of the king, annoyed him. The successful attempt of Bir Bikram to make an ideal village at Ramnagar is an instance in point. So Tripura was not an awkward territory for Congress, despite the fact that the party was under threat in the princely states, obviously on the expectation of the British government. For the princely areas the nearest alternative was the All India States' Peoples Conference.

The initiation and intensity of organised attempts at interest articulation on national and international issues by the subjects during the 1930s and 1940s did not permit the king to live in peace. He found himself within the vortex of politics. Three major forces were active at that time. The first was a secular nationalist force; the second was the communist element and the third, the Muslims. The first group popularly known as the Congress formed the *Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad* (1935) and was succeeded by the Indian National Congress, Tripura branch in 1946. The second group established *Tripura Jana-Mangal Samiti* (1938), *Tripura Jana Siksha Samiti* (1945), *Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal* (1946) and *Tripura Rajya Gana-Mukti Parishad* (1948) and all these fused into the Communist Party of India subsequently. The

Muslim organisations were *Anjuman Islamia* (1945), *Tripura Rajya Moslem Praja Majlish* (1946) and *Jamaet-Ulema-i-Hind* (1949). What made the Tripura scene eventful and tumultuous were the political dacoity (1932), the Ramnagar issue (1937), the Harijan strike (1938), the hoisting of the Congress flags at some academic institutes (1939), the resistance against the *Ghāsuri Ain* (1940), the *Riāng* unrest led by Ratanmani (1940—43), the Motor Workers' Movement (1941), the demand for adult franchise, and responsible government (1941—45), the movement for the rapid spread of public education (1945—47), the refugee problem (1946-47) and the Muslim Movement for the solidarity and territorial annexation (1945—49).

Tripura acceded to the Indian Union in 1949. For a period of 8 years (1949—1956) Tripura was a Part 'C' State. And at the suggestions of the States Reorganisation Commission, 1956, it was upgraded to become a union territory with a Council which was further promoted to an Assembly in 1963. In 1971 the title and the right of a full-fledged statehood were conferred on Tripura.

Political Parties

Tripura politics is characterised by multi-party system. Several parties, big and small, national and regional, contested the elections. However, the Congress and the Communists are the two major parties which contested every election and every seat. The number of parties participating in the elections was 5 in 1952, 5 in 1957, 5 in 1962, 6 in 1967, 7 in 1972 and 12 in 1977. About 15 parties namely Indian National Congress (INC), Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI-M), Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML), Forward Bloc (FB), Tripura Ganatantric Sangh (TGS), Praja Socialist Party (PSP), Samjukta Socialist Party (SSP), Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS), Tripura Upajati Juva Samiti (TUJS), Janata Party (JP), Congress for Democracy (CFD), Bhartiya Akyā Dal (BAD), Proutist Bloc of India (PBI) and Independents (Ind.) participated in these elections from time to time as shown in the following table.

The following table shows the names of different parties contested in the six elections :

1952 INC. CPI. FB. TGS. and Ind.

1957 INC. CPI. TGS. PSP. and Ind.

- 1962 INC. CPI. PSP. BJS. and Ind.
1967 INC. CPI. CPI (M). BJS. SSP. and Ind. .
1972 INC. CPI. CPI (M), BJS. FB. TUJS and Ind.
1977 INC. CPI. CPI (M). CPI (ML). FB. RSP. TUJS.
Janata. CFD. PBI. BAD and Ind.

These parties differ from each other in various respects : year of establishment in Tripura, ideology, area of influence, base of support and degree of success in elections. Another significant feature is that no Islamic party contested any election. But they did not boycott elections. They set candidates with either Congress or Communist tickets, or rather the two major parties set the Muslims to catch the Muslim votes. The parties like PSP, SSP, FB, RSP, BJS, BAD, PBI, TUJS etc. could not attract them. The independents are a mixed bag in themselves consisting of party dissidents, dummy candidates and individual aspirants.

Number of Seats

The number of Assembly seats available for contest was 30 each time in 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967, and 60 each time in 1972 and 1977. So the total number of seats during the six elections was 240.

The number of contestants at each election was more than the number of seats. There were 82 candidates in 1952, 125 in 1957, 104 in 1962, 87 in 1967, 215 in 1972 and 325 in 1977. Obviously, the cases of straight contest were few, and numbered only 33. There were 6 cases of uncontested returns in 1952. In the subsequent elections every seat was keenly contested.

The number of seats contested by the respective political parties was like this : 233 by INC, 93 by CPI, 125 by CPI (M), 10 by TGS, 9 by FB, 22 by PSP, 9 by BJS, 1 by SSP, 2 by RSP, 32 by TUJS, 60 by JP, 60 by CFD, 5 by PBI, 5 by BAD, 3 by the CPI (ML) and 267 by the Independents.

No party can claim the credit of fielding candidates for all seats on every occasion. Except in 1952 and 1972, the INC contested all the seats, it contested for 24 seats in 1952 and 59 seats in 1972. Ever since the great split of the CPI into two rival factions in 1964, the more active, energetic section CPI(M) quickly

recouperated its strength. It contested 16 seats in 1967, 58 in 1972 and 55 in 1977. The CPI has been contesting all the elections, parliamentary and assembly. The undivided CPI was a major force in Tripura politics. So far it has fielded 93 candidates. It contested 16 seats in 1952, 22 in 1957, 27 in 1962, 7 in 1967, 11 in 1972 and 10 in 1977. The TGS appeared only twice in the arena contesting 10 seats, 6 in 1952 and 4 in 1957. After that, the majority of its members came under the banner of the CPI. That the FB is no factor in Tripura is reflected in election. It contested 9 seats, 3 in 1952, 5 in 1972 and 1 in 1977. The PSP and SSP may be treated as a dead force. They contested 22+1 seats, 11 in 1957, 11 in 1962 and 1 in 1967. Instead, the RSP emerged, set up 2 candidates in 1977 in co-operation with the CPI (M). The BJS has been contesting since 1962 in both assembly and parliamentary seats without a single case of success. It did not contest all the seats and in all elections. The formation of the Janata Party at the national level on January 23, 1977 gave a momentum to the BJS which merged itself with the Janata. The newly formed Janata Party consisting of heterogeneous elements contested all the 60 seats and lost all. The Tripura State CFD, a defected faction of the All India CFD contested 60 seats and won none. The TUJS formed in 1967 is steadily gaining in strength among the tribal people. It contested 32 seats : 5 in 1972 and 27 in 1977. The PBI, a new entrant in Tripura politics and a party nourished by the political philosophy of the Ananda Marga, set up only 5 candidates in 1977 with infinitesimal number of votes in its favour. The similar is the condition of BAD—an insignificant force founded by one Sri Sukumar Mitra. The radical politics introduced by the Naxalites officially known as CPI (ML) had failed to impress upon the people. It contested 2 seats in 1977 and lost in both.

An interesting feature may emerge from a consideration of the number of candidates contesting each seat. The number of seats uncontested was 6, the number of seats contested by two candidates 33, by three 63, by four 45, by five 20, by six 8, by seven 3 and by eight 2. For the 240 seats there were 941 candidates. On the average there were 3.9 candidates per seat. So multi-cornered contests rather than straight contests between two candidates, is the usual feature. About 13 per cent of the contests were straight

contests, and 87 per cent of the contests were multiple contests. Obviously most of the candidates are elected by a minority of votes.

It is significant to note that certain constituencies invariably favour a particular political party while others prefer a different party, with a few constituencies showing their cosmopolitanism in outlook. For example, Mohanpur, Simna, Mandai-bazar, Uttar Debendranagar, Takarjala, Charilam and Biramganj have been returning communist candidates. Some constituencies like Belonia, Dharmanagar and Kailashar, prefer the Congress. The Urban constituencies like Agartala I and Agartala II have no fixed ideological commitment. Some time they return a Congress candidate and some time a Communist.

Number of Seats Won

The INC tops the list. Out of 240 seats it contested 233 seats and won 109 seats. It won 9 seats in 1952, 12 in 1957, 27 in 1962, 41 in 1972 and not a single seat in 1977. The CPI (M) occupies the second position. Formed only in 1964, it started contesting elections since 1967. It contested 129 seats and won 2 seats in 1967, 17 in 1972 and 51 in 1977, thereby, making a total of 70 seats won. So its progress is spectacular. The CPI has the third position. It fielded its candidates in 93 constituencies, captured 39 seats, bagging 12 seats in 1952, 12 in 1957, 13 in 1962, 1 in 1967, 1 in 1972 and not a single seat in 1977. Taking the two communist parties together, the number is exactly equal to that of the INC. The number of independent candidates who are either isolated individuals, or disgruntled party-workers or stooges of some political party, is 269. But their record of victory is very poor, only 9; 6 in 1952, 2 in 1957 and 1 in 1972.

The TGS, a hotchpotch consisting of Communist and Congress workers, appeared only twice, 1952 and 1957, in the election arena after which the workers taking side of either INC and CPI, the party vanished. It contested 10 seats and won 4, bagging, 3 in 1952 and 1 in 1957. Comparatively, the performance of a tribal party TUJS is better. Formed in 1967, it contested for 32 seats; 5 in 1972 and 27 in 1977, and captured 4 in 1977. The RSP contested for 2 seats in 1977 and won. The FB set 3 candidates in 1952, 5 in 1972 and 1 in 1977, and captured 1 seat in 1977.

The two parties could not win even in 1977 without the coalition and cooperation with the CPI (M). The newly formed Janata contested in all seats of 1977 election and lost all. The BAD and CPI (ML) also met the same fate.

Percentage of Polling

The percentage of polling is quite high in Tripura. It was 47.3 per cent in 1952, 74.32 per cent in 1967, 67.36 per cent in 1972, 79.51 per cent in 1977 and on average it was nearly 70 per cent. We may add here the relevant figure of parliamentary elections also. It was 47.7 per cent in 1952, 63.5 per cent in 1957, 67.96 per cent in 1962, 74.84 per cent in 1967, 60 per cent in 1971 and 70.05 per cent in 1977. It indicates that the people are politically mature. Besides a high level of political consciousness among the public, the articulation of the Communist party in the hills since the 1940's to induce the tribal voters to come to the polling booths in a disciplined way was also another factor for the high rate of polling. This is evident from the fact that in all constituencies where the Communist candidate wins usually defeating a Congress candidate, the difference of votes is quite big. For instance, in 1952 in Mohanpur constituency Promode Rajan Das Gupta of CPI secured 92.13 per cent votes, whereas A.K. Roy of INC obtained 5.66 per cent only. Sirajul Islam of CPI and B.B. Dev Barman (Ind) from Old Agartala in 1952 secured 91.67 per cent and 8.32 per cent votes respectively. Moreover, a steady increase in the percentage of polling has correlation with improvement in the economy of the state.

A reference may be made here to the percentage of polling by the two major communities of Tripura : the plains people and the hills people. For this, we have got worked out figure for 1962 and 1967 Parliamentary elections. In 1962, the votes cast by the general voters and scheduled tribe voters is 70.08 per cent and 65.81 per cent respectively. In 1967, the relevant figures are 75.52 per cent and 74.18 per cent respectively. The percentage of rejected votes among the two communities in the said elections is 2.25 per cent and 2.35 per cent and 2.53 per cent and 2.69 per cent respectively. This implies that the tribal voters are not lagging far behind the general voters in political consciousness and knowledge.

The Largest Number of Votes

We may now consider the largest number of votes polled by some individual candidates. In 1952 the largest number of votes (10,154) was polled by Sirajul Islam from Old Agartala ; in 1957 by Hemanta Dev (10,037) from Old Agartala ; in 1962 by Ram Charan Dev Barman (12,860) from the Kalyanpur ; in 1972 by Bidya Dev Barman (10,273) from Kalyanpur and, in 1977 by Ajoy Biswas (10,628) from Agartala. Of the six, Bidya Dev Barman secured record-breaking number of votes. Another important feature is that all the six candidates belong to the Communist Parties. Further, the nearest rivals of the six top-marking candidates were mostly Congress candidates. In 1952 Sirajul Islam's rival was an independent, Bankim Behari Dev Barman (922) ; in 1957 R.K. Madhabjit (4,847) of INC secured votes next to Hemanta Dev ; in 1962 Dhananjay Singh (6,194) of INC was the nearest rival of Ram Charan Dev Barman ; in 1967 too there was a marginal difference between M.K. Dev Barman (8,572) of INC and B.C. Dev Barman. The case in 1972 between M.K. Dev Barman of INC (3,006) and B.C. Dev Barman was similar. In 1977 an ex-Congressman and now a CFD candidate Kamal Singha (2,021) polled votes next to Ajoy Biswas. Reversely, in almost all cases where the Congress candidates won, the nearest rivals were the Communist candidates. The position and popularity of the two parties became more and more transparent since the 1962 election. In 1977 election, the popularity of the INC has declined sharply. Deserted and divided, the INC still, in certain constituencies, has proved itself as the nearest rival. In Belonia, for instance, Jyotirmay Das of CPI (M) (5,460) defeated his Congress rival Manoranjan Majumdar (5,341) by a margin of only 119 votes. In a few constituencies the TUIS either won or appeared as the nearest rival.

Absolute Majority

An interesting feature may come out from an examination of the number of cases of absolute majority captured by the parties. The Communist parties including CPI, CPI(M), RSP and FB, polled absolute majority of votes in 55 constituencies between 1952 and 1977. Their position is like this : 7 in 1952, 7 in 1957, 7 in 1962,

3 in 1967, 10 in 1972 and 21 in 1977. Over the same period the INC got absolute majority in 54 constituencies thus distributed : 5 in 1952, 3 in 1957, 6 in 1962, 23 in 1967, 17 in 1972 and nil in 1977. The performance of other parties in terms of polling absolute majority is infinitesimal.

Notable Defeats

The election-results of 1967 and 1977 contain several surprises and notable defeats. In 1967 the poll verdict went in favour of the Congress and against the Communists, while the result was completely reversed in 1977. Veteran politicians like Sachindralal Singh, Krishna Das Bhattacharya, T.M. Das Gupta, Jaduprasanna Bhattacharya, Manindralal Bhaumik and Sri Munchar Ali have been well-known personalities in the political circles in Tripura. Sachindralal Singh was the first Chief Minister of Tripura and a sitting Member of Parliament. He was defeated by Braja Gopal Roy a school-teacher, of FB. T.M. Das Gupta was a Member of Parliament and also a minister. Krishna Das Bhattacharya and Munchar Ali were all ministers. Ali was defeated by Arabar Rahaman. Similarly, Radhika Ranjan Gupta, Prafulla Kumar Das, Samir Ranjan Barman, Kalipada Bandopadhyaya, Maharaj Kumar Sahadev Bikram Kishore, Amar Gupta, Ashok Bhattacharya, Monomohan Dev Barman and Debendra Kishore Chaudhuri were all beaten in 1977 elections.

Term of Office

The number of terms a person was elected may be considered here. No one was elected for all the six terms. Two persons, namely Bir Chandra Dev Barman and Sudhanwa Dev Barman were elected for five terms. Eight persons, namely, Aghore Dev Barman, Abdul Wajid, Ershad Ali Chaudhuri, Promod Das Gupta, Krishna Dass Bhattacharya, Nripendra Chakraborti, Munchar Ali and Manindralal Bhaumik were elected for four terms. Four persons, namely, Atikul Islam, Hemanta Dev, T.M. Das Gupta and Sachindralal Singha were elected for three terms. Many were elected for two terms and the majority for one term only. The voters and the parties want change for the sake of democracy and to accommodate the aspirants. But the party-workers still defect and fight as independents.

Role of Women

Elections in Tripura are male-dominated. Out of the 941 candidates contesting the six elections, there were only 16 female candidates. Of them, the Communists set up 4 ladies, the Congress 5, independents 5, the Janata 1, and the CFD 1; only 4 candidates won: they were Kiranbala Devi (1952) of CPI, Basana Chakraborti (1972) and Lakshmi Nag (1972) of INC, and Gauri Bhattacharya (1977) of CPI (M). Basana Chakraborti and Lakshmi Nag became ministers. No woman candidate contested the parliamentary elections.

Electoral Profile of the State Assembly

The table below gives the names of various political parties, the number of seats contested and the number of seats won by each party in the period 1952-77.

Party	Seats won	Seats contested	Votes polled	Percentage of polling
1952 ELECTION				
CPI	12	16	55,603	43.2
INC	9	24	36,167	28.1
Ind.	6	33	27,886	21.6
TGS	3	6	6,221	4.8
FB	—	3	2,775	2.1
	30	82		
1957 ELECTION				
INC	15	30		
CPI	12	22		
Ind.	2	58		
TGS	1	4		
PSP	—	11		
	30	125		
1962 ELECTION				
INC	17	30		
CPI	13	27		
Ind.	—	35		
PSP	—	11		
BJS	—	1		
	30	104		

Party	Seats won	Seats contested	Votes polled	Percentage of polling
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1967 ELECTION

INC	27	30	2,51,345	57.95
CPI (M)	2	16	93,739	21.61
CPI	1	7	34,562	7.97
Ind.	—	28	52,457	12.10
BJS	—	5	1,506	0.35
SSP	—	1	83	0.02
	<u>30</u>	<u>87</u>		

1972 ELECTION

INC	41	59
CPI (M)	17	58
CPI	1	11
Ind.	1	75
BJS	—	3
AIFB	—	5
TUJS	—	5
	<u>60</u>	<u>215</u>

1977 ELECTION

CPI (M)	53	55
TUJS	4	27
RSP	2	2
FB	1	1
INC	—	60
Janata	—	59
CFD	—	59
CPI	—	10
PBI	—	5
BAD	—	5
CPI (ML)	—	2
Ind.	—	40
	<u>60</u>	<u>325</u>

Electoral Profile for Parliamentary Elections

The results of the six elections to the Lok Sabha may be presented here to have a comparative picture.

Party	Seats won	Seats contested	Votes polled	Percentage of polling
1952 ELECTION				
CPI	2	2	96,458	31.3
INC	—	2	40,263	25.6
BJS	—	2	9,663	6.1
Ind.	—	1	10,987	6.9
	<u>2</u>	<u>7</u>		
1957 ELECTION				
CPI	1	2	2,48,422	45.31
INC	1	2	2,53,241	46.01
Ind	—	3	48,675	8.84
1962 ELECTION				
CPI	2	2	1,63,623	51.27
INC	—	2	1,36,586	42.81
EITU	—	2	12,574	3.94
PSP	—	1	6,302	1.98
1967 ELECTION				
INC	2	2	2,55,583	58.25
CPI (M)	—	2	1,83,175	41.75
		<u>4</u>		
1971 ELECTION				
CPI (M)	2	2	1,79,456	43.50
INC	—	2	1,49,776	36.30
CPI	—	2		
BJS	—	1	27,896	6.76
Ind	—	2	2,038	0.49
	<u>2</u>	<u>9</u>		
1977 ELECTION				
INC	1	2	2,34,718	39
CFD	1	1		
CPI (M)	—	2	2,00,482	35
TUJS	—	2	35,916	6
CPI	—	1		
		<u>8</u>		

Politics in the State and Result-Analysis

In the 1952 election, the Communists won majority of seats both in the electoral college and in Parliamentary constituency. This is because of the strategic difference between the CPI and the INC.

- (i) The INC moved from urban to rural areas ; the CPI moved from rural to urban area. The CPI based its work first among the tribal people, the INC among the Bengali middle class.
- (ii) The rising educated tribal youths took the Bengali Hindus as their competitors in politics, administration and government services, but their attitudes to the vast Muslim peasantry were different. The latter were not considered as competitors. So in politics the Muslim peasants who were interested more in lands than in politics played the role of sleeping partners with the tribals whose land they had been cultivating. The CPI took advantage of this and supported the tribals and the Muslims.
- (iii) The disgruntled army-men of the Tripura battalion might have participated in the armed struggle of the Communists.

In 1957, the INC improved its lot. The probable causes were :

- (i) The centrally directed Tripura administration favoured the INC. The Constitution of an Advisory Council with three Congress leaders placed the INC at the helm of affairs. Being in power it was easy for them to propagate and popularise the party.
- (ii) The fact that the Congress was in power at the Centre was itself a factor in the minds of the voters.
- (iii) The rehabilitated refugees in general felt it an obligation to vote for the ruling party.
- (iv) By this time many Muslims left Tripura after exchanging landed property. The rest took side with the ruling party. *Jamait Ulema Hind*, a Muslim party, actively helped the Congress which in return sent to Muslim students abroad for higher education.

- (v) The reported persecution upon the Communist workers might have been an additional factor.

The causes of the Congress victory in 1962 were largely the same as those that led to 1957 victory. In 1967 the situation changed in character and dimension.

- (i) The rift in the Communist party following the Indo-China border issue weakened the party and cracks developed in the monolith.
- (ii) An aversion developed in the voters' mind against the pro-China CPI (M), had its effect on the poll.
- (iii) The conversion of the Tripura Territorial Council into an Assembly in July 1963 and formation of ministry brought greater scope for Congress to associate its name with all developmental activities.

The verdict of the 1972 election went in favour of the Congress because :

- (i) The restoration of the prestige and popularity of the Congress after the tactful handling of the Bangladesh crisis by the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and also
- (ii) the successful attempt of Sidharta Shankar Ray in persuading the dissidents to return to Congress. Thus four elections of 1957, 1962, 1967 and 1972 were favourable to Congress.

In 1977 the Left Front got overwhelming majority, while the two major rivals—the Janata Party and Congress—failed to capture even a single seat. The results of the 1977 elections are usually explained thus :

- (i) The formation of a 'Left Front' made a positive impression upon the public mind.
- (ii) The formation of a coalition among the leftist parties helped avoid same-side fight and spoiling of Communist votes.
- (iii) The anti-Communist votes were divided among three major parties—Janata Party, Congress and CFD which fought each other.
- (iv) The split between Janata Party and Tripura CFD on

personal rather than ideological ground considerably weakened the strength of the Janata Party.

- (v) The Janata had to write practically on a blank slate. It suffered from organisational defects and deficiency consisted of heterogeneous elements, its workers lacked solidarity and cohesion.
- (vi) Along with the Janata Party wave, many undesirable elements flocked. The entry of some dissidents, discredited persons, persons of questionable morality doomed the prestige and sanctity of the Janata Party.
- (vii) The appeal of the Left Front to try it at least for once after 30 years of Congress rule moved many voters.
- (viii) Certain political incidents like the defeat of the Congress at the Centre, the formation of a Janata Government there, the fall of the Sengupta ministry in Tripura, the desertion by some Congress MLAs and the formation of a coalition government between CPI (M) and Janata Party etc., all happened dramatically. During the coalition regime the CPI (M) Ministers and MLAs were more active than the Janata Ministers and MLAs to make public contact and to strengthen its organisation in all respects.
- (ix) As a result of its defeat in the parliamentary election, the CPI (M) took the assembly election with all sincerity and seriousness.
- (x) The candidature of Dasarath Dev and Biren Datta in the Assembly election for the first time was no less important. In the presence of the three stalwarts in the CPI (M) in State politics, people found the hope of a stable and strong government.
- (xi) It is believed in some quarters that men, money and materials poured in Tripura from some provinces, particularly from West Bengal, in favour of the Left Front.
- (xii) It is also believed that the financial assistance from the Janata Party's Central Fund to its local candidates was not properly and fully utilised by some of them.
- (xiii) The changed relation between the leftist parties and the employees is an additional factor favourable to the Left Front. Both of them have come closer since the sixties. The scale of employees participation in the 1977 election

is unprecedented. It is alleged that the members of the Employees' Co-ordination Committee, a reportedly Pro-CPI (M) employees' association, helped the left-front by all means.

- (xiv) The Janata leaders at the Centre failed to utilise the opportune moment as a result of a lack of proper assessment of the situation whereas the left front consolidated itself and made full utilisation of its organisational ability and experience in the interim period. The suggestion of the local Janata leaders to hold election immediately after the Parliamentary election when a Janata-wave was blowing was not given due attention by the Central Committee of the Janata Party. The latter relied more on the opinion of S.L. Singh, than that of B. Chakraborti. So the Party failed to hit on the head while the iron was red.
- (xv) A large number of the Muslim voters did cast their votes in favour of the Left Front. Formerly, since the 1956 elections, they used to cast votes in favour of the INC. This time, out of political calculations, they took sides with the Left Front.

A note may also be made of the victory of TUJS in four constituencies. It is the only opposition party in the present Legislative Assembly. The TUJS is a small well-defined regional party with substantial support among the tribal peoples. An avowedly tribal party, its membership is confined to the *Kirātas* only. The plains people are generally disinclined to vote for it. It went to poles with certain local issues: like the autonomous district council, the recognition of their language as one of the languages of the State, the use of the Roman script for that language and more reservation in government jobs. Two of its slogans are particularly appealing to its supporters.

- (i) *Kachāk Koofoor Choong-chiā, buini talā tanglā.* (Red and white, we do not know; we shall not remain under anybody or party).
- (ii) *Chini hāoa tangna hāngklāi, chini Kagna masrunṅāi.* (Those immigrants who reside in our land must know our language).

By 'red' and 'white' is meant the Communist and the Congress parties respectively. They do not want to remain under the flag of the either except their own of the TUJS. The two parties are

identified as Bengali-party because most of their members are Bengalees. The second slogan clearly assert the *Kak-barak* language. It is alleged that men, money and materials are placed at its disposal by some Christian-dominated states of India and abroad. The party is now reportedly imparting military training to the tribal youths in the hills. The tendencies are at work to erect the *Kirata* community as an entity distinct from the plains people. It manifests itself in the TUJS movement in strengthening the inter-tribal communications, in consolidating the different tribes into a single cohesive nationality, in the establishment of a number of *Kak-barak* schools, in the formation of the TUJS to articulate their demands, in the growing identification of the people with the *Kak-barak* language, in their demand for a script different from that of the plains people, in the publication of journals, newspaper, magazine and books reflecting their various aspirations. So cultural sub-nationalism is contributing to political integration, to the creation of a new elite, to the politicisation of new groups and the stimulation of widespread participation in politics. Thus, this political party and the social identity it propagates have been affecting the voting behaviour of the tribal electorate. A similar trend has developed among some Bengalees with, of course, far less force. The '*Āmarā Bāngālī*' is trying to unify the Bengalees as the TUJS is attempting to unify the tribals.

Politics in Tripura offers itself as a laboratory to test a theory of political behaviour. In a society characterised by some sort of communal cleavages, political parties try to reflect and transmit the cleavages into the arena of politics. Politics is both an integrating and disintegrating force. It unites and at the same time divides.

Local Government

Jagadish Gan-Chaudhuri

IN TRIPURA, there are two categories of statutory institutions of local government, the municipality and the *panchayat*. The former was introduced in 1871 and the latter in 1961. Agartala is the only town that is having a municipality. Beloniā, Rādhā-kishorepur and Dharmanagar towns have been recently declared notified areas.

Municipality

The western pattern of municipal administration in Tripura and for that matter all over British India came to be established at the instance of the British government after the taking over of the administration of India by the Queen Empress Victoria from East India Company in 1858. There was a proliferation of municipalities in India in 1860s and 1870s and the intention of the British government was to beat down economic pressure on imperial finance. Thus a municipality was started by King Bir Chandra (1862-1896)

in a predominantly rural town with a population less than 875 in number. The first chairman was a *Sāheb* who was the Political Agent. Subsequently, however, its population increased. In the Census Reports of 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1941, 1951, 1961 and 1971 the figure comes to 6,415; 6,831; 7,743; 9,580; 17,693; 42,595; 54,878 and 59,625 respectively.

ACTS AND LAWS

Besides many laws, orders and amendments, these are four Acts concerning municipal administration in Tripura which form milestones in history. These are the Acts of 1874, 1912, 1939 and Bengal Municipal Act of 1932. Very little is known about the Acts of 1874 and 1912. At the starting point, there was no law, no employee and no source of income except grants-in-aid by the *Rājā*. After three years, a law was passed giving the municipality a legal footing, providing for tax-system, dividing the town into eight wards and composing a municipal committee with nominated members.

The second Act framed after forty years in 1912 bears testimony to long experience in local government. It was an attempt at making the first law a little more comprehensive and more elaborate. It did not make any radical departure from the former. The framers might have consulted the Bengal Municipal Act of 1884 which adopted the principles of election as well as nomination for composing the committee. With a little modification, the Act of 1912 provided for the nomination of four officials and three non-officials to compose a seven-member committee. King Bir Bikram passed an order in 1937 and under this order Agartala was divided into six Wards, a policy of restricted franchise was adopted and a municipal committee consisting of 12 commissioners was constituted. Of these, the six commissioners were elected and the other six nominated. For the purpose of election-cum-nomination, each ward was taken as a double-member constituency. The order categorically referred to the Bengal Municipal Act of 1932 for guidance in future in connection with election, functions of the municipality and powers and duties of the commissioners. The order also expected the new committee to draft a comprehensive Act. Naturally, the Act of 1939 was a shadow of the Bengal Municipal Act 1932.

In 1961 the Government of India went a step further and extended the Bengal Municipal Act 1932 itself to Tripura. Compared to the early Acts, this Act is voluminous. It comprises 557 Articles and a few schedules. In January, 1973 an amendment has been done by the Government of Tripura. The Act provides for municipalities in small hill-towns, and notified areas for developing towns, the reservation of seats for backward communities and the extension of franchise. It makes elaborate rules regarding election, committee-system, functions and powers of the Municipal Board, sources of revenue and the like.

Personnel

The personnel of the municipality consists of both the bureaucratic and democratic elements. The bulk of the bureaucrats belonging to various categories and performing various jobs, are the staff of the municipality which is headed by a gazetted officer of the state government. He is designated as the Executive Officer and is usually on deputation for sometime. The government, appointed for some times an Administrator over and above the Executive officer. It must be remembered that appointment of either the Executive officer or an Administrator is not the mandatory function of the government.

The number of wards set by the *Mahārājā* in 1937 continued up to 1977. In 1951, the wards were converted to 3-member constituency. In March 1978 the number has been increased from 6 to 10 (Art. 20). The size of the wards may not necessarily be uniform in area and population. The provision of the Bengal Municipal Act is that the total number of commissioners in a municipality must not be below six and above 20 (Art. 15). The commissioners are elected by universal adult franchise through secret ballot for a term of four years (Art. 56). They elect, from among themselves, one chairman (Art. 45) and one vice-chairman (Art. 48).

Functions

The board of commissioners is the repository of all powers and responsibilities. The board generally exercises its powers in matters relating to the recruitment and service-rules of the employees, their salaries and allowances, and other terms and conditions of the committees, the acquisition of property and the approval of budget etc.

But it usually meets only once in a month (Art. 77). So, to look after the day-to-day work, to supervise developmental works and to attend to people's demands, it delegates functions to chairman, vice-chairman and committees. The chairman and vice-chairman play a pivotal role. The chairman and in his absence the vice-chairman is the head of the municipal administration. He convenes all meetings and presides over them. He prepares the annual budget.

Articles 86 to 90 of the Bengal Municipal Act deal with rules relating to the formation of three types of committees—standing, joint and special. There is no provision for the composition of a committee for each ward. But this is exactly what is going to be formed in Tripura. The present attempt at the constitution of *Nāgarik Samiti* consisting of a few selected persons residing in the respective wards, may lead to an extra-constitutional and conventional growth.

The functions and purposes of the municipality cover a wide field like water supply, sanitation, sewerage, scavenging, drainage, communications, roads, public health and the like. The sources of income are (i) tax on property, trades, business, water-supply, (ii) fees and licensees, (iii) tax from houses and holdings, (iv) fees from markets and slaughter houses, (v) revenues from vehicles, (vi) rent from its own houses, shops and flats lent out to others, and (vii) grants-in-aid from government.

Evaluation of Performance

The municipal administration in Tripura is a little more than a century old. But for the most part, it had been under the direct control of the government and as such its status got reduced to that of a department. The democrats in the Assembly perhaps wanted to keep it emasculated. So there appeared the symptoms of 'apoplexy at the centre and anaemia at the circumference'. People look at it with apathy. It is only in June, 1978 that the present government has awakened it from its deep slumber. The Election has been held on 25.6.78. CPI(M), RSP and F.B. fought together and captured all the ten seats. Congress, CFD and Janata's common forum known as Democratic Front failed to win even in a single constituency. CPI and Congress (I) fought independently and lost.

The services rendered by the municipality are not up to the mark of satisfaction. The inspection is utterly lacking. Favouritism, nepotism, indolence, under-assessment, over-assessment, shortage of fund, perennially poor collection, and excessive dependence on grants-in-aid, party clicks and evasion of tax are some of the ailments of the municipality. The reports of the Agartala Water Supply Enquiry Committee (1976) bear testimony to a few of these.

The rates of assessment are generally 10 per cent of the annual rental value. The rental value, however, vary from locality to locality. Here is the scope for subjective and hence, defective assessment. What is more, personal relations often play a role in making under-assessment to the advantage of an owner of a holding. Sometimes, a holding once assessed goes without reassessment for decades and the same old rate continues. The supply of water is a deficit service. A substantial income from water supply is lost because the municipality has not yet been able to collect taxes from the government offices and institutes. The education and electricity services have been undertaken by the government from the very beginning to the great relief of the local tax-payers. The evasion of fees is a regular feature. Check and supervision on vehicles possessing licences or not are so thin and casual that people can afford to move safely without licences. To evade tax, the goats are slaughtered a few yards beyond the boundary of the municipality. Some people even dare to kill the animals in street corners. In such places, the meat is readily available at cheaper rates. It takes a long time to get approved designs and plans of *pucca* houses prepared and submitted by the people. Mysteriously, some people get the same easily and quickly. Pilferage of the water taps, street-lights and bricks is no less a problem. The facilities presently offered by the municipality to a few orphans for accommodation and food are, by any standard, highly costly, harmful and wasteful. The drainage and sewerage service is no better. Most of the drains are nasty, narrow, shallow, zigzag and open. So flood is frequent and mosquitos unbearable.

The indolence of the municipality is noticeable not only in imposing taxes but also in collecting taxes. The security of job and timely payment of salaries of the employees have bred inertia. Unless local government is taken as a business proposition, its inefficiency will ever remain proverbial. The municipality

seems to be over-staffed. For the sweeping of a small bazar like the one at *Math Chaumohani* there are five employees. The volume of work here can be easily done by only one man. One may find the same picture within the municipality's main office. What a wastage of public money !

As it has grown up in comparatively recent times since 1860s, Agartala has none of ancient historical monuments. What attracts the people is its palace, straight roads and uniform pattern of buildings on both sides of the H.G. Basak Road. In addition, there is a model village, Ramnagar. For all these, the credit goes to Mahārāj Bir Bikram. Most of the paths constructed by the municipality after the death of the Mahārāj (1947), in areas like Sibnagar and Dhaleswar are not as broad and straight as those drawn by Bir Bikram for Ramnagar. Owing to the lack of vision and assertive spirit, the municipality roads are full of turnings. Traffic jams and collisions are not infrequent owing to the lack of proper foot-paths on the one hand and to the irresponsible use of the roads by vendors, hawkers, fruit-sellers and *ricksaw-walas* and mushroom growth of petty shops on the other. Unless the services of the municipality are more efficiently and economically rendered, the citizens cannot be required to pay more taxes.

Panchayat

Prior to the introduction of statutory *panchayat* in 1962, there were informal panchayats in the hills and plains of Tripura. Loosely speaking, there was a sort of dyarchy. The King ruled in the capital and village chief or *Gāon Burā* in every village. The King ruled from a distance through very simple administrative structure. He enjoyed certain customary powers and privileges and, beyond these, he had little means of enforcing his orders. Many things were left to the *Gāon Burā*. He was the friend, philosopher and guide of the villagers. The crimes and litigations were tried by means of oaths and ordeals. The justice was quick, visible and cheap. The formation of Village Council of any tribe was simple, consisting of, say four or five male people selected by the villagers in a meeting held at the beginning of a year. But the designation of the office-bearers would vary from tribe to tribe. Over all the village councils, every tribe had its own as tribal council, distinct and separate from that of other tribes. The structure was simple but solid.

Gradually, however, the authority of the village council eroded and after the first quarter of the present century, it became ineffective. Therefore, Maharaj Bir Bikram (1923-1947) attempted to revive and reorganise the system in a bigger scale and with uniform pattern. An Act was passed in 1929 and according to the Act, a number of contiguous tribal villages were grouped together to form a *Grāmya Mandali* to which members were nominated by the King. Besides the nominated members, each *mandali* had a band of volunteers. The attempt could not be carried forward owing to the outbreak of Second World War, the demise of the *Mahārāj* in 1947, the partition and other problems. Next, a sporadic attempt with a revolutionary spirit came from the Communist Party of India during the 1950s. The abortive effort of the party vanished in the vagaries of politics.

In the western part of Tripura, among the Bengalees also, the *Grām Panchayat* existed since times immemorial. In every village a small number of seven or eight elderly persons, having the qualities of head and heart, wielded considerable powers and prestige. In all matters concerning the village, their decision was final. The modern panchayat and court are no substitute for the ancient institution.

The United Provinces Panchayatraj Act of 1947 had been extended to Tripura in 1959. The Act is in operation in Uttar Pradesh. The statutory *gāon panchāyat* was first constituted in May, 1962 at a village called Jirāniā a few miles east of Agartala. All the villages of Tripura numbering 4,727 have been gradually covered within a few years and *panchāyats* constituted there. The total number of *Gāon Panchāyats* and *Nyāya Panchāyats* raised during the first phase of composition was 476 and 138 respectively. In the second phase that may be said to have started since 1978 when old *Panchāyats*' boundaries were reconstituted, election was held through secret ballot and open participation of the political parties was allowed. The number of *Gāon Panchāyats* and *Nyāya Panchāyats* increased to 689 and 191 respectively.

The Act speaks of a single tier at the village level. It is to be known as *Gāon Sabhā* consisting of the adult residents of a village or of a group of contiguous villages. It is a village assembly composed of the people themselves and not their representatives. The

Sabhā elects the members of an executive committee, that is, *Panchāyat*. The *Panchāyat* has two wings—an administrative wing known as *Gāon Panchāyat*, and a judicial wing called *Nyāya Panchāyat*.

On the basis of population, the number of member of *Gāon Panchāyat* varies. Formerly it varied from 9 to 30, and since September, 1974 from 7 to 13. Before 1974, there were five scales of representation. For an area with a population below 500, there were to be 9 members; for an area with a population between 500 and 1000, fifteen members; for an area with a population between 1000 and 2000, twenty members; for an area with a population between 2000 and 3000, twentyfive members; and for an area with a population above 3000, thirty members. Since 1974, the scales have been simplified and widened and the number of representatives decreased. For an area with a population below 1000, seven members; for an area with a population between 1000-2000, nine members; for an area with a population between 2000-3000, eleven members; and for an area with a population above 3000, thirteen members. There is provision for the reservation of seats for the scheduled castes and tribes. The term of office of the members of a *Gāon Panchāyat* and its *Pradhān* is five years, while that of *Upa-Pradhān* is one year only.

A *Nyāya Panchāyat* is constituted taking some elected members of *Gāon Panchāyat*. A *Nyāya Panchāyat* is composed of 5, 10 or 15 members. For this, a few contiguous *Gāon sabhās* are declared *Nyāya Panchāyat* circle. From a list of elected members of a circle, the sub-divisional Judicial Magistrate selects the *Panchs*. The head of this organ is known as *Sar-Panch*.

The U.P. Panchayatraj Act of 1947 does not speak of *Block Panchāyat* and *District Panchāyat*. This is envisaged by the Balvantrai Mehta Committee of 1957. So long, Tripura had not introduced the two and the three tiers of *Panchāyatraj*. But some elements of both are to be found. At the block level there is the Block Development Committee consisting mainly of the *Gāon Pradhāns* and the *District Panchāyat Officer*. The latter is of course, like the proverbial *Nidhirām Sardār* without shield and sword and also without any official duty whatsoever. It may be added further that the Tripura Block Panchayat Samitis Act, 1978 has been

passed to constitute the two tier. After twenty years since the formation of Balvantrai Mehta Committee, the Government of India appointed the Asoka Mehta Committee in 1977. This committee has recommended the two-tier system: *Mandal Panchayat* and *Zilla Parishad*. *Mandal Panchayat* is to be constituted by grouping a number of villages. For every village there will be a village-committee. To the Mehta committee's suggestions, the Tripura Government's reaction is mixed. While it is not inclined to accept the scheme of *Mandal Panchayat* and *Zilla Parishad*, and open participation of Political Parties, the Committee's observations about the present class-bias, and its suggestions of the weaker sections, etc. seemed 'useful' and 'remarkable'. Most of the recommendations of the Mehta Committee were not favoured by a majority of the Chief Ministers who assembled at a conference held in May, 1979 in New Delhi. Thus, within a period of about two decades, significant changes have taken place in the Panchayatraj in Tripura :

- (i) The scale of representation has been widened ;
- (ii) The secret ballot has replaced the old system of showing hands for casting vote ;
- (iii) The Political parties have been permitted to participate openly in election ;
- (iv) The *Gāon Pradhāns* are given an honorarium of Rs. 200 per month ;
- (v) The *Panchayats* have been officially empowered to impose and collect taxes, fees, etc. and to undertake developmental projects ;
- (vi) The *Block Panchayat* is likely to be shortly introduced ;
- (vii) A separate Directorate has been opened ; and
- (viii) A training institute has been established.

Functions

The Panchayat Acts of all states generally divide the duties into two types, the mandatory and the discretionary. The mandatory functions are obligatory which shall have to be performed, while discretionary duties are desires which may be performed. The difference is like the one that is between fundamental rights

and directive principles. The classification does not appear to be sound and uniform everywhere.

According to the U.P. Panchāyāt-rāj Act, some of the important obligatory functions are the establishment, construction, cleaning, repair, maintenance and supervision of public streets, ponds, wells, tanks, fairs, markets, cremation and grazing grounds ; the registration of births, marriages and deaths ; the prevention of diseases especially the epidemics ; the maternity and child welfare ; and the development of agriculture, commerce, corporation and industry. The discretionary functions are like the planting and maintenance of trees on road sides and other places ; the establishment and maintenance of library, schools, hospitals, gymnasiums, playgrounds and gardens ; the seizure and disposal of stray or wild cattle, dogs, monkeys and animals ; the relief to the destitute and the sick ; the general relief against any calamity ; the preservation and improvement of public health ; the general care of livestock ; the preservation and promotion of goodwill and harmonious relations among various communities, etc. It is also called upon to act as an organised forum of the rural people to ventilate their grievances and to act as a channel through which government assistance may reach the village.

The *Panchāyat* has the power to have control over streets, waterways and other public places ; to acquire, own, improve, maintain and dispose *khās* lands and other properties ; to own and establish public institutions ; to impose certain taxes ; to undertake profitable business ; to lodge genuine complaints against a government employee; to impose penalty on the *Gāon panchāyat* members; to appoint, punish and discharge staff.

To discharge its duties and functions, each *Gāon panchāyat* can raise a *Gāon fund*. It can derive income from fees, tax, loans, grants and gifts. These fees and taxes can be imposed on domestication and sale of animals, simple vehicles, octroi, fairs, festivals and entertainments, slaughter-houses, trade, profession, supply of water, latrines and drains, etc. Every *Gāon Panchāyat* is to prepare and lay before the *Gāon Sabhā* the estimates of its income and expenditure twice a year.

The *Nyāya Panchāyat* can try both civil and criminal cases of minor importance. It can impose a fine not exceeding Rs. 200. It

can require a suspected person to execute a bond of Rs.100. The fees is to be deposited to institute a case. A bench of five *Panchs* hears a case. The legal practitioner is not allowed to practise in the *Nyāya Panchāyat Adālat*. The superior courts may transfer a case and review its judgments.

Evaluation of Performance

Institutions of local government in Tripura are yet in the formative and experimental stages. The initial interest of 1960's soon ebbed away. Shortly, it turned morbid. There are instances where men with a spirit of service and sacrifice have first entered it but after some time left it in disgust. Report of the high-power committee on Tripura *Panchāyatī rāj* (1976) bears eloquent testimony to the weaknesses of *Panchāyats*. Registers are not properly maintained. The records are not written up-to-date, accounts are not correctly maintained. The papers are not timely replied. The attendance of the members is poor and some secretaries are irregular and incompetent. *Chowkidārs* hardly report the cases of births, marriages and deaths; taxes are not assessed and levied according to rules lest the leaders may incur the displeasure of the villagers. The *gāon funds* are almost nil. The *panchāyats* have no budget. The election by the show of hands has given rise to tension and squabbles. The lack of honorarium has made many disinterested in the affairs of the *Panchāyat*. The execution of judgement, being done through the magistrates, is often delayed. *Panchāyat* administration, thus, shows a gloomy picture and the above are the symptoms of that distress. The roots of disease lie, perhaps, elsewhere.

The *Gāon panchāyat* fails to attract competent democrats. The leaders who come forward are supposed to be at the bottom of the informal hierarchy of the politicians. They are little known, amateur, novice and dwarfish in political stature. The recruitment in large numbers, of civil servants for the *Panchāyats* has been made not through the public service commission. Naturally, personal relations and party affiliation of the candidates played a part. The academic qualifications of many of them fall short of the requirement.

The *Gāon Sabhā*, in most cases, consists of illiterate, unorganised, ill-informed mass of people ignorant of their powers. Instead of controlling the executive committee, that is, the *Panchāyat*, the *Panchāyat* controls and guides it. The open participation of the

political parties in the Panchāyat elections is a recent phenomenon. It will quickly and deeply politicise the mass. Political atmosphere may be vitiated by party factions. Politics will reach the threshold of every body. The trends of co-operation and conflict will be felt in greater degrees. Elections through secret ballot were held this time on three days : 28.5.78, 31.5.78 and 2.6.78. It was keenly contested. CPI(M) bagged as many as 462 seats of *Pradhāns* and TUJS of 66 *Pradhāns*. Other parties also were able to capture a few.

All over the world, a change is coming in governmental institutions. The sentimental worship of local government cannot be allowed to continue. In any attempt to study the ramification of local government, it must be considered whether we are moving in exactly the opposite direction of the world forces. We must remember that, after all, administrative expenditure is unproductive and bureaucrats are parasites.

Tripuri Political Consciousness

Jagadish Gan-Chaudhuri

AN EMERGENT intelligentsia has been exercising tremendous influence on the tribal people. The ideas and knowledge of science, arts, history, nationalism, political ideologies began percolating downwards from intellectuals to commoners. This helped in broadening the vision and widening the horizon of knowledge of the rural folk. Thus the political consciousness spread quickly even to the remote villages.

One important feature of Indian national movement is that the rise of nationalism was an uneven process in time and tempo. Some communities and provinces became politically more conscious than others, while many others remained dormant for long. One of the cogent causes of this peculiarity was the policy of the British government who deliberately checked the growth of nationalism among the tribal people. The tribes of Tripura were late in realising the impact and awareness of the movement.

The political awakening of the, hitherto, dormant communities particularly since the forties, has been reaching such a high level

that they show a melting pot where several isolated tribes who frequently fought each other in the past are on the verge of fusion to form a nationality. Behind their movements lies the urge for self-determination, to preserve and promote their own culture and heritage, and to protect their economic rights. The factors which have brought about the consciousness are the general economic development, the protective privileges, the spread of literacy, the impact of the Indian national movement, communist activities, the sense of exploitation and domination by the plains people, the acculturation between the people of the hills and the plains, and the Christian missionary activities. The educated tribal youths find in the near-monopoly of public jobs by the Bengalees an obstacle to their just share in jobs. The *joomias* find in the influx of plough-cultivators an increasing shrinkage of their *joom*-fields. The rising intelligentsia finds the simple culture cornered by the complex culture. The *Achais* (Priest-magician) find themselves rendered jobless by the *Brahmins*.

The currents and cross-currents of political movements generated three generations of political leaders among the tribes of Tripura. The Indian freedom movement, the Communist activity and the recent youth upsurge have involved the local people in increasing numbers. The first movement was joined by three persons only, the second by many, and the third is a mass movement. Those who participated in the Indian National Movement were of middle class urban background over generations. The second group of leaders with a rural background acquired school and college education, and came in contact with the Indian communist leaders during their student days. Both the first and the second group of leaders belong to the Tipra tribe. The first group, very insignificant in number, left no impact upon the mind of the local people. One important cause for poor participation and influence is that living in an independent princely state, the people did not feel the domination of the British. Subsequently, however, the Congress leaders succeeded in winning quite a substantial section to their side. When the Congress was busy in winning freedom for the country, the communists diverted their efforts in capturing the mind of the tribals. Strategically, their target in this respect has been the young educated boys. The communists executed their policy efficiently and effectively. Since mid-forties, the communists have been very active in Tripura hills. The third movement is a

movement *sui generis*, much more broad-based, touching almost all the tribal communities. It started as an appendage of the communist movement only in the mid-sixties of this century, but circumstances have turned it into the bitterest enemy of the initiators.

The great turning point in the history of tribal political movement was the year 1967 when both parliamentary and assembly elections were held in which the communist candidates were defeated by the Indian National Congress. Briefly speaking, the reasons for the defeat were the rift in the Communist Party, the popular distrust against the Pro-China CPI (M), the fielding of popular and famous people by the INC. The political acumen of the then Chief Minister, and the constructive and developmental activities by the newly formed Congress ministry.

The defeat made particularly the CPI (M) to think anew. The leaders, from the experience of the debacle, felt the necessity of renewing, revitalising and deepening their hold among the hills people. The thirty years of Congress rule were successful in bringing a considerable number of tribals to the side of the rulers and to generate a sort of faith. The growing erosion of hold was taken with horror. The CPI (M) convened an All-Party Hill Leaders Conference in June, 1967 at Kāindā Kabrā Pādā, a few miles east of Āgartalā. The tribal problems were discussed, in the conference and an executive committee called TUJS was formed. It was also decided to organise a big tribal rally on 22nd June 1967. But sharp division came up on the issue of leadership in the rally. At last B.C. Deb Barman of CPI led the rally. After the rally, CPI (M) withdrew its 4 members from the executive committee of the TUJS.

Meanwhile an isolated incident took place at Kanchanpur where the *Chakmas* and *Riangs* were in majority. R.K. Dev Barman, a top-ranking officer of Tripura permitted a group of about one thousand refugees to settle down at Kanchanpur. The *Chakmas* and *Riangs* repeatedly requested their Member of Legislative Assembly R.P. Chaudhuri to remove the refugees. As Chaudhuri did nothing, a person Ananta Riang by name formed a secret militant tribal organisation called *Sengkrāk* and raised the cry that either the Bengalees must quit Tripura by 25 November 1967 or face death. By this time, TUJS also formed its defence wing under the same traditional name of *Sengkrāk*.

The call alarmed the Tripura administration and the public. The CPI (M) leaders with whom a strained relationship had already developed considered, it is alleged, the two *Sengkrāks* as one and the same, communal and narrow. It may be added here that the anti-Bengali *Sengkrāk* movement of 1967 is not an unprecedented event. During the late forties similar uprising under the same name led by Amarendra Dev Barman alias Bansi Thakur took place in and around Āgartalā.

An other annual TUJS conference was held in January 1969 at Dūrgā Chaudhuri Pādā, near Āgartalā. This time the chief demand was the implementation of the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This demand was suggested by Amarendra Dev Barman and this demand of TUJS was also, it is claimed, recommended for some states in north-eastern India in mid-1969 by the Hanumanthia Commission. The CPI (M) also made similar demands. Naturally, the commission's recommendation strengthened their claim. Between the period from 1967 to 1973, the tribal people under different political banners and through various techniques of organised political agitation placed their demands and articulated their views.

One important result of the movement is that from 1967 onwards, the Tripura tribal society with its manifold problems came to be focused in press, literature, and discourses, in meetings and markets and in fact in every day life of all. In all these, the tribal history and culture, their problems and prospects were discussed, written, criticised and questioned by laymen and experts alike.

It may be recalled here that in 1943 Mahārāj Bir Bikram with a view to wean the tribes from the wasteful *joom* cultivation reserved an area of 1950 miles for five *dafās* or tribal communities only. Secondly in 1960 the Indian Parliament passed the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act. The Act puts restrictions on the transfer of tribal land to non-tribals over the entire state. Thirdly, in 1974 by an amendment of the 1943 and 1960 Acts, the tribal reserve was repealed and irregular transfers in the whole territory were regularised till 1968 and from 1969 irregular transfers were declared void and to be restored to the tribal owners. A limited, discriminatory tribal reserve meant for 5 communities only, inhabited by a still few tribals, and encroached by many non-tribals appeared un-democratic and un-useful to the government.

Consequent to the Act of 1974, the tribal dissatisfaction and agitation raged in the countryside. It formed a striking landmark in the growth of Tripura tribal consciousness. An all Party Tribal convention formed on 7 April 1974 decided and executed a four point strategy of a public agitation on 30 April 1974, a central rally on 10 July 1974, a mission to Delhi in September 1974 and Tripura *Bundh* in November or December 1974. The fourth point proved futile because of the success achieved even at the third stage. So, fourthly, an ordinance, promulgated on 27 February 1975 earmarked 42 *tahsils* and 133 villages in which in the matters of disposal of tribal or non-tribal land, the tribals shall get preferential treatment.

As soon as all these demands were achieved, the country came to be placed under Emergency in July 1975. All movements were banned during this period. The TUJS, however, utilised the time otherwise. They directed their efforts in social reforms. They organised tribal priests' conference at Āgartalā, and campaigned against dowry, child marriage and addiction. It may not be out of place to recollect here that during the forties and early fifties a new generation of educated rural tribal youths including Mahendra Deb Barman, Dasarath Deb, Aghore Deb Barman, Sudhanya Dev Barman, *etc.* agitated for a written constitution, adult franchise, responsible ministry, spread of literacy and abolition of traditional village chieftainship. In short, that movement may rightly be called the first native socio-political aspiration of a working community.

As a reply to the tribal demand for the implementation of the Sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution, in August-September 1976, the then Chief Minister Sengupta offered an alternative suggestion of the Manipur-type of district council which was unacceptable to the TUJS. Next came the sixth *Lok Sabha* elections in March, 1977. The CPI, CPI (M) and TUJS fielded candidates and lost. But in the Assembly election held in December 1977 only the CPI (M) and the TUJS came out victorious. The former won 56 seats, the latter 4. To the TUJS it was the first victory followed by the second victory with 66 seats of *Pradhans* in the Panchayat election held in May-June 1978. And at last in April, 1979, the Tripura Legislative Assembly passed the controversial District Council Bill. Being in power, it has become easy on the

part of the CPI (M) and the TUJS to focus the tribal problems, to organise their associations and unions, to spread their ideas and to mobilise public opinion.

The middle class democratic awakening of the Tripuri people found expression not only in land-problems and politics, but also in vernacular, religion and social institutions. The socio-religious movements launched campaigns to modify and revitalise the ancient religion, to reinstitute the traditional priest known as *Achāi* in place of the Brahmin priests, to produce books in vernacular, to establish vernacular schools (altogether 33 such schools were established). They also raised their voice against addiction, child marriage, dowry, marriage by physical service and superstitions. They expressed their keenness for more share in government jobs and for the rehabilitation of *joom* cultivators by taking to plough cultivation. These reform movements were not isolated attempts. These were inter-related parts to make a whole. Several isolated tribes were expected to come together to form a nationality with a view to build up a national unity, to achieve political power and to attain the socio-economic and cultural advancement of the people. These movements were socio-religious in form but national in content. Such a democratic, broad-based consciousness had come for the first time in their history.

It is common knowledge that in politics, inter-party and inter-personal relations are not perpetually peaceful. Politically, the local tribal people are coming under the banners of different political parties. The allegiance of the people is mainly divided among INC, CPI (M) and the TUJS. Defecting from other parties, the people are, increasingly coming within the fold of the TUJS. Nevertheless, the old alliances are breaking and new ones are forming. The CPI (M) and the TUJS which once stood in friendly relations are now at daggers drawn. On the other hand, the CFD and the TUJS came to an informal alliance in the last Assembly election. In future, the TUJS is likely to face some sort of crisis of leadership and defection.

Tripuri Folklore

Jagadish Gan-Chaudhuri

SINCE TIMES imemorial, the tribal people have inhabited the high hills and remote forests and have coexisted with singing springs, zigzag rivers, and wild animals and birds. The easy-going life and the self-subsistence economy provided them with ample scope for imagination, curiosity, speculation, smoking, drinking, dancing, singing and gossiping. There has always been a strong sense of group-spirit. The individual has never had a separate life as distinct from the community. Unfortunately, the old atmosphere is receding, shrinking and fading fast. The hills are being denuded, the villages are losing their integrity, homogeneity, and compactness, and the joint-family is breaking down. In the agricultural community of the past, the parents of the bride dictated the terms and conditions of marriage and extorted a price from the bridegroom ; whereas today daughters are considered a burden. The environment in which they were in unison with the natural phenomena was perhaps most conducive for the flourishing of a folklore,

The people have a rich store-house of folklore. Myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, dreams, beliefs, songs, ballads and rhymes etc. make the colourful and interesting spectrum of folklore. All these are the creation of the minds, highly inquisitive and imaginative. There is an explanation for every natural phenomenon. There is a glut of myths concerning the origin of everything—deities, demons, witches, human beings, flora, fauna, solar system, speech and behaviour of different communities and persons, birds and animals. Each community has its cosmogony which may be a little different from that of others. For instance, to some, the sun and the moon are brother and sister; whereas to some other, they are husband and wife. Earthquakes, the Milky-Way, the sky, thunder, hills, lakes are all subjects of interesting myths and tales. There are also beautifully spun legends about the articles and artefacts of domestic use. Some of these show signs of acculturation. The heroes and heroines of the tales and myths are gods, demons, men, beasts and birds. In some tales gods, men and beasts occur together. Some stories show veneration for serpents; some indicate certain habits now obsolete. Certain tales show the use of magic. The tales and myths are interesting, instructive and fantastic.

TIPRA FOLKLORE

Myths

It is believed that the earth rests on *Kāiching*, a big tortoise, who eats human excrement for the collection of which, *Khebok*, the black carabid beetle is engaged. Sometimes, the beetle, being tired of the work, makes a false report that there is not a single human being on earth. The earth bearing tortoise doubts this and to verify the report he shakes the earth. The quake terrifies men on earth and women make the *ulu* sound that reaches the ears of the tortoise who then strikes the beetle with a stone. So the beetle's head is flat. The neighbouring tribes like *Noātiās*, *Jamātiās*, *Riāngs*, *Hālāms* also have the same myth. The milky way, called *Kuthai Lāmthri*, is the path of the dead. It is believed that the dead pass this way. The rainbow known as *Chakreng tui ningnāl* is supposed to be a long serpent who sometimes appears on the horizon to drink water from any pool or lake. Anyone using the water of that pool or lake feels an itching sensation resulting in eruptions curable by propitiation to the serpent. A rainbow in

the western horizon is supposed to indicate the death of a great man. The hailstorm is called *kathar*. It is believed that deities in the heaven fry them and they drop on earth.

The meteor or shooting star is supposed to be the visit of the star to its father-in-law's house *Āthukiri Chārmāri thānga*. At that moment hair, if pulled, increases in length.

The cyclone called *Nokbār* is supposed to be feared by those alone who were, in their previous birth, indebted to it. Formerly, the sky called *Nakhā* was soft and at a very low level. People used to cut some portions of it for food. Once a woman while husking paddy with a pestle felt inconvenient because she could not sufficiently raise her pestle. She knocked the sky with her pestle and the sky went high above. Lightning is called *Nakhā philliga* and is supposed to be the private parts of a beautiful girl who had to leave this world and take shelter in the sky. As usual the girl and her grown-up brother went to the hills for *joom* cultivation. On their way back home they bathed in a river. While bathing, the brother saw the bare body of his sister and desired to marry her. This being against the custom, his parents first disagreed but afterwards consented. A few days before the appointed date of the marriage, the girl, who was shocked by the proposal, climbed up a tall *chhātīm* tree. Repeated requests, assurances of the dissolution of the proposal and animal sacrifices could not persuade her to come down. At last the unruly brother was sacrificed. Soon the brother turned into a chameleon which also climbed up the tree and followed her. She then climbed higher and higher, and at last breaking the head of the tree took shelter in the sky. It is believed that people even today can see her body while she bathes in the sky. The unsatisfied brother now in the form of a chameleon, out of anger grows red whenever it sees a man. The thunder stone called *Fuirāng* is believed to fall and strike those spots where devils, demons and evil spirits reside. Eclipses occur only when a big frog goes to swallow the sun or the moon. The frog asks the sun and the moon to report about human affairs and releases them only after being satisfied with the report. It is a taboo for pregnant women to do anything during an eclipse.

According to Hindu mythology *Sitā* was kidnapped by *Rāvana* and this enraged *Rāma* and *Lakshmana*, who went out in search of the lady. Whoever they met on the way was halted and

asked whether he knew the whereabouts of Sitā. On the way, it is said, they met a kingfisher who gave the correct information. So the bird was blessed so that it would come out successful every time it dived in water for a fish. The same question was also put to a *Lāirok* leaf (*Phrynium imbricatum*) but it suppressed the news. So Rāma cursed it. This is why the leaf goes on shaking its head almost continuously. A duck and a drake on being asked reacted differently. The duck while attempted to reply in the positive, the drake in a low voice discouraged and directed her to suppress it. For this reason, the voice of the drake is broken.

In the past, both man and dog could see the gods. To conceal their movement, the deities smeared black soot on the eyes of man. So he is now unable to see him. The dog fled away as soon as a thin layer of soot was smeared. So dogs can see the gods even today. Certain trees are the abode of evil spirits. So tamarind, *āowāl*, wild jackfruit tree (*Artocarpus chaplasi*) are not used as pillars for house-building.

The head of the *Chhāttim* tree (*Alstonia scholaris*) is flat and broken because once a girl to get away from an incestuous marriage climbed up the tree and left it for heaven. While leaving for heaven she broke the head of the tree so that people standing below could not follow her and catch her. The *Lengrā* grass (*Chrysopogon aciculatus*) was a lascivious fellow in his previous birth. To satisfy his lust he is reborn as *Lengrā* which can easily see the private parts of woman. The more the cultivated bamboos swing in wind, the more the fortune of a family fluctuates. So it is taboo to cultivate bamboos. Thus they plant them in a horticultural garden and compared them to young girls on their attaining maturity. Just as the girls of this age attract the attention of adolescent boys, so the trees of fruit-bearing age become the abode of evil spirits. This fear restrains gardening among them. The red-wattled lapwing bird called *tātādūng* is supposed to sleep at night lying on its back and erecting its legs straight upward lest the sky may fall on it. The sparrow learnt how to walk from the wagtail but ultimately it forgot both the styles, that of the wagtail and its own. It is a bad omen if an owl sits on the roof of a house. The *Bou-Kathā-Kao* bird (*Cuculus micropternus*) in its previous birth was a bridegroom who, because of sad and sudden death immediately after marriage could not pay a return-visit (*māitrān*)

to the house of his father-in-law. In its very melodious call heard March-July, the bird yearns for his wife and reminds the newly married couples to visit their father-in-laws' houses.

Legends

Long, long ago there was a king called Subrai. He was the first king of the Tiprās. He introduced all arts and crafts in Tripurā. He had hundreds of wives. To encourage the arts and crafts, it was the declared policy of the king to marry those ladies who excelled in arts and crafts.

It is believed that the Tiprās usurped the political power of Tripurā after defeating the king of the Bāchhāl tribe. The Bāchhāl king, thus defeated, could not regain his power. The two tribes have been at daggers drawn ever since. But as a mark of respect to the former ruling tribe, until recently the Tiprā king on the occasion of the annual feast organised during the *Dūrgā Pājā* used to take his meal only after the Bāchhāl king had taken his.

A terrible fight is supposed to have occurred between the Tiprās and the Kukis. After several days of fight, the Tiprā King's general Roy Kachak at dead of night captured the Kuki fort known as Thānāngchi which was on the top of a lofty hill. It was extremely difficult to climb up the stiff hill. There were no stairs nor any path. At last a big *iguana* came to the help of Tiprā army. The long tail of the *iguana* served as a rope. The Tiprā army stealthily climbed up, killed all the Kuki soldiers who were then asleep and brought the *gariā* god.

There is a mythical account regarding the origin of the Tipras. The account draws a lineal descent from the Lunar dynasty of the Mahābhārata. Being cursed by Sukrācharya, King Yayati was suffering from infirmity (*Jarā*) which could, however, be exchanged with the youth of another man. The king publicly announced that he would give his entire kingdom to any young man who would agree to this. Nobody volunteered, not even his sons. At last Puru, the youngest prince agreed. The other princes incurred the displeasure of the king who exiled them to different directions. Dhruva moved eastwards and reached Sagar island where lived the great sage Kapila whose blessings helped the prince a lot to build up a kingdom which once extended up to Praggyotishpur in modern Assam. One of his successors, Tripur, named the kingdom

after his name. Thus the kingdom came to be known as Tripurā, and the subjects as Tiprā.

There are a few legends in Tripura regarding the worship of only heads of 14 deities. Dakshin, one of the legendary kings of Tripura, while running away in a lost battle took with him only the decapitated heads as it was not possible for him to carry the corpses of the deities. According to another legend, all the deities were once engaged in fighting but they got defeated and their heads were chopped off. However, the heads came back to Tripura.

There is yet one more legend. Long ago a queen of Tripura on way to the bathing ghat in a river saw fourteen deities seated on the top of a tree unable to climb down out of fear of a wild buffalo which was standing under it. The deities requested the queen to rescue them. According to the advice of the deities, the queen threw her *risā* (breast-cloth) over the buffalo. This tamed the animal. The contended deities advised the queen to start worshipping them for the welfare of the kingdom.

Dhruya's thirty-ninth descendant, Tripur was an able king but an atheist and a tyrant. The subjects prayed to Lord Shiva, the destroyer, to end the regime of atheism. Tripur was killed by Siva (from where He is known as Tripurari) and a posthumous son was born to Tripur, who was named Trilochan. He was virtuous and able, and strengthened the kingdom.

Tales

Tripura is very rich in native tales some of which are really beautiful. Some of the tales end happily, others are tragic. There are various themes in their folk tales. There are stories of tricksters capable of being transformed into animals, of an unhappy girl transformed into a *noāi* bird, of an unfortunate newly married groom who died and was reborn into a mocking bird, of a helpless girl who kept her words by marrying a python who built a house in the *joom* field for her while she fell victim to a hailstorm, or a princess who was kidnapped by a domesticated white elephant; of two unfortunate princes who during early childhood, lost their mother and fell victims to the intrigues of their step-mother, of the love of the Prince Chhengthungpha with Nāithakbi, of the story of the jackal and lion, etc.

Proverbs

As with all other peoples, the accumulated wisdom of ages is expressed also by the Tipras in the form of proverbs. Here are a few specimens :

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>Āsā dā tāi phāilengchi</i> | = | There is no end of hope. |
| <i>Ā bāi āna chāo</i> | = | The fish eats fish. |
| <i>Āti Khuku thuina lākai tā radi</i> | = | Do not lend thy purse to one who is too sweet-tongued. |
| <i>Āmingsā khipab tāi phapkā</i> | = | Cat always hides its excrement. |
| <i>Kāngāl sa akra ta ungdi</i> | = | Never be the eldest son in a poor family. |
| <i>Khina ekkhai bahai phainai</i> | = | Excrement if stirred, stinks. |
| <i>Khoomni bahai nagbarna talanga</i> | = | Air emits the odour of flowers. |
| <i>Chela kak kurung kāmī khāo</i> | = | An eloquent man preserves the unity of the village. |
| <i>Borai kak kurung kāmī sevāio</i> | = | An eloquent woman destroys it. |
| <i>Sele māi kurai</i> | = | An idle man gets no rice. |
| <i>Thentā hā kurai</i> | = | A cunning fellow gets no accommodation. |
| <i>Charmani katar</i> | = | A sumptuous meal pleases the most. |
| <i>Char bāi char</i> | = | A thorn removes a thorn. |
| <i>Char lo hāmīā</i> | = | A thorn in the body never becomes flesh i.e. adopted son-in-law never becomes as one's own son. |
| <i>Tāl su kiting kurai</i> | = | There is nothing as round as the moon. |
| <i>Sāl su thamchi kurai</i> | = | There is nothing as strong as the sun. |
| <i>Mā Sukbā Kāhām kurai</i> | = | There is nobody as good as the mother. |

*Tākhuk sinini bumā āchukna
khāmplai māniā*

= A mother of seven issues
gets no seat.

Kai sāni bumā chaai pālā

= A mother of a single issue
never finds her food-stock
empty.

Riddles

A hump backed person jumps into water	(fishing rod)
A dead person eats a living one	(bait)
An earthen pitcher that can't be carried by the waist	(egg)
A dead snake that moves on	(rope)
A boat that floats without water	(cradle)
A house within a house	(mosquito net)
A child is lulled to sleep in water	(fishing trap)
Only a <i>thoch</i> turns a thing into a coin	(millipede)
Two brothers engaged in wrestling	(roofs of a two roofed hut)
<i>Fakir</i> dances in every house	(soot)
You can touch a thing but can't see it	(one's own head)
You can see a thing but can't touch it	(sky)
A dead bird flies in the sky	(kite)
The more the mother weeps, the more the son talks to	(loom)
A tree with only one leaf	(handfan)
A big garden with numerous flowers	(sky)
A single ear of paddy fills the whole granary	(light)
King's turban cannot be folded	(a long path)

Folk songs

Like all forms of verbal art, the folk songs is generally perpetuated by oral circulation and tradition. The Tribal folk song in Tripura has flourished with a variety and strength impressive of a simple and changing culture. The folk songs represent various aspects of their culture. Love, courtship, marriage, economic activities, rituals, games, natural phenomena, political incidents, etc. are the topics of innumerable songs. The history, regional geography, flora and fauna of Tripura are reflected in the folk

songs. Along the east and south-east border, the ancient tribal traditions and the habits and customs are relatively less affected by cultural contact. After all, folk songs reflect the gradual changes in the culture, the growing agony of Tripura. Most of the songs are sung by individuals simply for enjoyment or as an emotional outburst.

Dreams and Superstitions

The Tipras are great believers in dreams. Most of the dreams are supposed to come true. The future is portended in dream. The bad dreams are disclosed to all and good ones concealed.

During sleep, the human soul (*Fald*) is capable of leaving the body, taking the shape of a grass-hopper, visiting different places at its will and re-entering into the body. So a Tipra never kills a grass-hopper after dusk lest any sleeping person may die. To ensure a deceased's journey safe up to the place of *Lārimā*, a cock is killed at the feet of the dead. Utensils, ornaments, corns, tools and tobacco are offered to the deceased for the next life.

In selecting a site for *joom* cultivation some magical practices are performed. From the tentatively selected hill a lump of soil is brought by the cultivator and placed it below his pillow. It is omen to hear the call of a kite or of a deer. At night he wears a clean cloth and sleeps alone with a hope of revelation through dreams. If he sees in dream buffalo, cattle, elephant, fish, water, burning light, or a marriage ceremony, etc. it is believed that the cultivation would be profitable. On the contrary, it is bad if he dreams of a beggar, a naked woman, a dead animal, fire, red cloth, a police, or somebody laughing, or a gathering of men. While selecting a site for *jooming*, a place having deep and narrow holes (*Noārikhar*) or where a black monkey or python died, or where the burrows of a porcupine are found, is considered unsuitable.

To the Tipras, a dream about building a new house means that the dreamer will die shortly. The Lakhers also have this superstitious belief. A low and narrow junction (*Hakchen*) connecting two hills is believed to be the route of gods. So it is dreaded and avoided. If a woman suffers from an unceasing flow of menstruation, a chicken is sacrificed just in front of a hole dug

by a crab. A chicken is also sacrificed at a spot where a person falls in accident or receives wounds or injury.

It is widely believed that eating a particular fish or any animal when one is in mother's womb may impart its qualities upon the consumer. So an expected mother's diet is carefully prescribed. A number of taboos are imposed on her diet. She is not allowed to eat *Kuchiā* (*Amphipuous cuchia*) lest the child's eyes may be small. She is also prohibited to take *meni* fish (*Nandus nandus*) lest the child may get a big mouth. To a Tipra girl and woman of child bearing age, the tortoise's head is taboo. Just as a tortoise frequently brings out and enters its head, the baby too may behave similarly during delivery. Eating a pig's tail may make a child of very fickle nature. Excepting for these prohibited items of food, she is served anything she likes ; otherwise the child may salivate profusely owing to the unsatisfied hunger of the mother.

HALAM FOLKLORE

Myths

The earthquake called *Likhite* is believed to occur when Sarafā a big tortoise on the back of which the earth rests, shakes it. Khangdur a black carabid beetle, is engaged by the tortoise to collect regularly human excrement for the latter's food. Sometimes the beetle gets tired and stops the supply on the false plea of want of excrement. The hungry tortoise doubts and verifies the report by shaking the residence of men. The quake terrifies the living beings ; womanfolk make the *ulu* sound which reaches the ear of the tortoise. The angry master accuses the servant and strikes it with a stone over the face.

The rainbow, called *cang kleng*, is supposed to be a big bow tainted with blood in a bloody war. The bow when thirsty appears on the horizon to drink water from any lake or pool (*dunkur*). After its use, the water from any lake or pool (*dunkur*). After its use the water suffers from the eruption of boils. The hailstorms is known as *Rul*. It is believed that the gods fry the hailstorms for use as pellets over the sinners. So the children are forbidden to go out and others are advised to take shelter at safe places.

They also have a short story about lightning almost similar to that of the Tipras and other tribes of Tripura. It relates to the tragic fate of a girl. It is customary in their society for both boys and girls, men and women, go out of doors and work together in the forests and fields. It so happened that a brother and a sister used to go out together for the collection and cultivation. One day on their way back home, while they were bathing in a waterfall, the brother saw the bare body of his adolescent sister and became impassioned to marry her. The scene made him confused and indifferent to any other girl. When after some time it came to the notice of the parents, they, on close questioning, came to know his desire and tried to dissuade him but in vain. So the parents gave their consent very unwillingly and advised him to work hard till the harvest. The matter was kept a secret from the girl.

After the harvest, preparations were being made. The paddy was spread over a mattress for sundrying. The grandmother of the boy was guarding the paddy from cocks, hens and sparrows. These birds were so frequently swooping down and swallowing paddy that the old woman became annoyed and threatened to kill them at the marriage ceremony between her granddaughter and her grandson. The girl who was then engaged in cooking overheard and was shaken. She decided to leave the place for heaven, went out of the kitchen, climbed up a short *Chhātīm* tree, sat on its head and requested to grow straight upward. The tree listened to the request of the chaste girl. By this time the villagers came to know of this and they assembled under the tree, requesting her to come down. They assured her of the dissolution of the proposed marriage. She thought that even after the dissolution of the marriage, people might whisper against her. So she climbed higher and higher and at last took shelter in the sky. While leaving the tree for the sky, she broke its head so that nobody could follow her. This is why, it is believed, the head of the *Chhātīm* tree is broken. To the people, the lightning is nothing but her beautiful body casually seen while bathing in the sky.

The eclipse, called *āmlan* has also a long story behind. There was a couple in a village. They had no child but had two dogs one black and another red. A protracted sufferer of bone-trouble (*rirukhu*), the husband was an invalid. So the wife had to work

hard to maintain the family. One day while engaged in collecting roots, tubers and vegetables in a forest, she found a big snake lying in an almost senseless condition. She put it into her basket and brought it home for food. Actually it was a female snake, which had become tired and drowsy after copulation. The male snake left her only to bring a herbal medicine in order to revitalise her. On his return back to the spot, the male snake did not find its mate and so became restless and furious. Following the footprints of the woman, the snake reached the house. By this time the woman had cut it into pieces for cooking and was kept hanging in a napkin. The male snake from below throw a medicinal saliva which had the efficacy of joining together the pieces. The medicine was so powerful that the female snake got back its body and life. So the snakes returned happily. But the napkin used to wrap the meat got wet with poisonous saliva. The cloth remained wet. The efficacy of the medicine very much moved the woman who herself observed it. She became curious to experiment with the medicine on her ailing husband. She rubbed the cloth on his body. To her utter surprise, the husband was cured. They were now quite happy. But she concealed the whole affair, for future use preserved the cloth in a basket (*phar*) and forbade her husband not even to touch it and kept the dogs on guard. This made the husband curious. One day when the wife was out, the husband took the chance of opening the basket. He found the wet cloth, took it out and placed it over a horizontally fixed bamboo bar (*dāndāl*) at the back (*inchar*) of the traditional house for drying.

Now the sun and the moon thought that if the medically potent cloth remained with the family, all human beings would be cured from all diseases and also would be immortal. So they sent two birds to collect the cloth. The birds came, attempted, dived and failed initially because of the vigilance of the dogs. At last the birds swooped down. A tug-of-war occurred between the dogs and the birds. But ultimately the powerful birds succeeded in snatching the cloth along with the dogs. The birds flew to the sky and carried the dogs to the sun and the moon. Henceforth, the dogs had to live there and appear occasionally and alternately.

Why uneven topography ! It is believed that the surface of

the earth was formerly flat. Later, it lost its flatness ; gorges, swamps, hills, lakes, and in some places flat lands appeared when the queen of Rājā Subrāi angrily slapped and beat the earth with a waving sword.

They have a beautiful story about the introduction of fruit-trees in the hills. Formerly there were primeval forests everywhere. Fruit-trees were cultivated only in the kingdom of Bānglār Rājā in the west. King Subrāi of ancient Tripura wanted to introduce them in his kingdom. Subrāi had his wife, seven daughters, one son and several subjects. He was too addicted to drinking. One day he set out to collect seeds and seedlings from the King of Bengal. His son Deyānsā accompanied the father. Before leaving home, he collected and stored all necessary household articles including rice, vegetables, meat, fish, firewood, so that members of his family need not go out for them. He also convened a meeting of his subjects and advised them to remain alert against possible attacks and atrocities by one Nāreng Nākā, a devil of the neighbouring forest in the east.

Heavily drunk, Subrāi started westward. After covering a distance, he felt thirsty and told his son to fetch drinking water from a stream. Preparing a bamboo pipe, Deyānsā brought water. After use, the pipe was left there and was directed to keep Subrāi's absence in secret. They resumed their journey. In course of their journey they met several things and beings, such as a duck, a drake, a *phālphak* leaf (*Phrynium imbricatum*), a kingfisher, etc. similar direction was given to all of them. At one time the King felt a bowels motion, The excrement was also forbidden to divulge the news. At last they drew near the palace of Bānglā Rājā. But they did not enter the capital directly. The King stopped at the bank of a pond to which also the same order was served and sent his son to enquire whether the King of Bengal were present and to inform him. The King of Bengal welcomed and treated him in a befitting manner and treated him very kindly, entertaining both guests with sumptuous dishes. Tobacco, betel-leaves, wine and pork were offered for days together.

But they could not enjoy the hospitality of Bānglā Rājā for long. Nāreng Naka having crossed the border entered the Kingdom

of Subrāi. To ensure the absence of Subrāi, Nāreng Nākā asked everything and every one about them—the bamboo pipe, duck and drake, the leaf, the kingfisher, the excrement, the pond and even the swine. So Nāreng Nākā safely entered into the house of Subrāi. Nāreng Nākā was not only a devil, but also a magician. He could take any shape and imitate anybody's tone. Nāreng Nākā reached the house of Subrāi dead of night, took the shape of Subrāi and in imitation of his voice asked the inmates to wake up and open the door. The queen was fast asleep. The daughters awoke. In spite of repeated warnings by the other daughters, the eldest daughter opened the door. No sooner had she opened it, than Nāreng Nākā touched her with his magical spear (*sukhrek*). She immediately got stuck to it. To save her, her sisters one behind the another slung at the waist thus forming a line. But to no effect. On waking up, the queen was bewildered. But things were out of her control. Nāreng Naka left with the daughters and put them inside the burrow of a porcupine (*sarukul khur*).

Fortunately while living amidst pleasure in the guest-house, both Subrāi and Deyānsā dreamt of an unhappy incident. They became impassioned so Deyānsā on the following morning set out. Subrāi talked to the King of Bengal about the dream and requested him to deliver the seeds as early as possible. Built at a little distance from the dwelling houses, the barn was guarded by a cat. The King sent a mouse to collect from the barn a pipe full of different kinds of seeds. While the cat was asleep the mouse crept in and tore the thread of the hanging bamboo pipe containing seeds. At once the pipe fell down. The cat awoke and chased the mouse. The mouse returned without the container of seeds. The mouse was again deputed. This time it made a successful attempt. The King of Bengal had handed it over to Subrāi who then started for his kingdom.

By the time he returned, Nāreng Nākā had left. Subrāi sent his people to look for his daughters. They found them all put into a burrow but failed to rescue them. They reported this to the king. The attempt of Subrāi also failed. The girls cried and requested the father to make provision for them for the future. The King gave them a boon : whoever cultivates a forest or a hill with a burrow inside will fall ill ; they will be cured only after offering

sacrifices which will be the girls' food. The King did not stop there. He served a summon on all the witnesses of his journey. The King rebuked and cursed them.

Legends

How were the Tipras and the Halams different in their legends. Tradition has it that the Halams and the Tipras are the children of the King Subrāi. Though Subrāi was the common father, their mothers were different. Subrāi had two queens. The Halams are the descendants of the son of the elder queen, while the Tipras are the descendants of the son of the younger queen. The question of succession arose in his old age. According to the customary laws, the elder son should be the king. But he was too simple to be the king. Comparatively the younger son was capable of being a king. This being against the tradition, the king put the princes to an intelligence-test. The king asked the princes to ride on an elephant; he said, 'whoever can ride first will be the next king'.

The elder son at once rushed to the forest to collect bamboos to prepare a ladder to ride on. But the younger son instead of going to the forest, used some code-words usually used by a *māhut* to make the elephant bend a little. The tame elephant at once followed the direction of the master. The prince rode on. So the younger prince got the selection for the next kingship. The elder prince was not, however, completely deprived of. He was given the eastern part of the territory along the title 'Ray'. The younger prince became *Rāja* and got the western part of the kingdom. The Halams until recently used to present the Tripura King clothes, horns, elephant trunk, birds, fine rice on the occasion of annual feast called *Hasam bhojan* organised by the Kings during the *Dūrgā Pūjā*. This was a great occasion of revitalising inter-tribal relations and recollecting old legends.

It may be added here that the Halams have till today a two-tier administrative structure; at the bottom there is a small, selective body of village council, and the next tier is of the entire community. This bigger body is composed of a hierarchy of office-bearers selected by the people on their annual festive occasion. The titles of the officers arranged accordingly to protocol are: *Roy, Kanchan, Gālim, Khau Kusum, Yayāk Kusum, Chāpiā Liun, Chāpiā tang, Hājirā, Oākmā, Khāndal, Lāmai marāk, Kha marāk*.

Regarding their migration and movement, they have a legendary account. It is narrated that *Barpul-tāng* literally meaning 'very high hill' was their former residence from which they migrated south-westward and came down to Tripura. There, on the hill-top, they had a big settlement consisting of as many as 126 households. The village had a council of elders headed by *Kānchi Kāo* for temporal affairs and by *Achāiung* for ecclesiastical matter. The village was not thickly populated in all its parts and quarters. The headman's quarter was thickly inhabited, while at another part there lived a widow and a few families. The village had a big guardian snake for whom one person had to be offered annually. The council used to decide the turn of the households. Annoyed and afflicted at the cruel demand of the snake, the council decided to kill the snake. One of the strong and stout young man executed the order. The snake was skinned, cut to pieces and distributed among the households. The widow got, as her share, the head and intestines of the snake. At the time of distribution, the widow was out *jooming*. The distributor put her share inside a hanging basket at the *verāndah*. On her way back home, when she reached near her house, she heard a cock's voice from inside the basket. The cock repeatedly advised her to leave the village to avoid a massacre. She become surprised at the sermon. On enquiry she came to know the incident and asked some of the neighbouring households to assemble, listen to it and think it over. Apprehending it as divine advice, they left the quarter, moved south-westward and ultimately settled in Tripura.

TALES

Trickster

A *joomiā* family had its *joom* field in a deep forest. The forest was full of wild animals which ravaged the crops. The attempts of the family to ward off the animals and birds by magical and other means failed. So a deadly trap was set. A hog was caught, but it was so strong that nobody dared to kill it. The head of the family knew the tricks of transforming himself into any animal. He uttered some spells on water separately kept in two pots. He would turn into a tiger with the sprinkling of water

from the first pot and regain his normal life when water from the second pot was sprinkled. He showed to his wife the distinction between the two pots and directed her to sprinkle water carefully and fearlessly. She dropped water on him. He became a tiger, went to the field, jumped upon the hog, killed it and returned. But on his return in the shape of a tiger, the wife was fear-struck. She climbed up the roof. The tiger, assured her not to fear, and through gestures and postures suggested to sprinkle water. But in vain. So the tiger took the water in its hand and sprinkled. But as the water did not cover the entire body, he remained half-man and half-tiger. Now his condition was still worse. He would be accepted nowhere. So he jumped up, caught the wife and both of them died on the spot.

A tragic incident

A couple had two children, a daughter and a son. The girl was senior to the boy. Every day the couple used to go out for work in the fields being the children to themselves. The girl used to look after her young brother, cook and perform minor domestic chores. One day the mother forgot to give the necessary direction of cooking. When she had walked a little distance, the daughter loudly sought necessary instruction. The mother suggested to prepare a curry of *dangte* vegetables. As the sound of the reply was not very clear, she understood it differently. She thought that her mother had suggested to cook the meat of the brother. Accordingly, she killed the child, cut the body of pieces and cooked. On their return home, the parents came to know of the tragic incident and became very much struck with deep grief. they rebuked and beat her with a stick, and stopped her food for days together. The father prepared a basket and put her inside and closed the door. In that condition she was kept at the back *verāndāh* of the house. As usual, the parents resumed their work in the field.

One day a big *Noāi* bird was flying over. The poor girl humbly requested the bird to offer her some feathers. The bird took pity on her, plucked feathers and dropped them near the basket. On her request, the children of the hamlet stuck the feathers into her body and opened the door. Then she left home and flew with the *Noāi* bird for ever,

Marriage between a girl and a snake. There was a big village having as many as one hundred twentysix families. The magician priest of the village known as *Achāiung* was so busy with the affairs of the people that he would hardly get any time to work in his own field. The *Achāiung*'s wife died sometimes back leaving two daughters. Sufficiently grown up, the daughters were looking after all household affairs. Every day they used to rise up early in the morning, cook food, eat and carry the mid-day meals to the field, keeping the father's meal at home, work all along in the *joom* field and return in the evening. While working they used to converse with each other about many things including their past, present and future. The sexual curiosity naturally arose in the minds of these adolescent girls. They felt the necessity of boy-friends or husband. Quite frank and friendly to each other, they would often discuss about it. The elder sister once said, 'Had there been over husbands or boy friends, our life would be less monotonous, and work light. They would have helped us in preparing the field, sowing, weeding, building a watch-house and harvesting ! How pleasant it would be !' One of the gods in the heaven heard the conversation and decided to help the beautiful damsels. The god came down to earth that very night, weeded a large portion of the field, and built a watch-house. The god hid himself in the nearby woods in the shape of a python.

Astonished to see all these the next day, the girls took it as the effort of a kind fellow desirous of being their suitor. The elder sister said, 'whoever he might be, I will marry him.' At the time of taking the mid-day meal, the younger sister, in anticipation addressed the strange fellow as the brother-in-law and invited him to take meal. To their utter surprise, a big python came, ate the meal and gently left. The elder sister was so true to her words that she boldly accepted the snake as her husband. They, however, did not divulge the unusual incident to the father. Fear-stricken and hesitant, the younger sister stopped taking meal there at noon. So her health started breaking down gradually. After a week or so, the diminishing condition of her health came to the notice of the father. He asked and asked but got no satisfactory reply. One day while the elder daughter had gone to the stream to fetch water, the father on close questioning came to know the fact and decided to go alone to the field. He dissuaded his

daughters to go out and advised them to take rest. In the field he sharpened a knife and at noon in the imitation of the voice of the daughters, invited the snake to the mid day meal. With a knife in the hand, the *Achäiung* ambushed behind the door. No sooner had the python stepped in the threshold, the *Achäiung* beheaded it. What was more, he skinned, cut it to pieces, cooked a portion of the meat and ate. The head and skin were buried at the foothills. The remaining portion of the meat was brought home for the daughters. The younger daughter understood as to what had happened. But the elder daughter fell in great doubt. She was about to weep.

The next day the two sisters started towards the field. The elder sister was in anxiety. She stepped quickly. The younger sister followed. Near the house, they found several spots stained with blood. On the pit in which the head and skin were buried a very beautiful flower called *Sankluk par* blossomed. The girls realised that the python had been killed by their father. The elder sister cried. At noon they invited it. But alas !

The younger sister requested the elder sister to collect the flower. The elder sister feared that she might be stuck there. The younger sister did not believe. She insisted time and again. So to satisfy the sister, the elder sister knowing her fate proceeded. As soon as she had touched the flower, her body gradually went down the earth. She felt completely helpless. Befooled and bewildered the younger sister returned home and reported the incident.

For the lonely younger daughter, the father sought a companion. One day he entered into a forest and collected a big cobra. With the magical spells he tamed the snake and offered it to her. In the evening arrangement was made for the sleeping of the daughter and snake on the same bed as husband and wife. Unfortunately the snake started swallowing up her right from the legs. She cried and requested the father to light a lamp. But the father took it as a love-affair and advised her to remain silent. Within some time the snake completely swallowed her. Unable to move further, the snake lay there. Surprised and sorry at the incident, the *Achäiung* killed the snake and cutting its belly brought out the body of the daughter. He tried his best to revive her but failed. The sad news spread in the locality. The woman who had preserved a piece of cloth wet with the medicinal saliva

of a snake heard the news ; she rushed to the spot with the cloth rubbed it over her body and revived her.

The story of a white elephant. In ancient times there lived a woman and a female elephant in a Halam village. Both of them became pregnant. The woman with her husband used to live in a hut built on a raised platform in the traditional pattern. She used to spend most of her time in weaving. One day during the absence of her husband, while she was weaving, from her hand the shuttle fell down on the platform by chance. As she was in an advanced stage, it was difficult on her part to move, to go down-stairs and collect the shuttle. There was none except the elephant in the vicinity. On request, the elephant came forward to help the woman, but it put a condition before lifting. The condition was that if their future children were of opposite sex, they must be married to each other. The condition being unusual and unexpected, the poor woman reluctantly agreed. The shuttle reached her hands. She went on weaving.

After a few months, both of them gave birth to two babies. A daughter for the woman, and a male calf for the elephant. The two children were gradually growing up. But in future they may not marry each other unless a very close intimacy develops from childhood. Any imposition may end in tragedy. The mothers foresaw the problem and so induced them to play together right from early age. Ignorant and obedient, they started playing together. The neighbours noted it and jeered at them. The constant taunting had appeared unbearable to the play-mates who decided to leave the village at dead of night. They did what they had planned.

The anxious parents of the girl announced the incident over the entire country with a promise to marry her with the saviour. A meeting of the village council was immediately convened. The village elders felt concerned, discussed ways and means and suggested the mother to go on cooking rice for seven days continuously. Whosoever could afford to eat up the heap of rice in a single sitting was believed to be capable of rescuing her. On their advice the mother cooked rice for a week, and on the eighth day almost all people assembled except two young and stout brothers, Puthiān and Rāngchāk by name. Earlier they did not get the

news. Now being invited, they came, assured to deliver the girl, ate all rice and started following the foot-mark. The foot-marks gradually increased in size. Initially they were like those of a rat, then like those of a cat.

On the way, Rangchak and Puthian being tired, took rest for a night under a big banyan tree. Unfortunately, it was a meeting place of the gods where all the deities flocked to hold meetings at the fall of night but as the venue was preoccupied by the travellers, the deities felt annoyed. They asked them who they were. The wayfarers told their names Rangchak and Puthian to the gods. Of the two brothers, Rāngchāk was younger and had some knowledge of the magic. So when his name was uttered first, the deities did not dare to disturb them. While one was sleeping another was watching. In the first half of the night, Rāngchāk was on guard and in the second half, Puthiān kept the vigil. The deities came again and put the same question. Puthiān uttered his own name first. So the deities caught hold of him, threw away and covered him with a big stone. Next morning, Rāngchāk found him moaning from a distance in the voice of a frog. Rāngchak rescued and lifted him up.

They resumed their journey. The foils now grew bigger. At last they reached a place where the foot-prints of the elephant became clearly visible. There they stopped and stayed for a few days. A large number of elephants was living. At the centre was the white elephant living along with his beloved. In the dead of night, when the elephants were asleep, Rāngchāk stealthily stepped in, reached the centre, awakened the girl and took her on his shoulder. While returning he was moving very hastily and some of the elephants were trodden and disturbed. The elephants awoke and resisted. A fight ensued. In the fierce fighting, Rangchāk drove back the elephants all alone. However, he too got injured and tired. Blood was oozing out. Puthiān washed him with hot water. Rāngchāk fell deeply asleep.

In the mean time, a mischievous plot came to the mind of Puthiān. He fled with the girl leaving Rāngchāk alone and asleep. To earn the credit, he made a false attempt. He took two teeth of a big rat and claimed them to be the teeth of the elephant kidnapping the girl. But the villagers did not believe. On being asked, he also reported that Rāngchāk had been killed by the

elephants. This news too appeared to them false. After awaking, Rāngchāk correctly realised what had happened. He quickly started, returned and refuted the claim of the elder brother. The marriage took place between Rāngchāk and the girl with all pomp and pleasure.

When things came down to normalcy, the young wife requested her husband to recover a valuable ornament which she got as patrimony but which was now in the hands of the demons dwelling in the inferno. The young couple, on an auspicious day, left home for the inferno. The entrance of the inferno was a hole deep, dark and narrow. The wife kept waiting just at the mouth of the hole, while Rāngchāk stepped down. To ensure a safe return, Rāngchāk fastened himself to the end of a long rope, the other end of which was with the lady who was instructed to pull him. It took time to find out the clue of the ornament and bring it into possession. She thought that he had been killed by the demons. So she untied the roped, threw it away and left for home. Unfortunately Rāngchāk was captured and imprisoned by the demons who rejoiced at getting in him tasteful meat. The poor captive contrived with the children of the demons. He promised to offer them some pieces of flesh from his body in exchange of untying his hands and feet. The simple children agreed, untied him and got flesh. Again he offered them a piece of flesh for a flat seed of *Pai* also known as *Sukai* or *Ghila* (*Entada scandens*). He made it magically potent and sowed there. The bean immediately sprouted and instantly grew into a very tall tree. He climbed up the tree and reached the mouth of the hole. Before leaving the tree, he kicked it down. Many of the demons died suppressed. Rāngchāk was reunited with his wife.

RIDDLES

While the proverbs are indicative of the people's experience and wisdom, the riddles are mark of their wit, sense of humour and keen sense of observation. It also indicates their environment and interests. Here are a few popular riddles.

A matted hair on the head, a stick inserted
into the rectum.

(pineapple)

A flower blossoms at night and shrinks at day-time.

(mosquito net)

Another flower blossoms at daytime and shrinks at night.

(umbrella)

The more it cries, the more it discharges stool.

(ginning wheel)

The more the mother weeps, the more the child grows.

(loom)

From a thing, when turned upset down, tears continuously drop.

(a small triangular shaped basket used in preparing alkaline water)

A big garden with numerous flowers, but there is nobody to pluck flowers from it.

(sky)

What is the nearest thing in this world that can be touched but cannot be seen with one's own eyes.

(one's own head)

Three brothers go on warming up their body by the fireside but unable to stand up and go away.

(tripot of an oven)

Two brothers wrestle with a bamboo.

(a ridge pole of a two-roofed hut)

King's turban never ends after so many folds.

(long path)

A small thing can fill up a big room.

(a lighted lamp)

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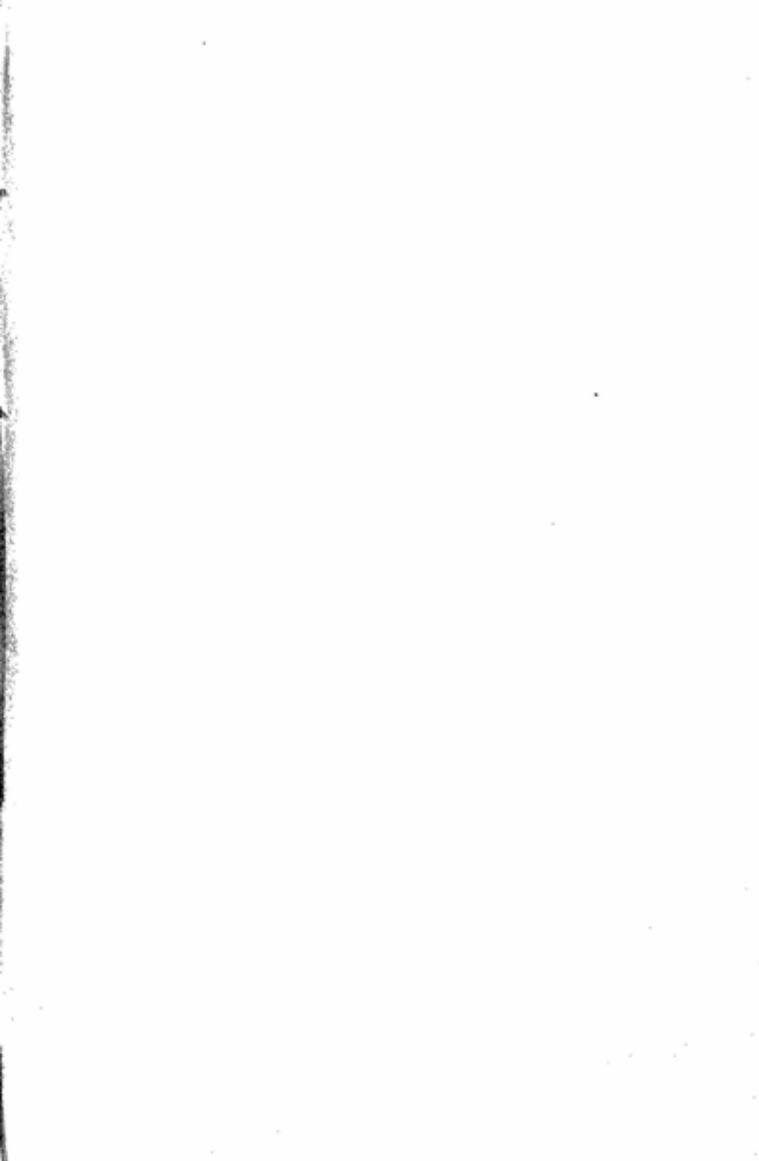
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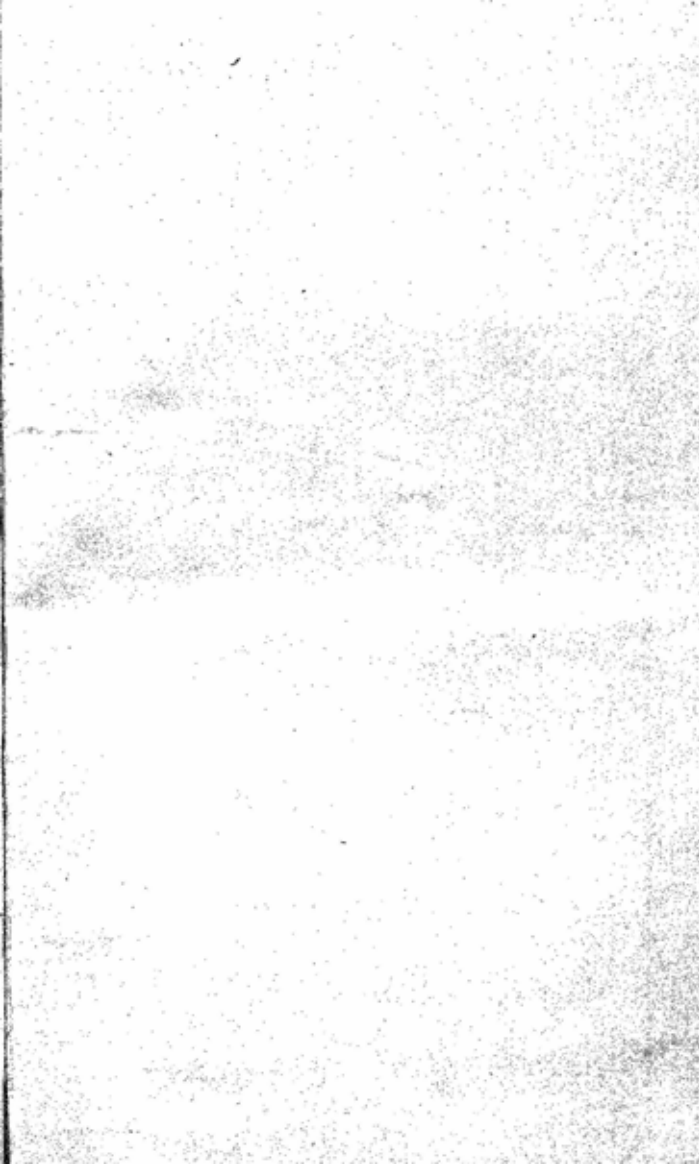
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