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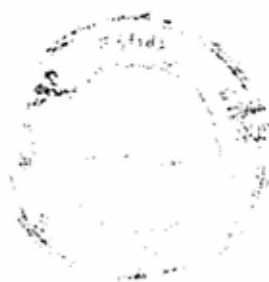
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TRIPURA





TRIPURA

ITS HISTORY AND CULTURE

OMESH SAIGAL

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CONCEPT PUBLISHING COMPANY
DELHI

63918

अर्वाप्त संख्या दिनांक 24.11.78
निर्देश संख्या 901.095413/Sai
नई दिल्ली

केन्द्रीय पुरातत्व पुस्तकालय

First Published 1978

© Omesh Saigal 1978

Omesh Saigal (b. 1941-)

Published by

Naurang Rai

Concept Publishing Company

65-F, Anand Nagar

DELHI-110035 (India)

Printed by

Sunil Composing Co.

at S.P. Printers

1067 Ajay Palace, Naraina

New Delhi-110028 (India)

Photographs by courtesy of

Robin Sengupta

Studio Sen & Sen

Agartala, Tripura

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Received from Patra Book Service, New Delhi, vide Bill No. 2491
dated 30.9.78 for Rs. 45.00/-

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Introduction

In March 1969, working at the Secretariat of the Delhi Administration, I first learnt of my posting as District Magistrate and Collector of Tripura. I was excited. The idea of getting out of the stifling and restricting atmosphere of the secretariat and the bourgeois-big business culture of Delhi appealed to my youthful mind. And to all young members of my service a district posting is considered 'glamorous'.

My first reaction was to rush to the Secretariat library to get as much information as I could about the land and people whom I would have to serve for the next three or four years. Imagine my dismay when I discovered that not a single book on this state was readily available. Visits to the bookshops proved equally fruitless. The only information I could collect was from the IAC flight schedule! It was from that day that I was determined to do my little bit to close this information gap.

As my plane glided over Agartala Airport, I witnessed one of the most delightful sights. The whole area was covered by luxuriant, lush green vegetation. The reflection of the sun sparkled like little diamonds from the small ponds and rivulets that dotted the countryside. The little bamboo and mud huts, in their idyllic surroundings, presented the most astonishing beauty that my eyes had beheld for a long time.

I was received by Ajit Bhattacharjee, the Additional District Magistrate, who later proved to be my most trusted and knowledgeable companion when I embarked upon my voyage of discovery of this delightful state and its colourful people.

My very first night, after taking over my new assignment, was a strange one. Loud cries of "Sachin Singher *mundoo chai*!" (we want the severed head of Sachin Singh!) woke me up. Jaladhar, the trusted Jeeves of a generation of Collectors, assured me that this was a normal routine for Agartala and need not disturb me at all. Mobs demanding the 'head' of the

Chief Minister need not be of any concern to the District Magistrate was more than I could comprehend. But then I had not yet been bit by the Tripura bug !

My first few months in the state were the most momentous I had ever spent in my life. On the third day of my arrival at Agartala, I rushed to the Chief Minister's house to find a number of school children, 8 or 9 years old, scuffling with the police to enter the house and *gherao* the Chief Minister. The next day, thirty workers *gheraoed* the Chief Minister in his drawing room, the *gherao* continuing for over 30 hours, and the Chief Minister refusing to be rescued. All this in the background of an incident two years back when an incensed mob dragged him from the Assembly and, but for the presence of mind shown by his personal body guard, would surely have lynched him !

The office of the Sub-Divisional Officer of Khowai was almost continuously under *gherao* for over a month and the position in the other towns was not much better. The pre-monsoon period, when the new *jhum* crop has not yet been sown and the stocks from the previous years crop have been exhausted, is indeed a very difficult one for the tribals. They flock in large number to the government offices for loans and gratuitous relief. This year it was particularly bad. In the month of June alone there were over a dozen *bandhs*, three dozen *gheraos* and over 600 demonstrations and processions. In Agartala, the law and order situation deteriorated so much that curfew had to be imposed for over three days at a stretch.

To top it all there came the floods !

Nobody who has not been to Agartala can understand the psychology of the people in the face of the threat of floods. Agartala is sandwiched between two rivers (seasonal mountain streams, really), the Hawra and the Katakhal. Towards the side of the Airport there is a small stream and on the fourth side is Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). In the event of a heavy downpour (a rainfall of over 50 cm in a single day is not unknown), these rivers get flooded and sometimes the water is over four metres above the level of the town, kept back only by the earthen flood protection *bunds*. Even a small breach anywhere can widen and wash away the *bund* and flood the whole town. There are only a few high points in the town where people can take shelter and there is no way of leaving the

town as in the event of a flood all exits from the town would be blocked.

In June-July 1969 there was unusually heavy rain both in Agartala and in the catchment areas in the Baramura range. It takes about 2 or 3 days for the muddy waters from the range to reach the town. And so it happened that on a bright, sunny morning a huge crowd apprehensively flocked to the river sides to see the swirling water in the rivers. The water level was steadily rising and small breaches were apparent in a number of places in the *bunds*. The gangs of the PWD were engaged in covering them up by cement bags filled with sand and mud. As the water topped the Agartala Jirania road, the PWD tried to join the two ends of the *bunds* by putting sandbags on the road.

A panic-stricken crowd is a dangerous crowd. Allegations of PWD lethargy or inadequacy of relief arrangements kept pouring into the control room, keeping me constantly on the move. I was almost assaulted in one place where the PWD store, crammed with gunny bags, was padlocked, the sub-overseer having retired. It was only when I authorised them to break open the lock that they calmed down.

Fortunately for us, the flood waters started receding before they crossed the high level mark and we all breathed a sigh of relief again.

Within a few months of my joining, the Prime Minister visited Agartala. The only earlier occasion on which the P.M. had visited Tripura was in 1951! This was a great occasion for this remote state, which always felt neglected. This kept us busy for over two weeks.

The first few months were only a precursor : my entire stay in Tripura was eventful. Politically the territory progressed from a Chief Commissioner's province to a Lieutenant Governor's Union Territory and then in 1971 to full-fledged statehood. There were a number of important changes in the revenue and administrative set-up as well. Tripura was one district with 10 sub-divisions and 23 development blocks. In 1970 it was re-organised into 3 districts and the sub-divisions were further subdivided into more than two dozen revenue circles, and over 175 tehsils (Patwari circles).

In 1971 the administration faced its greatest challenge : to care, feed and shelter the one and a half million refugees from

Bangladesh, a figure equal to its population. I was put in charge of this work as the Director-cum-Secretary of the newly created Department of Refugee Relief.

Despite the onerous burden of my duties, how could I still get time to collect material for this book, one would wonder. But, odd as it may seem, it was precisely for this reason that I could gather the material !

Everything that I did brought me in contact with the people, hundreds of them, and took me across the length and breadth of the state. In the absence of much published data (though there was some as I discovered later) this was the only way to compile the material. I undertook some important tours on foot of the inaccessible and interior areas of the state especially Jampui-Sakhan, Raima-Sharma-Gandacherra, Atharamura and many other areas. This brought me in contact with the old and knowledgeable people of their area and gave me a feel of their environment. Much of the information I have collected directly from them. In addition to this, I dipped into the unpublished records lying in private libraries and in the Collector's record room.

For me it was love at first sight with the people of this state. Whether it was my personal orderly, Jaladhar, or my proud driver, Subol, or my resourceful and efficient personal assistant, *Pal babu*, or it was the remarkable local journalist, Dutta Bhowmik, or that store-house of information, Magistrate Gupta, I have never passed a dull moment in the company of any of the persons with whom I came in contact. Everybody there appears to be related to the other and an outsider is immediately admitted into the fold.

Tripura grows on you, not like moss but like a beautiful rose creeper. In many respects one is still living with the *Kirats* of Mahabharat days; singing and dancing with the Mizos of Jampui hills one cannot believe that the automobile and the aeroplane can be true.

Tripura is a real amalgam of cultures. It is here that the Bodo culture still blooms meaningfully amidst the sophisticated songs of Tagore that one hears so often. A large majority of the people are Bengalis, refugees from East Bengal. The tribals cannot be easily classified, for they overlap each other. For the sake of facility, if for no other reason, they have been classified

as the tribes of the Kuki-Chin language group, the Tripuri group, and the other tribes.

History is usually the story of kings and empires, the people getting a secondary position. While the story of the kings is important politically and has been given its due place, the march of the people has not been ignored in this book. A sample of their songs and tales have been included to show the intellectual attainment of these simple people.

The people of Tripura are happy but poor. They live on the most beautiful land, but the land does not yield anything more than a mere subsistence. To clothe their beautiful souls with material garments will be a challenge to the administrators and politicians for many years to come. If this book contributes even a little bit in this direction and in creating a better awareness of their problems and needs, the author will consider his labour to have been richly rewarded.

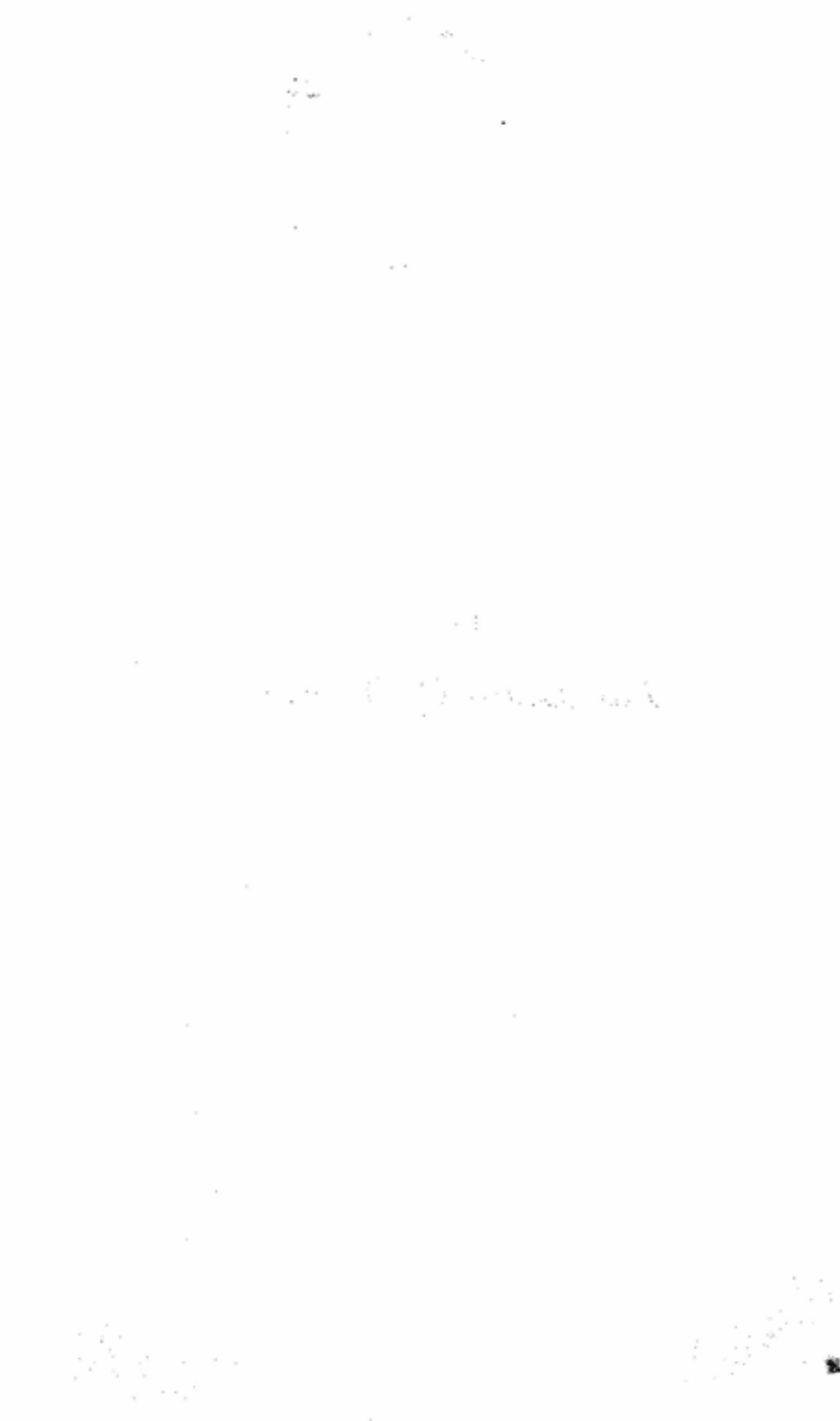
New Delhi

OMESH SAIGAL



PART I

The Land Of Tripura





CHAPTER I

The Land

Tripura, the ancient home of the Bodos, is situated between $20^{\circ}56'$ north and $24^{\circ}32'$ north and $91^{\circ}10'$ east and $92^{\circ}21'$ east. It is almost completely surrounded by Bangladesh on three sides, having a tenuous link with the rest of the country through the Cachar district of Assam. It has an international frontier of 1,000 kilometres towards the west, south, and north-east. Towards the north and east are the districts of Cachar and Mizo Hills in Assam. Its only access to the rest of the country is through a narrow strip of 30 kilometres into the Cachar district of Assam, the rest of the 160 kilometres frontier to Assam being through the high hill ranges of Mizo Hills.

The whole region from Assam to the Arakans, including Tripura, is traversed by a series of folds running approximately north to south which give rise to parallel hill ranges separated by broad synclinal valleys. Topographically the entire territory can be broadly classified into hill ranges, plain lands including valleys, and river basins. The hill ranges broadly run north to south losing altitude till they merge into the plains of Bangladesh. They gradually increase in height from west to east. They send out lateral ranges or offshoots which closely approach others sent out from the successive main ranges.

These divide the territory into broad parallel valleys, the area of which consists of low undulating *tilas*. The floors of the valleys also rise in succession from west to east, corespective of the drainage of the country. Tortuous streams with innumerable small tributaries flow from these ranges through these valleys

into the plains of Bangladesh where they mingle and merge with the waters of the Padma and the Ganges.

The six principal hill ranges in Tripura are the Jampui, Sakhan, the Longtharai Atharamura, the Sardang, the Baramura-Devtamura and Atharamura ranges. The Jampui range is situated in Dharamnagar sub division and is 74 kilometres in length. One of its peaks the Betling Sib (1000 m) is the highest altitude found in Tripura. This range is mainly inhabited by the Lushais and the Reangs, the Lushais having their villages on the top of the ridge and the Reangs on both the slopes. The top villages have now been connected by a jeepable road which will connect with Damcherra Phuldungsei. These villages in their turn are connected with Reang villages on the slopes and in the valleys by narrow tracts constructed by the local people themselves with the help of the government. The Sakhan range forms the boundary of the Dharamnagar and Kailashahar sub-division and its northern part is known as the Unakuti. The length of this range is 58 kilometres and that of Unakuti 20 kilometres. Its highest peak is the Sakhan (840 m) on which the Lushais have made a delightful village.

This range like others is also solely occupied by the tribals amongst whom are the Darlongs who are of the Kuki clan. The Longtharai range forms the boundary of Kailashahar and Kamalpur sub-divisions and is about 48 kilometres long. Its highest peak is Longtharai (515 m).

The Assam-Agartala road cuts the Longtharai range and on the highest point where the road crosses this range there is a temple of the Longtharai Sib. It is at this temple that the elephant catchers used to worship during the Khedda operations. The Atharamura range starts from the Amarapur sub-division and then runs into the southern part of Khowai sub-division and thereafter along the boundary of Khowai and Kamalpur sub-divisions till it merges into the plains of Bangladesh. It rises at Niungmarueta to a height of 514 metre and derives its name from the fact that it has eighteen peaks.

Two offshoots of this range run towards south-east and west meeting the Longtharai and Baramura ranges respectively. The southern part of the Atharamura range is known as Jharimura where one small hill range branches off embracing the Jharimura and Sardeng hill ranges. This is the common

boundary of Khowai and Amarpur sub-division. The length of the Baramura range is about 47 kilometres and that of its lower portion known as the Dehta range is about 85 kilometres. The Baramura runs along the boundary of Sadar and Khowai sub-divisions and the latter between Amarpur and Udaipur sub-divisions.

Near Saisum Sib a range branches off to Baramura in the south-west direction to the tri-junction of Sadar, Sonamura and Bangladesh. Another small range branches off from Dehtamura to Champamura and runs almost westward along the northern boundary of Belonia sub-division.

All the hill ranges were at one time thickly forested areas with lush undergrowth. But due to unrestricted fellings and the practice of shifting cultivation known as *jhuming* extensive bare patches are discernible. They are inhabited by tribals whose only company was wild animals and reptiles of all varieties. Except in the Jampui and Sakhan hills the weather in all other areas is heavy and stuffy, with mosquitoes and flies in abundance. These ranges are very sparsely populated mainly due to the restrictive practice of *jhuming* and the policy of the forest department.

In between these hill ranges, which descend mainly from north to south and then merge into the plains of Bangladesh, are the valleys which consist of plain lands broken by intermittent small hillocks. These form the plain districts of Bangladesh, namely Sylhet, Comilla, Noakhali, Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts. Some tribals have also settled down in the plains and have taken to plough cultivation on plain land, though most of them also *jhum* in spare time. These lands, especially in north-western and southern parts of the territory, are fertile and supply the bulk of the agricultural needs of the territory. Over 2500 sq. kilometres of these lands are cultivated by the agriculturists coming from Bangladesh and also by the original inhabitants of the state.

There are many rivers in the state which rise from these hill ranges and, after being fed by innumerable small *cherras*, flow through the valleys into the mighty rivers of East Bengal. They are fed only by rain water, most of them drying up during the winter and swelling dangerously during the monsoons, causing destructive floods. The Longai, Juri and Deo rivers

rise from Jampui range. They are respectively 98 kilometres, 79 kilometres and 132 kilometres in length. The Longai runs north between Jampui and Mizo Hills and then enters Assam near Damcherra.

The upper portion of the river is known as Saisilui, Tulianpui and Sai Lutlai. It has many tributaries of which the more important ones are Kalagang, Manachhara, Damcharra on the left bank and Boaraibui and Gabaicharra on the right. The Juri meets the Ragna of Dharamnagar and flows along the western boundary of that sub-division towards Bangladesh.

The Deo runs northward from Jampui towards Kumarghat where it meets the Manu river forming an arc behind it. This is a ferocious river during the rains and causes great erosion on its banks. The Manu, known as Chaumanu in its upper portion, rises from the Sakhan range and meets innumerable small streams as it flows southward towards Kumarghat till finally it passes into Bangladesh by the side of Kailashahar town after a course of 167 kilometres. This also usually overflows its banks during the rainy seasons causing heavy floods.

The Dhalai and the Khowai rivers have their source in the Longtharai range, the latter being called Maricherra in its upper portion. They are 117 kilometres and 166 kilometres in length respectively. The Khowai river flows towards the north-western direction upto Teliamura and then turns north till it enters Bangladesh near Khowai town. The source of Hawra river is the Baramura range and it runs for a length into Bangladesh. A sharp shower of a few hours is enough to bring this river in spate at which time it threatens the Agartala town.

The historic Gumati river, is probably the most important in Tripura. The ancient capital of Tripura was situated at Udaipur which is washed by its waters. It flows almost along the centre of the state dividing it into two equal parts. It is navigable for small country rafts and barges and serves to open up the huge hinterland of Amarpur to river trade. Many towns were flourishing along its banks in ancient days as is evidenced by the ruins at Udaipur, Maharani and Amarpur. It rises from the range connecting Longtharai and Atharamura. Raimacherra flows from the confluence of Kalyansingh and Malyansingh near Kanti Charan Para in the eastern part of Amarpur sub-division till it meets the Thermanadi near Duchaibari. The

Therma then flows from north to south and after some distance assumes the name of Gumati and runs in a singularly serpentine course upto the Dumbur fall of Amarpur sub-division. The length of the Gumati is about 133 kilometres. It is a big river and runs across Amarpur, Udaipur and Sonamura sub-divisions and then flows towards Bangladesh by the side of Sonamura town.

The Gumati valley is composed of alluvial soil and forms an excellent culturable land. It passes through gorgeous and magnificent country, consisting at places of huge straight cut rocks and at others of lush and fine greenery. It has a total catchment area of over 2400 sq. kilometres. There are numerous rapids along its course, which probably indicate the sudden rise in the floor of the valley which lies between the Devtamura and Atharamura ranges. There are rapids near Nutanbazar, Narayanbari and Amarpur. The Muhiri river rises from the Devtamura range and runs south-westernward for a length of 64 kilometres before it enters Bangladesh through Belonia town.

The land map of Tripura is traversed by several hill ranges, each having a number of peaks gradually sloping from south to the north till they merge into the plains. These ranges become higher as you go towards east, the highest hill range being the Jampui on the borders of Mizo hills. In between these hill ranges there is flat land which is dotted with innumerable low hillocks, the sides of which were once clothed with lush vegetation but are now barren due to the destructive effects of shifting cultivation. Several rivers originate from the hill ranges and flow across the valley towards the plains where they finally merge with the great rivers of Bangladesh. Except the Fenny river, which flows towards the south-west direction from the southern boundary of the territory, all other rivers flow towards the west or north-west into Sylhet and Comilla. The Fenny falls into the Bay of Bengal passing through the Noakhali and Chittagong districts. There are some waterfalls in the upper ridges of these rivers, the most notable being the Dumbur Falls at about 30 miles from Amarpur, which has a drop of more than 35' and is an important source of hydro-electricity for the territory. A 10 MW hydro-electric project has been set up there. These rivers are fed by innumerable streamlets which also

find their source in the various hill ranges, all of them being fed only by rain water.

Geology

Tripura was covered by the sea during the earlier part of the Tertiary period. The shore line was said to be running in a wide arc from Garo to Mikir hills, the sea continuously receiving sediments formed by the denudation of soil from the shore. The drying up of the sea in the Oligocene period was followed by earth movements as a result of which the shore line resumed its original position during the Miocene period due to subsidence. The water, however, became shallow receiving sediments all the time. Extensive swampy and boggy areas are still found in Tripura, especially in the south. Towards the end of this period there were intensive earth movements resulting in the formation of high hills. The present form that we find in this territory is entirely the result of weathering and erosion by rivers and streams.

Some of the rocks were deposited under shallow water conditions and are of fresh water origin. Some others were deposited under deep and tranquil water conditions and are of marine origin.

Rocks

The rocks of the territory are of the Tertiary age. They may be classified into three mutually unconformable groups, marked by uneven surfaces and fossiliferous conglomeratic beds. The rocks related to the Barail series exists in the Unakoti-Sakhan-Jampui axes and consists of fairly hard, fine-grained and yellow to pink coloured sandstones. Bands of calcareous fossiliferous sandstones and blue-grey slates and shales are also found in it. Some of the hill ranges in the west and the hill slopes in the east are occupied by the Surma series, which consists of medium to coarse graded and bluish sandstones. The Tipam series occupies the low hills in the west and the slopes of the Baramura-Debtamura ranges. It consists of yellow coloured sandstones which are soft and coarse alongwith soft shales of grey to white colour.

The land in the hilly areas is generally sandy loam to loamy sand and is practically devoid of humus due to the *jhum* fires. The ash produced thereby is washed to the valleys, enriching the soil.

Soil

The soil of Tripura is sandy loam to loamy sand, clay loam to pure clay or lateritic. It is grey to brown in colour. Large tracts of soil is alluvium consisting of sand, silt and clay, pure sand being exclusively confined to the river beds. Except the sandy loam, all other varieties of soils become very sticky even after a shower, but they dry up very quickly.

On the exposed uplands the combination of tropical sun and torrential rains has denuded minerals from the soil. These soils are grossly deficient in nitrates, phosphorus and potash as well as organic matter and trace minerals. As these soils have developed by weathering of sedimentary rocks they are coarse textured and reddish brown to brown in colour. They are generally very deep and are susceptible to sharp erosion. The soils developed from shales are medium fine in texture, dark brown to dark grey brown in colour, medium and shallow in depth and susceptible to erosion. Natural drainage condition is rapid while permeability is poor.

Both the soils are acidic and low in humus and lime-content. The low lands consist of the valley lands which are the flat plains streams and *cherras*. These lands have soils which are transported and mostly alluvial. The surface structure is medium to light grey in colour, moderately deep and in some cases impededly drained. The *lunga* land soils are alluvial in nature with wide range of drainage condition varying from rapid to impeded. The colour varies from light grey to dark grey depending upon the humus content and drainage conditions. Nitrogen and phosphorus content is fair.

Mineral Resources

The mineral resources of Tripura are meagre, apart from the clay found near Agartala, which is being used locally. Traces of lignite, coal, limestones and ochre have been reported,

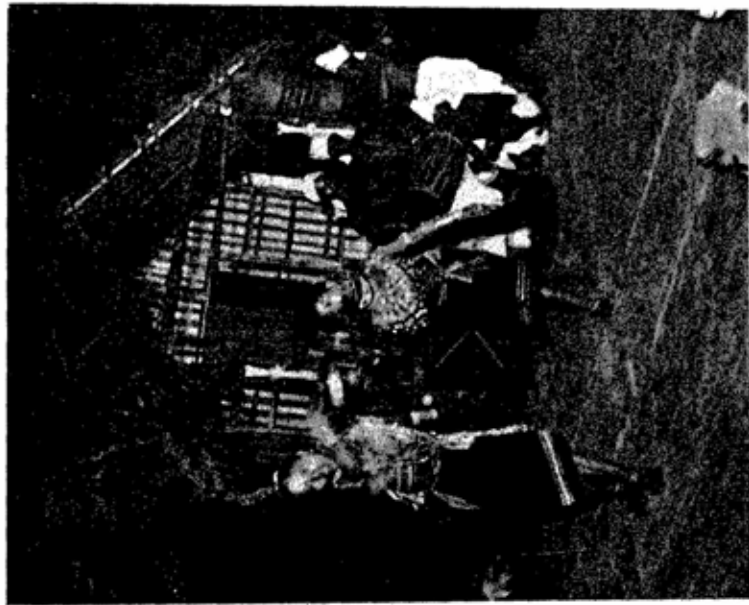
but the quality is poor and reserves too low to be of any commercial value. There is, however, a good possibility of striking oil in Tripura as the formations in which oil is found in Assam and Bangladesh occupy much of the territory here; it is optimistically stated in some knowledgeable circles that Tripura is floating on oil. Gas has already been found in test drilling.

There are deposits of clay in the vicinity of Agartala. Certain white and buff coloured clays occur on the hill sides near Paschim Champamura at the base of a low hillock. The seam is 1 to 2 metres thick with an overburden of 3 metres. A larger clay deposit occurs near Jogendranagar where, however, the material is of poor quality. The reserves there are estimated at over 33,000 tonnes of white clay and 2,000 tonnes of highly plastic grey clay. Clay deposits have also been noticed south-west of Ranirbazar, on the west bank of River Hawra. Kaolin bed of about 1 metre thick is found with overburden which is 2.4 to 3 metres thick. The reserves are estimated at 13,000 tonnes of white clay and 2,000 tonnes of grey, plastic clay.

The exposure of workable building material laterite have been found near Bagpasha, Silbari, Pabiacherra and Sindhukumarpara. Sandstones which can be suitably used as a road metal are found in the Gagracherra area and near Gorar Tila. The conglomerate beds from Bahuricherra quarry and near Atharamura range are also suitable for use as road metal.

Lignite deposits were traced at a place in Quarercherra branch of Ratikraicherra in continuation of the lignite deposits of Ujan Thangna. Some lignite has also been noticed near Hiracherra Tea Estate in Dhatuacherra and Indolacherra, near Natingcherra Tea Estate. The lignite exposure in north of Kumarghat varies from 15 cm to 60 cm in thickness with high depths while in Indolacherra it is 0.4 to 1.2 metres thick with very low depth. Lignite coal is also found in the Hrishamukh area of the Fenny valley near Sonarampura. The lignite occurs in pockets which are scattered haphazardly in sandstones. The quantity of lignite fragments decreases with depth down to 9 metres and then disappears altogether. Smaller pockets of lignite are found in some other areas as well. Shaly coat is reported in the Gumti valley of the Sonamura and Udaipur sub-divisions, but to what extent and of what quality

I. The Reangs are poor but still know happiness !



II. The Rupinis are staunch Vaishnavites





III. A bejewelled Reang beauty



IV. A Kuki damsel



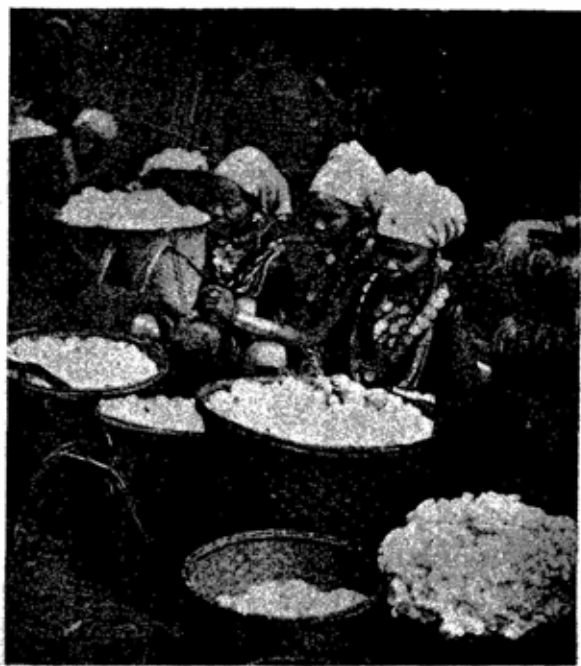
V. A Mizo girl from Jampul Hills



VI. The Jamatias are a disciplined, martial people



VII. Some coins of the Manikyas of Tripura



VIII. Reang damsels leave their forested havens to sell their surplus 'jhum' cotton in the weekly market

has not yet been determined. Limestone is reported in all the areas of Tripura except Sonamura but the quantity is so small and the quality so inferior that it cannot be commercially worked out.

Superficial nodules of ochre have been found in a dark grey clay seam in a valley below Bindapa-tilla hill in Belonia.

Petroleum

The rocks in Tripura are similar to the Burma strata where petroleum has been found. The Oil and Natural Gas Commission has carried out a detailed survey and they have found that the strata running into Tripura is the same as in nearby areas of Bangladesh where huge reserve of natural gas has been recently discovered. Test drilling has been taken up. It is reasonably certain that natural gas will be found here in commercial quantities and there may be sufficient reserves of oil to run a refinery of 3 million tonnes capacity in the course of time if the expectations of the experts are fulfilled. It is likely that the economy of Tripura in future, like that of Kuwait, will be interlinked with its oil and natural gas resources.

Forests

The forests generally cover all elevated flat land, hillocks and high hills. It is practically absent in the plains due to the settlement of land given in this area for agricultural purposes. The whole forest consists of four main types, viz., *sal*, *garjan* (*shorca-robusta*, *dipterocarpus-turbيناتus*), bamboo and miscellaneous. All these types are found growing either separately or mixed together in the same locality. Bamboos are found underneath *sal*, *garjan* mixed with *sal*, and other miscellaneous species. These species grow all over the state, but are concentrated mostly to tracts. *Sal* forests are mainly found in a narrow belt in the state in Udaipur, Sonamura and Belonia sub-divisions. Some *sal* forests are also found in the Sadar sub-division. The *garjan* forests are also confined to the same areas except that they grow in Sabroom sub-division as well. Some tracts of *garjan* are also found in Khowai, Kailashahar and Dharmanagar, but their relative importance is small.

Over 95 per cent of the territory of Tripura was covered with luxuriant forests about 50 years ago. It was this fact that got the princely State of Tripura the name of Hill Tipperah. But now, due to the extensive immigration of both tribal and non-tribal people from Bangladesh and due to the practice of *jhum* cultivation, unregulated and unrestricted fellings, grazing and repeated fires, much of these valuable forests have been destroyed and replaced with a vegetable cover like bamboo and savannah over extensive areas.

Sal forests are mainly of two sub-types which grow on dry highlands and paddy field lands. The dry high land type of *sal* is found in the Garji and Chandrapur forest reserve of Udaipur sub-division and also in the Radhapur and Pathalia reserve of the same sub-division. Its principal associates such as *konak*, *harguza*, *kum*, *awal*, *baheera*, etc., are found scattered in groups inside such forests where bamboo is also found. The paddy field *sal* is mainly found in Udaipur and occupies flat to undulating lands higher than the paddy fields.

Garjan forest exists scattered or in small groups, in the Betagaludhwa, Muhuripur, Trishna, Talakali bari, Unakoti, Manuehhelengata, Deo, Juri, Ujan-machmara and Damcherra areas. Due to its low fire resistance when young, it has generally migrated from the forests and colonised the areas adjacent to villages. The miscellaneous forests are mostly of dry or moist deciduous types. The large prevalence of bamboo forest in Tripura is mainly a result of *jhuming* by the tribals in the hill areas since time immemorial. Vast areas in the territory are occupied by bamboos, the only other predominant species being changgrass (*imperata cylindrica*) and assamlota in areas where there is no overhead cover.

Wild Life

Not too long back, it is said, elephants used to graze in the fields where now the imposing structure of the Secretariat stands at Agartala. About 10 years ago a District Collector shot a huge tusker a few yards from the M.B.B. College. At present, however, due to deforestation and extension of agricultural lands, wild life has become scarce. But, in many of the forest areas like the Jampui, the Sakhan, Gandacherra,

Raima, etc., herds of elephants are still found. Other varieties of wild life found in Tripura are tigers, leopards, sambar, barking deers, wild pigs, and monkeys. Wild buffaloes and bisons also exist, but they are on the verge of extinction.

Climate and Rainfall

For the larger part of the year, the climate in almost all parts of Tripura is hot and humid. The winter season begins in the middle of November and it is again hot by the end of February. Both the day and night temperature begins to fall in November, and generally January is the coldest month of the year. The lowest temperature during that month comes down to about 11°C. From the middle of February the mercury gradually starts rising, and in the month of May it becomes as high as 36°C. From the month of April to September, the temperature does not usually come down below 27.5°C even though there are usually heavy rains during these months. The relative humidity goes as high as 100 per cent and hardly comes below 40 per cent.

Tripura is situated within the south-west monsoon belt. Usually the heaviest rain is between May and October, more than 90 per cent of the annual rainfall being received during these months. However, there is intermittent rain throughout the year, not a single month passing without rain. The average rainfall over the past 50 years has been over 250 centimetres.

Mosquitoes are very common in the valleys and also in the hills except in Jampui and Sakhan. The valleys are usually hot and humid though in the winter they tend to become exceedingly cold due to a thick mist over it. The sun succeeds in piercing it by 11.00 a.m. and 2 or 3 hours later again vanishes behind the hills. Probably the coldest place in the plains of Tripura is Anand Bazar, located as it is between the Jampui and Sakhan hills.

The weather on the other hill ranges, apart from the Jampui and Sakhan hills, is not very pleasant. These hills are full of mosquitoes, flies and parasites of all sorts. Jampui hills, however, are very pleasant during the winter, a chilly breeze blowing across the hill top. It can easily be converted into a health resort in case transport facilities can be developed.



CHAPTER 2

Rulers of Tripura

About 700 hundred years ago a Hindu merchant complained to the Emperor of Gaur, the Turk sultan of Bengal, that he had been robbed of his money and jewels as he was passing through the kingdom of Tripura on his way to present tribute to the Emperor. The indignant Emperor mobilized a huge army under the command of Hiravat Khan and invaded the state. King Chengthum-fa, hearing of the mighty force which was about to strike him, was fear-stricken and bargained for peace.

His wife Queen Tripura Sundari was indignant at his cowardice and chided him. She took command of her troops and roused them saying that their king was acting like a jackal, and the brave should follow her. The troops were then feasted with the flesh of buffaloes, *mithans*, goats, sheep, pigs, deer and with thousands and thousands of jars of rice-beer. The aroused Tripura army then set upon the invading hordes and slaughtered them. The rest of the Gaur forces, led by their general Hiravat Khan, then fled and the victorious Tripura troops cheered their glorious queen who had led them to victory.

Rev. James Long in his analysis of the Bengali poem *Rajmala* or Chronicles of Tripura written in the middle of the 19th century stated that "though interspersed with a variety of legends and myths, it gives us a picture of the state of Hindu society and customs in a country little known to Europeans,—Tripura, the highlands of Bengal, the last country that yielded to the tide of Moslem invasion, and which in its mountain fast-

Queen Tripura Sundari belonged to a Raj which traces its descent to Drujho, the son of Yajati, the supreme ruler of the world. The early history of Tripura is clouded in mystery and romance. The tale is told in the *Rajmala*, the early parts of which were composed in A.D. 1458 by Tripuri priest Durlabhendra and two of his Brahmin associates, Sukheshwar and Baneshwar. This is the oldest specimen of Bengali writing extant and gives the story of the Tripura kings and their subjects. The Tripura kings belonged to the eastern provinces where he founded the city of Tribeg on the banks of the Brahmaputra. Drujho ultimately became a *sanyasi* and abdicated his throne in favour of his son Tripur who unleashed a reign of terror and oppression.

ness retained for so long a period of Hindu traditions unruined with views that might stream in from other countries". He adds that "the *Rajmala* is a curiosity as presenting us with the oldest specimen of Bengali composition extant, the first part of it having been compiled in the beginning of the 15th century, the subsequent portions, were composed at a more recent date".

The trend among modern historians is, however, to belittle and dismiss the historical pretensions of this narrative. Dinesh Chandra Sarkar (Copper Plate Inscriptions of the time of King Vijayamanikya of Tripura, an article in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. XVII No. 2/1951) states that "the authenticity of this chronicle for the early history of the Tripura royal family, however, seems to us not always beyond doubt". He continues:

"As I have pointed out elsewhere, even the first part of the *Rajmala*, usually ascribed to the 15th century, appears to be later than the middle of the 18th century. The composition of the second part of the chronicle, which deals with the reign of King Vijayamanikya, has been ascribed to the end of the 16th or the beginning of the 17th century. It, however, seems to us that both the first and second parts of the present *Rajmala* were compiled early in the 19th century." He gives the reason for this belief in the *Sakta Pithas* (JRSAB, Letters Vol. XIV No. 1/1948) wherein he states that as the *Rajmala* quotes verse 18 of the *Pithanirnaya*, which was not written before the beginning of the 18th century, "it cannot be assigned to the 15th century as it follows interpolations in a work written not much earlier than the beginning of the eighteenth century."

No doubt the relevant extract of the *Rajmala* quoted by Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sarkar contains a quotation of verse 18 of the *Pithanirnaya*, a work ascribed to the 18th century. However, from this alone can we conclude that the *Rajmala* must have been written later than the 18th century?

It is noteworthy that Dr. Sarkar accepted without comment the version of the *Rajmala* given by Kali Prasanna Sen as authentic. It is therefore,

Groaning under his tyranny, his subjects, reduced to a state of penury and starvation, emigrated to Hiramba (Cachar) but soon returned as they got no aid from the Raja there. They then worshipped Shiva, who promised to help them if they worshipped *Chaturdash Devta*. Their prayers were answered when Tripur's widow gave birth to Trilochan, who was immediately made the king by his grateful people. Tales of his wisdom spread far and wide and the Hiramba king offered him his daughter in marriage. There was a general rejoicing when the marriage was solemnised.

clear that his comments apply solely to that one. His objection cannot be applied with equal force to other versions, if any, without scrutinising them minutely

It is well-known that more manuscripts than one exist of the poem. One such manuscript is lying in the Bengal Sahitya Parishad Library (No. 2259) and was published in 1967 by the Directorate of Education, Tripura. The said quotation from the *Plthanirnaya* finds no mention in this copy, which differs in many ways from Sen's version. The manuscript which the Asiatic Society gave to Rev. Long and which was presented to them by Dr. Wise of Dacca is also, unfortunately, not available today. Without examining these manuscripts we can pass no hasty judgement on the time or period when the *Rajmala* was composed. It is, however, to be noted that Rev. Long accepted that it was compiled in the beginning of the 15th century. Without any evidence to the contrary we should accept this evidence at least as regards the manuscript he pursued and of which he has given a substantial account in his analysis. It is significant that all the manuscripts of the *Rajmala* available agree on the essential historical details about Tripura.

About the account of the ancient history of Tripura as given in the *Rajmala*, which Rev. Long calls the traditional period, Dr. Sarkar states that "the attempt to prove the antiquity of the Tripura State from epic and puranic references to a locality called Tripura or Tripuri is absolutely unwarranted. This ancient Tripuri is the modern Tewar near Jabalpur in the Madhya Pradesh. The name Tripura is undoubtedly a Sanskritized form of the tribal name Tipra borne by the aboriginal people which inhabit the eastern fringe of south-east Bengal and to which the royal family of Tripura belongs. The claim of the family to be descended from the lunar dynasty of epic fame may be passed over in silence". He adds that he considers "it very probable that the early members of the family were leaders of some aboriginal tribes of the neighbouring hilly region and that they became gradually powerful and extended their political rule on the adjoining plains. This event does not appear to be much later than the Muslim conquest of West Bengal about the beginning of the 13th century".

Trilochan had all the princely attributes. He was, as his heirs after him, of average size, with a round body, well-formed ears, broad chest, small belly, a neck like an elephant's and legs like a plaitain tree, arms round as a palm tree. These bodily quantities were combined with an intense devotion for Vishnu and Shiva. After a reign of conquest and glory, he was succeeded by the youngest of his twelve sons, Dakshin, who was the choice of both his father and their subjects.

Raja Kumar, fifty-eighth in succession after Yajati, visited Samalanagar to meet Shiva, who fell in love with a Kuki girl. On hearing this the enraged Kali kicked her so violently that she broke her neck. Rajeshwar, the sixty-first king of Tripura had no son; so he in his anger fired an arrow at a Shivalingam. Shiva cursed him that he would have no son but to propitiate the great God, Rajeshwar offered a human sacrifice which pleased the Great Destroyer and Rajeshwar was blessed with a son by the name of Micholee.

At the time of Pratit, the seventy-first Raja, Tripura and Kachar were bound in a strong alliance, thus uniting in a bond the two great Bodo people. This treaty survived the storm and stress of subsequent history. Jangy-pha invaded and occupied Rangamati (renamed Udaipur by Udai Manikya) from its king, Nikka, who was assisted by the Kukis, and made it his capital. We have already seen how Tripura was saved from being overwhelmed by the Gaur forces at the time of the 97th Raja, Cheng-thum-pha. The tide of Tripura nationalism was however, reversed by Ratan-pna, then an exile in Gaur, who

The rulers of Tripura take pride in claiming to belong to the lunar race and tracing their descent from the Rajput Kshatriyas. Todd in his *Rajputana* states that Tripura was one of the 84 mercantile tribes of Rajasthan. It is not unlikely, therefore, that a branch of the great Aryan tree, as it spread its roots over the great land mass of India, extended to the south-eastern extremity of India now called Tripura. A synthesis then occurred between the culture of the Aryans and that of the Bodos and the present ruling family is a fruit of this. Everywhere in Tripura one finds the fruits of this great synthesis, nowhere more than in the great Chaturdas Devta bari temple where the non-Brahmin *Chantai* (priest) leads the worship of the essentially Hindu Gods. In the absence of further evidence it will not be easy to "pass over in silence" the claim of the Tripura ruling family of descent from the great Kshatriya lunar race just as the claim of the other great Kshatriya clans cannot be ignored.

invited the Turkish sultan Togral to conquer the kingdom. He successfully invaded the state with the help of the Mohammedan troops and ascended the throne after beheading his brother. The Gaur sultan conferred upon him the title of Manik, which the Tripura rajas have retained to this day. This was probably in A.D. 1279.

Dharma Manikya ascended the throne in A.D. 1407 and ruled till A.D. 1458. Upto his time human sacrifice was very much in vogue, but he ruled that such sacrifice should only be offered three times a year. Under his patronage, the work on the first part of the *Rajmala* was started. He was a patron of learning and was a great king of the Tripuris. He died after a long and peaceful reign. An inter-regnum followed after his death till Dhanya Manikya became the raja in A.D. 1490.

Dhanya Manikya was the greatest of the Tripura kings. With the help of his queen Kamala Devi he tried to remove a number of baneful caste restrictions among his troops. He consolidated his kingdom by destroying a number of recalcitrant chiefs. His ablest general was Chuchag, probably a Kuki, who helped him reduce many of the neighbouring tribes. The Kacharis were also subdued after a successful campaign by Chuchag. The power of the Muslim rulers of Bengal was challenged when the Tripura troops seized Roshnabad (Chittagong) and drove out its garrison in A.D. 1512.

Soon Dhanya Manikya had conquered Arakan as well. A huge army collected from the 12 provinces of Bengal then attacked Tripura to Hussain Shah avenge its defeat, but they were routed on all three occasions, twice by damming up the waters of the Gomti and then breaching the bund to cause a huge torrent to sweep away the enemy. On the third occasion the raja slew a black *chandal* boy as a sacrifice to Kali which so pleased the Goddess that she appeared after dark amongst the Bengal troops and made so loud and terrifying a noise that the frightened troops fled. Hussain Shah, the former king of Jaunpur, who was degraded on his return to the fortress of Sagaria, is said to have put his head in his hands and remarked that he who would conquer Tripura ought to lead double the troops he had.

The triumphant Dhanya Manikya returned home to his capital in Rangamati and offered prayer to the fourteen gods

with great pomp. He was able to limit human sacrifice to three times only in a year and that too when suitable prisoners of war were available. He was a great patron of literature and sought to popularise Bengali. He was a worshipper of the lingam and built many temples and got artists to carve beautiful images. He is considered by many to be the greatest of the Indo-Mongoloid Bodos. He died in A.D. 1520 and was succeeded by his sons Dhanya Manikya and then by Dev Manikya.

Dev Manikya, a great devotee of Shakti, conquered Bhulua in Noakhali district. He was a *tantrik* and was murdered by a helping priest who was in league with one of his scheming wives. The brahmin was in turn killed by the army chief who put first Indra and then Vijoy, the late raja's two sons, on the throne.

Vijoy Manikya (A.D. 1535—1583) soon had the army chief murdered and become a powerful ruler. He defeated the Mughls at Chittagong and regained the districts of Sylhet, Comilla, and Noakhali. One thousand Pathan horsemen in his cavalry revolted and marched on Chittagong, but they were captured and sacrificed before the fourteen gods. The indignant king of Gaur struck with a powerful force but was defeated after a prolonged struggle lasting eight months. The Gaur general was likewise sacrificed before the fourteen gods.

Vijoy Manikya followed up this victory by marching to Bengal at the head of a huge force comprising 26,000 infantry and 5,000 horse besides artillery. The Persian Sultan Daud Khan, then engaged in a fierce struggle with the Mughals, could not do much to oppose him. Vijoy was thus left as the unrivalled master of East Bengal. He led his victorious troops to the banks of the Brahmaputra and sailed to the Padma in 5,000 boats. After plundering the country including Sonargaon, the Mughal capital of Bengal, he returned to his capital, Rangamati.

An astrologer predicted that his son Anantha would be king; so he sent his eldest son on a pilgrimage to Orissa. Anantha married the daughter of Gopi Prasad, the Commander-in-chief, who was once the raja's *gomasta* in Dharamnagar and later his cook. He succeeded to the throne after Vijoy died of small-pox, having ruled for 47 years.

Anantha Manikya (A.D. 1583—1585) declared war on the

Mugh raja Sikander Shah (it was popular amongst Mugh rulers to give themselves Muslim names) who was getting uneasy but was repulsed owing to the assistance the Portuguese gunners gave the Mugh forces. The raja of Tripura himself later engaged these Portuguese, whose descendants still inhabit Mariamnagar near Agartala. A larger force sent from Tripura was similarly repulsed and the Mughls marched on Rangamati and ransacked it. Thereupon Gopi Prasad strangled his son-in-law and sat on the throne as Uday Manikya.

Uday Manikya (A.D. 1585—1596) adorned his capital Rangamati with beautiful tanks, buildings and temples and renamed it Udaipur. Some of his 240 wives were so dissolute that they even invited a prince of Gaur to cohabit with them. On hearing this the raja had some of them trampled under his elephants and others devoured by dogs. The Tripura forces attacked the Pathan forces marching on Chittagong during the night and, after a war lasting five years, the Tripura troops were routed with heavy losses. A few years later Uday was poisoned.

His son Jay Manikya (A.D. 1596-1597) succeeded him, but nominally as the real power lay with his uncle Runag Narayan. Runag Narayan, seeing that Amar, son of Jay Manikya, still had great influence, tried to kill him with a stratagem. But Amar was warned by a friend and escaped. He subsequently got both Runag Narayan and Jay Manikya beheaded and himself ascended the throne.

Amar Manikya (A.D. 1597—1611) decided on some religious celebrations. He asked all the Zamindars under him to send labourers. When the Zamindar of Sylhet refused, the army was ordered to march upon his territory. His son was brought as a prisoner to Udaipur. Next, the Mohammedan commander of Sylhet was defeated by the Tripura troops who attacked in Garuda formation, the two generals represented by the beak, the flanking troops the wings, and the main army the body. The Muslims were subsequently defeated. After subduing a few more minor feudatories he returned to his capital and performed the ceremony of *tula*. Amarpur town is named after him.

Upto this time the Tripura kings had successfully repelled all external invasions and had carried the glory of their state beyond the banks of the Brahmaputra and the Padma. The invasions by the tribes in the east and the well-disciplined

Pathan and Mugh troops had been likewise repelled. But by the middle of the 17th century a more potent force knocked at the door of Tripura and threatened its independence. The Mughals had built up a huge and powerful empire in the plains of India which continuously needed elephants for its huge land armies. The Mughals therefore, threw covetous glances at this remote state. It was in these animals that the tribute imposed upon the kings of Tripura was always paid.

The treacherous Muhammad Shah, king of Mughls, sent his troops and seized Chittagong after having formerly agreed to postpone the fight till the Durga Puja whereupon the Tripura forces had retired to their winter quarters. When the huge Tripura army confronted him, Mohammad Shah sued for peace and sent an ivory crown as a peace offering. There was a dispute among the raja's three sons as to who should take the crown, the ones not getting it abused the Mughls. This led to war and the Mughls were defeated. In the moment of their victory, however, one wounded elephant trampled upon and killed one of the raja's sons whereupon the demoralised and confused Tripura soldiers fled. The Mughls then defeated the Tripura troops and marched on Udaipur and plundered it. The raja in the meantime had fled to the forests and subsequently committed suicide after taking a bath in the sacred Manu river.

He was succeeded by his son Rajdhar Manikya (A.D. 1611—1613) who erected a temple of Vishnu and distributed land to the brahmins. The king of Gaur, Adin Tagrul, taking him to be weak, attacked him, but was repulsed. He was accidentally drowned in the Gumti as he bent to drink the water in which the image of Vishnu had been washed.

His son Jasadhar Manikya (A.D. 1613—1623) was repeatedly at war with the Mughals. To get elephants and horses for Emperor Jahangir, Nawab Fateh Jung invaded Tripura in A.D. 1620 and after fierce fighting managed to subdue Jasadhar, who was taken to Delhi as a prisoner alongwith a large booty of elephants and horses. Having refused restoration of his throne on condition of paying a tribute, Jasadhar was exiled to Benaras where he died at a ripe old age of 72 "while meditating on the excellence of Vishnu".

Meanwhile Tripura was systematically plundered by the

Mughal governors of Udaipur which was set up during the interregnum of A.D. 1623—1625 till a dreadful plague forced them to retire. In 1625 A.D. Kalyan Manikya, a kinsman, was elevated by the people of Tripura to the throne of Jasadhar.

Kalyan Manikya (A.D. 1625—1659) was kind and equitable and struck coins in the name of Shiva. He toured his kingdom and fed the brahmins whom he held in great respect. He defied the Mughals and refused to pay any tribute. Thereupon, the Nawab of Murshidabad was directed by the Emperor to bring him in line. The powerful Mughal troops were repeatedly defeated in the battlefield, but the valiant Tripura troops were finally overcome by Shah Shuja in 1658. Thus for the first time in its history, Tripura came to be included in the rent roll of a foreign power and a part of it, Meharkal Comilla, was assessed at Rs. 99,860 (Mr. James Grant's Analysis of Bengal Revenue, April 24, 1786). It was "however unknown to the ignorant natives" and supposed never to have been assessed until a second time reduced in the eighteenth century during the Government of Shuja Khan.

Be as it may, it appears that at the beginning of the 18th century Tripura was still independent and had been independent for so long that their 1658 defeat was almost forgotten. It is also likely that the rent assessed by Shah Shuja was never paid.

Kalyan was succeeded by Govind Manikya whose reign was interrupted by his half-brother Nakshatra Rai who ruled between A.D. 1660—1666 as Chattra Manikya with the help of the Nawab of Murshidabad. After Chattra Manikya's death of small-pox, Govind Manikya regained his throne and ruled till A.D. 1669. In his short reign Govind Manikya became very popular as he distributed salt to his people, reclaimed the waste lands in Meharkal and settled the brahmins on land at a reduced rent. He resisted successfully all attempts by the Mughals to oust him from the throne.

He was succeeded by his son Ram Manikya (A.D. 1669—1682) whose reign was quite uneventful. After his death his younger brother Narendra Manikya usurped the throne, but after his deceit was discovered by the Nawab of Dacca, he was deposed and the rightful claimant was put on the throne.

Ratna Manikya (A.D. 1684—1712) regained the throne and soon built the Jagannathbari temple in Comilla. Towards the

end of the 17th century, Ratna Manikya declared himself free from the Mughals. The relationship between the raja of Tripura and the court at Delhi at the time of Ratna Manikya was an annual tribute paid by him to the Nawab in return for which they received *khilars* or honorary decorations.

The throne was seized by Ghanshyam Thakur, the second son of Ram Manikya, who murdered the Raja and assumed for himself the title of Mahendra Manikya (A.D. 1712—1714). He was succeeded by his younger brother and Juvaraj Durjoya Dev.

Dharma Manikya (A.D. 1714—1744) was deprived by the Mughals of a large portion of his plains territory where they stationed Mughal zamindars. In 1722 A.D. the territory was reduced to 17140 Sq. Kilometre and assessed at Rs. 92,993. Nurnagar, then included in Tripura State, was assessed at Rs. 25,000. This was, however, entirely remitted as a military *jagir*. These zamindars and the troops stationed in Udaipur proved a source of great annoyance to the raja who had them invited to a party and murdered after intoxicating them with strong drinks.

In 1730 Dharma Manikya banished his nephew and son of Chattra Manikya Jagat Ram from the country. He managed to induce the Nawab of Dacca to send an army to Tripura to enforce his claims to the throne by promising to pay up the arrears of the tribute. The Tripura troops were defeated and the raja fled to the hills as Jagat Ram ascended the throne.

With the accession of Jagat Manikya (A.D. 1732—33) to the throne, the whole of the country in the plains quite submitted to the Mughal rule and became annexed to the Mughal Empire. The name of Tripura was changed to Roshnabad and a considerable number of Mughal troops were stationed in Udaipur. In 1733, however, the usurper was removed as by this time Dharma Manikya had been resorted to the favour of the nawab.

There followed the short reigns of Makunda Manikya (A.D. 1733—1737), Jai Manikya (A.D. 1737—1739) and Indra Manikya (A.D. 1739—1743). This was a period of sordid court intrigues where all the contenders were trying to ingratiate themselves with the Mughal nawab. Finally Vijoi Manikya was appointed raja by the nawab, who allowed him a monthly salary and forced him to send all the revenue of the state to the nawab. On his falling into arrears, he was sent as a prisoner to Delhi, where he

died. Tripura was then made a Mughal province with Shamsher Kazi, a notorious plunderer, as Governor. He set up the son of Dharma Manikya as a puppet raja but when this failed to pacify the people he unleashed a reign of terror until so great was the outcry against his repression that he was ordered to be blown up from the mouth of a cannon after 12 years of lawlessness.

By the time Krishna Manikya (A.D. 1760—1783) ascended the throne, the Muslim glory was on the wane in India. The English East India Company followed up their victory in the Battle of Plassey with a treaty with Siraj-ud-Daula in 1759. They subsequently forced their vassal to cede Burdwan, Midnapore and Chittagong to it. The Company gave Chittagong a strong local Government under Mr. Verelst.

It was presumed by the Company's officials that the Mughals had occupied the lowlands after their conquest of Tripura, leaving the hilly areas under the control of the raja, subject to the control of, and tributary to the nawab. Therefore, on obtaining the *dewani* of Bengal, they thought called upon to occupy all the plains territories which were on the rent role of the nawab. Mr. Verelst, therefore, dispatched 200 soldiers and two guns under the command of Lieutenant Mathew to Tripura where they found the nawab's dewan already in possession of all the forts. The raja had fled to the hills. The plains were attacked by the Company and Krishna Manikya (A.D. 1760—1783), the brother of Indra Manikya was made the raja of Hill Tripura.

He was succeeded by his nephew, Jajdhar Manikya (A.D. 1785—1804) who was deposed and not restored to his throne till he had agreed to pay an annual revenue for the plains territories, Chakla Roshnabad. "The Company sought rupees, not elephants", says Mackenzie, "and so the hills were left to their native rulers!" A five year inter-regnum followed his death during which anarchy prevailed in the state, with various contenders for the throne inviting the kukis for their own ends. Ultimately in A.D. 1808 the English recognised Durga Manikya (A.D. 1809—1813) and invested him as raja. Since that date every raja received investiture from the English and was called upon to pay *nazar*. The rulers of Tripura continued to describe the

state as Swadhina Tripura, but the state soon fell in line with the other feudatory states of India.

The relations of the subsequent rajas of Tripura with the English were based solely on the concern to regain as much of their territory as possible. Due to the active support given by Isan Chandra Manikya (A.D. 1850—62) in ordering the arrest of the soldiers of the 34th Native Infantry, who had joined the first war of Indian independence by mutinying at Chittagong on the night of November 18, 1857, attacking the treasury and then marching on his capital at Agartala, he hoped to receive the sympathetic consideration from the British authorities in the matter of the fixation of the boundaries of Hill Tripura. But his hopes were belied. He was succeeded by Bir Chandra Manikya (A.D. 1852—1896), Radha Kishore Manikya (A.D. 1896—1909), Birendra Kishore Manikya (A.D. 1909—1923) and Bir Bikram Harikya (A.D. 1923—1946), all of whom tried to impress the British with the need to fix their boundaries in accordance with the correct historical position, but to no avail.

The last of these rajas, Kirit Manikya, retained the title, some privileges, and a sizeable privy purse when his state acceded to the Indian Union in 1949 till these were withdrawn by the President of India in 1970 and he became a commoner, thus ending a dynasty over two millennium old.

CHAPTER 3

The March of the People—I

At the height of its glory, the Tripura raj kissed the sacred waters of the Brahmaputra and the Padma and challenged the might of the Mohammedan conquerors. But due to the dissipation of its effete ruling class and the challenge posed by modern weaponry, the proud Tripuris were at last subdued by the Mughals in the early 18th century and forced to cede the greater part of their plains territories and pay tribute for the retention of the rest.

Thus in 1765, when Tripura came under British rule, it had been reduced to a small state of less than 10,000 square kilometres and a population of less than 50,000. Most of the country lay wasted by years of warfare and internecine conflict and the people writhed in agony after each Kuki raid left their homes and fields in shambles. To add to their woes, cholera and small-pox continued to take their annual toll keeping the people precariously perched on the razor's edge of life and death and struggling to eke out a miserable existence.

The hill people, left largely undisturbed over the years due to the inaccessibility of their territory and the unremunerative nature of the undertaking, continued to sweat out a subsistence level living for themselves. There was enough paddy, chillies, vegetables and cotton to meet their meagre needs and leave a surplus to be bartered for salt and other essential manufactured goods from the plains on the periodical bazar days. The ruling clan, which could get an adequate income (over Rs. 300,000 in 1765 when Tripura came under the hegemony of the British)

from its plain territories, did not bother the hill people with monetary demands, satisfying themselves with occasional call ups for their army of a specified number of tribals.

The elements, however, did not spare these people from their ire and they continued to be plagued with small-pox, cholera and malaria. But the Mongolian traits of self-reliance and courage together with "a great optimism and cheerfulness of temper, combined with a *bon-homie* and a *cameraderie* that are the result of a happy-go-lucky freedom", which they had brought with them, stood them in good stead. All misfortunes were submerged in their sense of colour and rhythm and all their woes were swept away by the cool winds that blew through their villages on the hilltops.

Writing in 1869, Lewin, the then Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Hill Tracts, had shown that a *jhumia* family could comfortably meet their needs from its *jhum* and have enough surplus left over for festival and *puja* expenses, sickness, ornaments and clothes. He estimated that a man and his wife could *jhum* 9 *kanies* (3.6 acres) of land every year. The man had to put in 176 days labour and his wife 146 days, leaving the wife enough time for household chores and him for cutting firewood and collecting other forest produce for sale. They produced Rs. 72 worth of paddy and cotton and Rs. 4 worth of vegetables. The man could make an additional thirty rupees by wood-cutting, bamboo or boat-cutting, making a total income of Rs. 106. Of this about Rs. 41 were spent on rice, fish, oil and salt, Rs. 10 on betel and tobacco, Rs. 12 on cloth, Rs. 14 on rituals and festivals, Rs. 7 on sickness, Rs. 15 on ornaments and Rs. 7 on seeds and implements for the *jhum*.

Therefore, the tribal, though virtually on subsistence level, cannot be said to be worse off than his counterpart in the plains. The condition of the tribal in neighbouring Tripura was not much different. By the turn of the century there was no significant gap in the living condition of the tribals in the hills and the settled cultivator in the plains.

When the rulers of Tripura were deprived of their plains territories, they were at the same time robbed of their only source of income. They had therefore, to increasingly rely on their hill territories to provide the revenues to meet not only their princely requirements but also the heavy demands the

English rulers made of them. (At one stage in the latter part of the 19th century the *nazar* was fixed at a whole year's revenue in the case of indirect succession and half that amount in case of direct succession. In A.D. 1785 the English collected a revenue of over Rs. 1,39,000). The hill people came under increasing pressure to contribute to the State exchequer. This pressure eased to some extent when some plains territories were ceded to the raja, but by then a new danger signal appeared on the horizon which, if materialised, threatened to wipe out their existence completely.

The heavy and crushing burden of taxation imposed by the English trading company and their successors and the ruthlessness with which they realized it led to a steady stream of immigration from British India to Tripura of the maharaja's former subjects. The population therefore, increased from 74,242 in 1874 to 1,19,125 in 1891, 155,008 in 1901 and 2,29,641 in 1911. The population steadily rose at the rate of 25—35 per cent every ten years till in 1940 it was 5,13,010. This despite the fact that the annual death toll always exceeded the birth rate. In the year 1916-17, for instance 1421 births were reported as against 1526 deaths. The corresponding figures for 1920-21 and 1930-31 were 2223 and 2356 and 2689 and 2976 respectively.

Not that all the immigrants were from the plains only. As long back as in 1884-86 immigration of over 4000 chakmas was reported from the Chittagong Hill Tracts to the Udaipur division. The number of tribals immigrating every year exceeded the number of those emigrating. In the year 1920-21 it was 2583 against only 880 emigrating. It is however, a plain fact that bulk of the immigrants were from the plains driving the tribals to the hills, where, due to the fast increasing tribal population, there was increasing pressure on the lands suitable for *jhuming*. It thus became increasingly difficult for any scientific method to be followed for shifting cultivation and the lands became depleted of their topsoil and the yields were drastically reduced.

The rulers of Tripura encouraged this process as it helped to augment their income. The plains lands were allotted to the non-tribal immigrants on payment of *nazrana* (premium) and settlement of annual land revenue. The leaders of hill tribes from the neighbouring hill districts were invited to farm out *jhuming* settlements and *sanads* and titles of raja were given to them.

As recently as in 1912 the Lushai chiefs Hrunghunga and Loikuma were given *sanads* to settle in the Jampui Hills. The Lushai population of that area is now about 5,000.

As a result of these measures the coffers of the Maharaja inflated. The income from land revenue, which stood at Rs. 1,54,338 at the turn of the century, shot up to Rs. 4,53,360 twenty years later, and stood at Rs. 7,92,073 in 1942-43. It shot up to Rs. 11,98,188 in the next year but then came down slightly due to the ill effects the war had on the economy of the state. The area of land under settlement had gone upto 10172.32 sq. kilometres by the end of 1946.

That the immigration remained confined to the non-tribal population of the plains is illustrated clearly by the fact that the family tax in the hills went up only marginally in all these years. It stood at Rs. 39,009 in 1899-90 and forty years later in 1940-41 only Rs. 42,712 were collected under this head. In the year 1945-46 the figure seems to have gone upto Rs. 68,544 probably due to better collection.

The Maharaja appears to have made some effort initially to alleviate the economic position of the hill people and to save them from famine and hunger. The report on the Administration of the Tripura State (A.D. 1899-1900) mentions that "to bring the hill people to settled mode of life—without which all efforts to improve their condition seem futile—has been the care of the Administration for a considerable time". It adds that "for this purpose the first necessity is that they should give up *jhuming* and adopt plough cultivation". The Report optimistically notes that "there is a growing inclination at least among the more intelligent of them to introduce this desirable change and some have already adopted the better mode of agriculture with very hopeful results".

The Report admits, however, that "with the vast majority of them the difficulties of meeting the initial expenses is insuperable". It was therefore, proposed "to establish a few agricultural banks in the territory with the object of advancing loans to the hill people on easy terms". But nothing appears to have been done by him. He also did nothing to regulate *jhuming* so that it could be done in a systematic manner by demarcating the boundaries of the various "jhum settlements" for which he had granted *sanads*. He allowed matters to drift; it did not

matter to him, if the drift meant certain disaster and chaos for the most loyal of his subjects.

The "inclination at least among the more intelligent tribals" to break this terrible vice-like grip of hunger, malnutrition and famine induced many to take to settled cultivation before the whole land was occupied and it was too late. In the Administrative Report of 1937—40 (after a silence all these years) there is a reference to the successful *pan* cultivation by the Khasis (who were apparently brought from outside for this purpose) in Dulucherra and the fact that "many Mugh families have taken to plough cultivation and their number is growing". But beyond recognising this position, the state appears to have done nothing to accelerate this process. Nay, they placed positive hindrances at least in the way of the unfortunate Mughhs by reserving the area in Mughroom, where they had settled, for a group of five tribes, not including the Mughhs. This was either an act of extreme thoughtlessness or deliberate state policy. Either way it brings no credit to an administration which had earlier pledged itself to the welfare of its hill people.

Meanwhile, the rajas were dazzled when the tales of the material progress from the Western world reached them. Their demands for more luxuries in the shape of motor cars, costly palaces and exquisite ornaments and silks progressively increased and with this increased the cost of maintaining the royal family. It remained as high as Rs. 5 to Rs. 7 lakhs throughout the first half of the century. The figure is actually much higher for a large part of the ruling clan's expenditure was met under separate heads. The palaces were built under the Public Works head and the princes were educated (expensive tutors were kept) under the Education head. The efficient civil servants under the Maharaja, most of them retired Bengal Civil Service Officers, were under constant pressure to raise more and more revenue to meet the ever increasing demands of the ruling family.

Some ways of raising the revenue have been explained above. Another source of revenue was forests. Rs. 1,95,362 were collected as forest toll in 1899-1900. Forests were then leased out as *mahals* and only tolls on forest produce were collected. In the year 1908-09 of the considerable forest area, 251 square kilometres was classed as reserve and 9885 sq. kilometres as unclassed open forest. No *jhuming* was permitted in the reserve

forests (though apparently a few isolated cases were overlooked either by corrupt officials or as a deliberate state policy). In the unclassified forests, certain specified timber trees could not be felled without special permits. The reserve forests were initially looked after by the Agriculture Department. The forests were taken under the direct management of the government to plug all the holes and tighten the administration. The forest revenues started going up as a result of these measures till in the year 1915-16 the revenue from forests exceeded land revenue, the first time in the history of Tripura. The forest revenue in that year was Rs. 3,72,477 as against Rs. 3,51,814 collected as land revenue. The revenue from forests continued to increase over the years and by the end of the war it stood at Rs. 10,65,228, over three lakh more than the amount collected as land revenue in that year.

Forests having proved to be great money-spinners now got due attention from the rulers of the state. The forest staff was strengthened to check revenue evasions and illegal fellings. The income from permits increased from Rs. 54,409 in the year 1915-16, when the system was extended to the whole state, to Rs. 1,86,622 in 1945-46. To manage the forests scientifically and prepare them for future use, it was necessary to reserve certain areas for this purpose. The first forest regulation protecting certain species of tree was passed in 1887 and by 1946 total of 2637 sq. kilometres had been constituted into a forest reserve and *jhuming* was made a penal offence there.

These measures of the government, though they boosted the revenue of the state, proved disastrous for the tribal whose fast depleting *jhum* areas were further restricted. And this came at a time when the fast increasing immigration rate was pushing up the population at about 3 per cent a year. The introduction of the permit system came as a further blow to the already hard-pressed tribals. For ages they used to supplement their income by selling firewood and other minor forest produce in the plains. Now, when the need for such supplementary income was more acutely felt, their rights in this regard were curtailed.

There were protests from the tribals against these measures of the authorities. There was rioting and violence in 1908 when the forest regulation as regards export of forest produce was extended to Sonamura. The number of persons charged with

forest offences rose from year to year. From about 90 cases in the twenties, the number went up to about 200 in the thirties and forties. Hundreds of persons were jailed for these violations over the years. The regulation which was most defied was the one relating to permits.

The elements too were not kind to the unfortunate hill people of Tripura. The twentieth century began under good auspices for agricultural crops. The rain set in well in time and there were no storms or hails. The rainfall was sufficient and well distributed. The price of rice was Rs. 3.75 to Rs. 7.25 per quintal and the agriculturalists found a fair market for their surplus crop.

They started with a good stock in their granaries. The *jhum* yielded excellent output of cotton and oil seeds which was sold in good quantities, the state collecting Rs. 1,22,726 as toll. They had sufficient funds to meet their needs of salt, oil, pulses, cloth and fish. A mood of great optimism prevailed in the state. Only 39 persons were lodged in the jails at the end of the year. This mood continued till 1903-04 when again the rain was good and well distributed.

In the year 1904-05 there was unusually heavy rain in the earlier part which seriously affected the *jhum* cultivation. The production of cotton and oilseeds fell to 60 per cent of the normal crop. To add to their cup of misery, which was already full, cholera in an epidemic form struck the hill people in certain parts and took a heavy toll. The abnormal weather conditions in the subsequent year caused a partial failure of the *jhum* and paddy crops, requiring the state to import larger quantities of Rangoon rice. The price of rice rose abnormally to Rs. 7.50 to 15 per quintal, the highest on record. Acute distress was caused and "except in a few stray cases here and there, (it) was practically restricted to a hilly tract of country occupied entirely by hill men, lying up the valley of the Gomti".¹ Rs. 4,080 were spent by the government on relief works and "at the close of the year the distress was alleviated to some extent by the collection and sale of forest produce", which activity, however, was soon to be restricted by the state by the strict enforcement of the permit system.

1. Administration Report, 1904-05 Archives, Tripura Government.

The condition of the people improved somewhat in the next few years. The price of rice came down and the export of cotton and oil seeds, sown mainly in the hills, had improved. In the year 1910-11, the toll tax on the export of these two commodities was Rs. 2,01,840, the best ever till then. But the war struck a heavy blow, especially to the hill people. There was barely any market for jute and cotton, and the prices of imported commodities rose. To add to this, the rain (230 cm) was unseasonable throughout: while the *aus* crop suffered due to heavy rains, the *jhums* and *aman* suffered because of lack of it. The price of rice shot up to Rs. 8.75—Rs. 20 per quintal.

The next year was even more disastrous. The total rainfall (304.17 cm) was far too heavy. 96.75 cm of rain in June-July caused heavy floods which destroyed almost the whole of the *aus* and jute crop, while a downpour of 33.09 cm in two days in autumn caused a heavy flood which destroyed most of the *aman* crop and inundated part of Agartala town. The export of cotton dropped sharply from 70,438 maunds² in 1911-12 to 18,951 maunds in 1916-17. Near-famine conditions prevailed in most of the hill areas. There was again a heavy flood next year which destroyed most of the winter crop and a part of the cotton crop. The timber and cotton trade was seriously affected by the war. The next three years were equally trying for large sections of the people. There was a bumper rice crop in 1917-18 but the people lacked the purchasing power.

The crops were again affected in 1919-20 when the price of rice went up so high that the government was forced to prohibit export and control prices. The price went upto Rs. 30 per quintal in the moffusil and as much as Rs. 50 per quintal in Agartala. The people in the hills, as usual, and the middle classes suffered the most. The wages for skilled and unskilled labour went up considerably (from 40 paise to Re. 1 and 30 paise to 50 paise in 1910 to 60 paise to Re. 1 and 37 paise to 75 paise in 1920) but it did not benefit the people of Tripura as almost the entire labour force was imported from the neighbouring British districts. The high price of rice, however, benefited the peasants from the plains, who alone had an exportable surplus.

The attitude of the ruling clan to these calamities was one of

2. Approximately 2½ maunds make a quintal.

benign calm and indifference. In their administrative reports they relegated the "condition of the people" after that of "cattle" under the head "weather and crops-agriculture". Great pains were taken to report the Maharaja's tour of Calcutta and the Governor's return visit. In this year the Maharaja spent over five lakhs of rupees on himself and his family and enlarged and renovated his palace at Kunjaban.

In 1923-24 Birendra Kishore Manikya expired and he was succeeded by Bir Bikram Manikya (1923—1946). The condition of the people improved considerably initially under his reign and he even had a *darbar* with the hill chiefs at Kailashahar in 1925 and visited some interior areas. The export of cotton picked up and 85,321 maunds were exported in 1925-26. The price of cotton also showed an upward trend. It stood at Rs. 15—Rs. 60 per maund in 1925-26 as compared to Rs. 12 and Rs. 25 per maund in 1924-25. This also benefited the hill people, who, however, suffered a set back in 1926-27 when the rain was unsatisfactory in the hills and the "rat pest" appeared, as it had been doing with unflinching regularity every twenty years, following the curious phenomena of the flowering of bamboos. The agricultural population of the plains, however, fared well, owing to the high prices that generally prevailed, "sowing the suspicion that the plains people were making capital out of the misery of their kinsmen in the hills."

The government went in for the first time on a fairly large scale in giving loans and relief to the famine-stricken people. About Rs. 50,000 was spent on relief. The movement of foodgrains from the affected areas was controlled, the first time recourse to such a measure had been taken. The next year, the state spent over Rs. 14 lakhs on the Maharaja and his family, and in 1930-31 when a bumper jute and cotton crop had no demand due to the world-wide depression, "the agricultural population found itself in a more or less hopeless position", Bir Bikram went on a world tour! The next year, when heavy floods had worsened the already hopeless position, Bir Bikram married for the second time with great pomp and show!

The condition of the plains people changed for the better, but the condition of the hill people continued to deteriorate. Cholera, small-pox and malaria broke out almost every year.

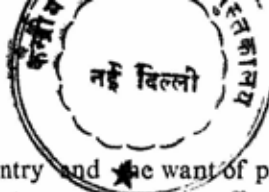
The export of cotton was picking up when the outbreak of the World War shattered any hopes that the tribals may have had.

The exports of cotton, which had risen from 34,011 maunds in 1936-37 to 68,694 maunds in 1939-40, crashed to an all-time low of 7,250 maunds in 1942-43. In 1945-46 it stood at the negligible figure of 2,118 maunds. The war, however, did not go too badly for the cultivator in the plains. The prices of rice shot up from Rs. 6.25—Rs. 12.50 in 1937-38 to Rs. 20—Rs. 70 per quintal in 1942-43. The prices seemed to have been stabilised at this level. To take advantage of these high prices, 5,96,720 maunds of rice and paddy were exported in 1940-41. Even in 1945-46, 3,52,157 maunds were exported.

The war situation was further accentuated for a time by hostile forces of nature at work with unsettled weather conditions, heavy floods, landslides and loss of crops, the hill sections, in particular found themselves practically in the throes of famine. The public health was also unsatisfactory with malaria, cholera, dysentery and small-pox being rampant. The middle classes were also brought to the level of a breakdown when inflation made the plight of the hard-pressed people worse.

The steady impoverishment of the hill people had its consequences. The number of criminal cases instituted in the courts went up from 401 in 1903-04 to 1,337 in 1930-31 to over 1,700 by the end of 1946. The first serious cases of dacoity were recorded in 1920 when 6 cases occurred in quick succession in the Sadar division. The people were so terror-stricken that "for months together they spent sleepless nights". By the end of 1946, the population in the jails had increased from 30 in 1899-1900 to 1,682. To meet this increased incidence of crime, the state increased the number of *thanas* from 19 in 1899-1900 to over 30 by the end of 1946, when a Police Commissioner was also appointed. This despite the fact that as early as in 1904-05 the work relating to separation of police and revenue collection was taken up.

A separate Superintendent of Police had been appointed in 1903-04. In that year, the Administration Report stated that "the tracts of country in and about the Kamalakhan *haur* in the upper waters of the Gumti and the tracts in and around Ghorakapa in the upper portions of the Feny valley are parts of the Udaipur and Belonia divisions respectively. The inaccessi-



bility of these parts of the country and the want of proper communication, render it difficult to manage them effectively from the headquarters of the divisions. Acts of lawlessness on the part of the people of these tracts, particularly those living close to the borders...have been frequently brought to notice but not always satisfactorily dealt with..."

The unsatisfactory economic condition of these people was also reflected in their educational prospects. While the total number of pupils in schools went up from 5,925 in 1915-16 to 10,000 in 1945-46, the number of tribal students (other than Deb Barmans) went up only marginally from 89 to 130. The total number of tribal boys in school, including Manipuris and Tripuris, also went up nominally from 1,533 to 2,243 in the corresponding period. The proportion of tribal boys in school, it is clear, perceptibly shrunk in the first part of this century, highlighting their deteriorating economic and social status.

The rulers did make attempts, howsoever, belated and ineffectual, to reverse this trend. At the turn of the century, the danger facing these people was clearly recognised but nothing much seems to have been done. In 1930 the Maharaja visited Kalyanpur and selected a tract where the tribals could be settled. In the next year, it was reported, the settlement and reclamation work in Kulaihaur had made good progress. "Some of the new settlers", says the Administrative Report, "managed to live in their *jhuming* system". About 11,000 acres in this year was reserved for the tribal people in Khowai and survey and settlement was taken up. Subsequently a huge area, a third of the state, was declared a tribal reserve. Howsoever, well-intentioned these moves may have been, they were predestined to fail as sufficient preparations had not been made for them and they were not followed by a survey and settlement operation on a scale required. The result was that in the next decade or so large-scale immigration had reduced his order to a mockery.

The first part of the century brought nothing for the unfortunate hill people of Tripura but sorrow, misery and hardship. Their condition at the turn of the century was none too good and it further worsened in the first five decades of this century, having received repeated blows not only from the hands of nature but also from the ruling clan and its administrative

machinery. Their *jhum* areas were severely curtailed by forest regulations at a time when the fast increasing immigration rate was already threatening to drive them away from their homes and lands. The gulf in their income and that of their plains neighbours further widened as they had to pay more and more in terms of labour for less and less of cloth, salt, oil and fish due to the fast rising prices of these commodities.

Socially also their position deteriorated as was reflected in their fast diminishing share of seats in schools. The frustration of the tribals found expression in occasional revolts and acts of lawlessness. The reaction of the State to this was to streamline the administration of the police and opening more police stations and outposts. They did precious little to meet the aspirations of its most loyal subjects. Whatever else they did, like declaration of a third of the state as a reserve for the tribals, was made ineffectual by an inefficient and corrupt Civil Service. Considering all this, it is indeed a wonder how these people have survived at all over the years, having received such dreadful blows from the hands of both man and nature!

But then, when their luckless fate had led them to the verge of despair, the inexorable march of history took them in its stride and they hopefully waited for the whiff of fresh air of freedom it augured. Even the bleeding wounds of partition were forgotten as the wave of enthusiasm and joy swept the entire country. The hill people of Tripura too looked forward to an era of plenty and prosperity.

CHAPTER 4

The March of the People—II

The flames of communal frenzy lacerated the country on the eve of Independence. Nationalism was presented to the people garbed in the dazzling colours of religious fanaticism. The foreign dispensers of our fate, who then held the reins of power, helped drive us headlong into the abyss of chaos, whilst our fiery passions reduced our souls to ashes. The great traditions of our heritage along with the glorious spirit of understanding and tolerance that characterised our race were alike consigned to the hell fire of our insane urges.

Communal riots broke out in Noakhali and terrified Hindus poured in large numbers into Tripura. The presence of Mahatma Gandhi managed to restore a semblance of sanity there but only temporarily. The fire raged so fiercely that no earthly power could possibly have extinguished it. The embers now and then burst into flames, compelling thousands of innocent persons to leave their hearths and homes and seek sanctuary in Tripura and elsewhere.

On August 15, 1947 India woke to a new dawn. Jawaharlal Nehru pledged to build a new India free of tears and sorrows, cleansed of all its tyranny and repression. After centuries of slavery and oppression, the Indians prepared to advance to keep their "tryst with destiny".

The people of Tripura were not to be left behind. In October, 1949 their state merged into the Indian Union. Considering their backward condition, the state was taken under its wings by the central government. Slowly more and more of their

affairs were handed over to them. A territorial council was formed, followed by an Advisory Council and then a Legislative Assembly with restricted functions. The Union Territory was elevated in 1971-72 to the status of a full-fledged state to take its rightful place among the other states of the Union.

During the course of the two World Wars, thousands had seen service in Europe. They returned to narrate the tale of the progress and prosperity that had been achieved in those countries. The new class of educated Indians read with hope the remarkable achievements that the scientific revolution had brought in Europe and America. The people demanded, and their leaders promised, acceleration of economic development so as to not only wipe the tear from every eye but also to herald a new era of growth and prosperity.

The First Five Year Plan was inaugurated in 1951. A community development project was launched on October 2, 1951 to revive and strengthen the half a million village communities and lead them to plenty and prosperity. Rs. 1,70,11,000 were spent over the first Plan in Tripura to develop agriculture, industries, communications and educational facilities, a sum beyond the wildest imagination of its princely rulers. The next five year saw a further spurt in the development activities in the state, a sum of just under ten crores having been spent. The years 1961-66 made even these stupendous efforts seem insignificant. A sum of over Rs. 15 crores was spent for development in the fifteen years after the merger of the state with the Indian Union which was more than three times of the total revenue of the state in the five decades preceding it.

The investments in the subsequent years dwarfed even these efforts. The outlay of Tripura's Fifth Plan was as high as Rs. 69.68 crores.

Remarkable progress has been made in various fields. The total number of students in educational institutions, which stood at 10,000 in 1946, jumped up to over a lakh in 1958. The figure currently is of the order of 4 lakhs. In 1950, there were only 404 primary, 40 middle and 24 high schools. In 1977-78, the number of these schools had sky rocketed to 1,571, 300 and 136 respectively. Against only 2 degree colleges in 1950, there are at present as many as 6, including one each in the North and South District. A post-graduate centre of the

Calcutta University was opened in Agartala in 1976-77. In addition, there are 1,075 balwadis with an enrolment of 38,500 children in the age group of 3—6 and 856 Social/Adult education centres in the State.

Because of this, 19.3 per cent of pre-primary, 83.6 per cent of primary, 36.3 per cent of middle and 26 per cent of high/higher secondary level children now go to schools. This represents a more than five fold increase in the last three decades. The literacy rate has more than doubled from 15.5 in 1951 to more than 30 now.

From antiquity, malaria, small pox and cholera have been the bane of Tripura. As against 28 dispensaries and 1 hospital in 1951, there are 117 dispensaries and 11 hospitals now. In addition, there are 27 primary health centres

In agriculture also, this infant state has made significant progress. About 75 per cent of the people derive their income from agriculture and 70 per cent of the state income is derived from this source. The production of rice, which increased from 1,33,210 tonnes in 1957-58 to 2,07,500 tonnes in 1967-68, has further spurred to 36,000 tonnes in 1977-78. The production of sugarcane, jute and potatoes as also other cereal crops has also gone up manifold. This achievement has been made possible due to additional area being brought under the plough (30,000 hectares in 1958—68 alone) and conversion of single cropped area to double cropped area (60,000 hectares in 1958—68) by provision of irrigation facilities and other inputs. There were hardly any irrigation facilities when the state merged with the Indian Union. By 1976-77, 33,700 hectares, working out to 8.71 per cent of the gross cropped area, had been provided irrigation.

There was hardly any modern system of communications in Tripura in 1949. The total road length has increased from 80 kilometres in that year to 4,275 kilometres by the end of March, 1978. In the first 15 years, 265 post offices and 13 telegraph offices were opened. The number is going up steadily.

Many other statistics can be recounted which tell a tale of steady progress. But there are others which introduce a jarring note. The number of crimes went up in the two decades after 1945-46 from 2,880 to 8,957. These have gone up even more sharply since then. The fast quantitative improvement in education has led to a sharp decline in teaching standards. The pass

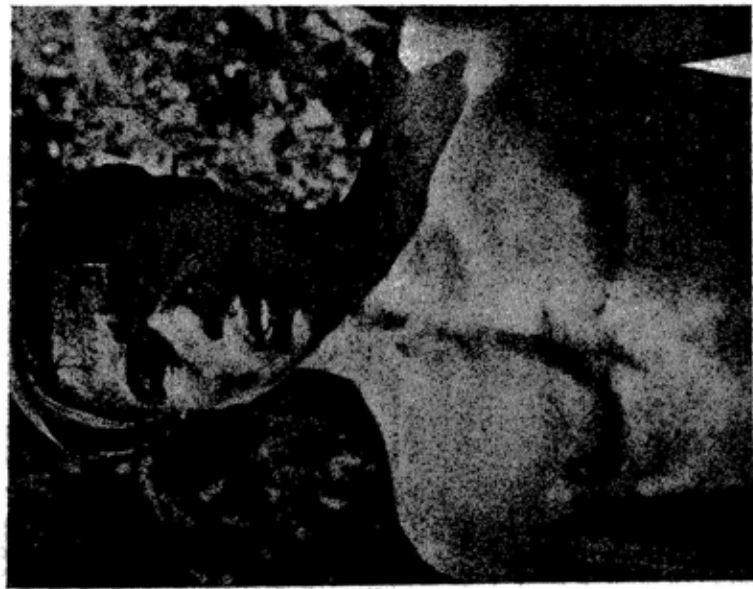
percentage in the matriculation examination, which was 75.83 in 1945-46, is not even 40 per cent now. The percentage of first divisions has also nose dived from 8 per cent in 1943-46 to a figure much less than 1 per cent now. Despite opening of new schools in interior and tribal areas, classes are hardly held there due to resistance of teachers to rural postings. I have myself seen schools in Khowai town overstaffed to the extent of 50 per cent while schools in interior areas of that sub-division cannot function for lack of teachers.

The forest area in the state is about 37.08 per cent. Through tree plantations in villages and government land, 52,400 hectares have been covered in the last three decades with valuable tree species. The forest department claims this to be an achievement which is "outstanding and extremely significant as this percentage of man-made forests to the forest area is the highest in the country". I wonder if the tribals would agree with them. It appears that the Welfare State has taken a leaf out of the Maharaja's copy book!

It is many years back that every village in Haryana was electrified. Now, thirty years after independence, 94 per cent of Tripura's 4,727 census villages are still deprived of this gift of science. Tripura's per capita power consumption is 8.7 units, a very small fraction of the abysmally low all India average of 120 units.

Despite the progress that has been made in the field of agriculture and cottage industries, the state still has to spend lakhs of rupees annually for famine relief. Hundreds of thousands of rupees are spent every year in providing loans to distressed tribals and agriculturists and thousand of rupees are distributed as gratuitous relief. Tens of relief works are started every year to provide employment to the indigent. Over 383 pockets comprising about half the area of the state are termed distressed, where large chunks of population annually suffer from acute lack of employment and purchasing power for 4 months in the year.

Once, while on tour in June 1969 of some of the interior villages, I visited a village situated on the 43rd mile post on the Assam-Agartala Road. The village, inhabited by Reangs, is situated on one of the many 'peaks' of the Atharamura range. The village head man, Sardar Naburoy, visited Agartala often



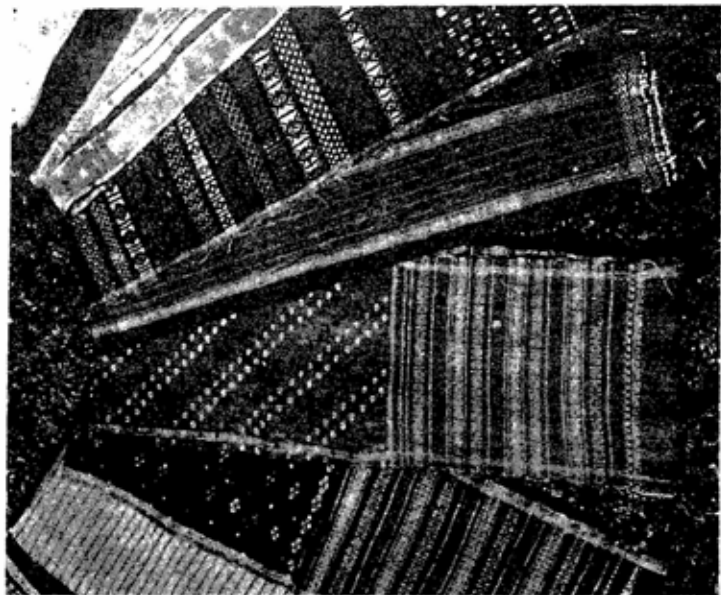
IX. A hardy race, the Tripuris are dreamy and sentimental



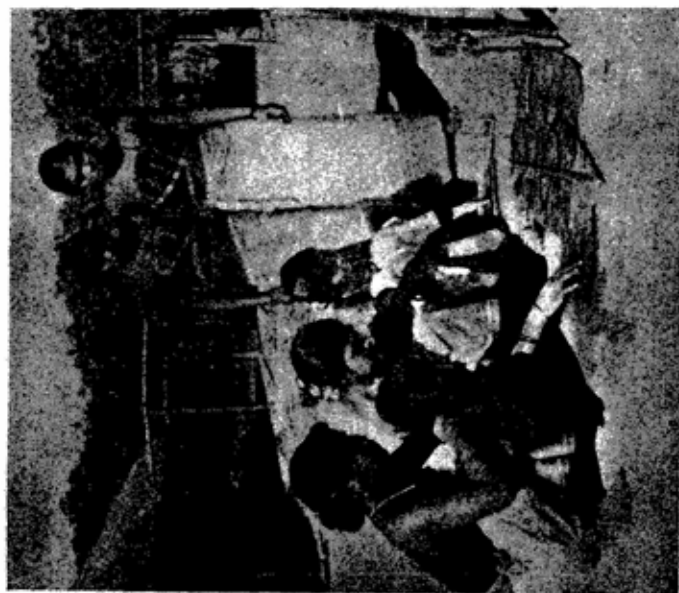
X. After an occasional jaunt to the fair, it's back to work again ! A Tripura girl seen harvesting her 'jhum'



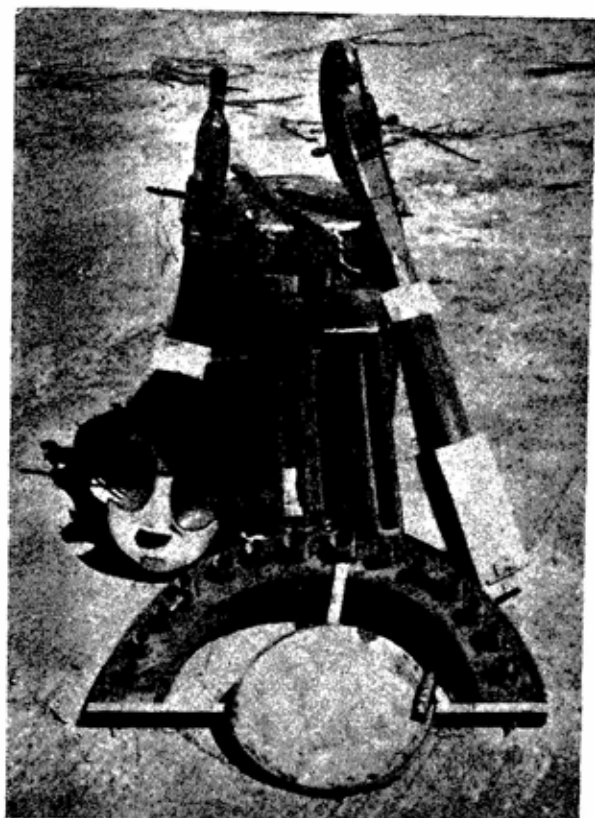
XI. A Chakma youth



XIII. The 'breast;cloth' of the tribals called 'rhia'



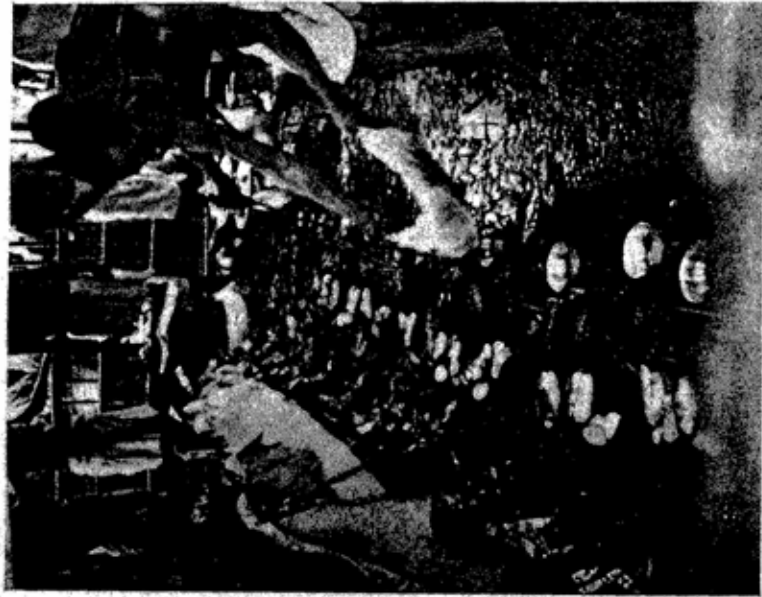
XII Tastefully attired Tripuri damseles observing 'Surja Darshan'



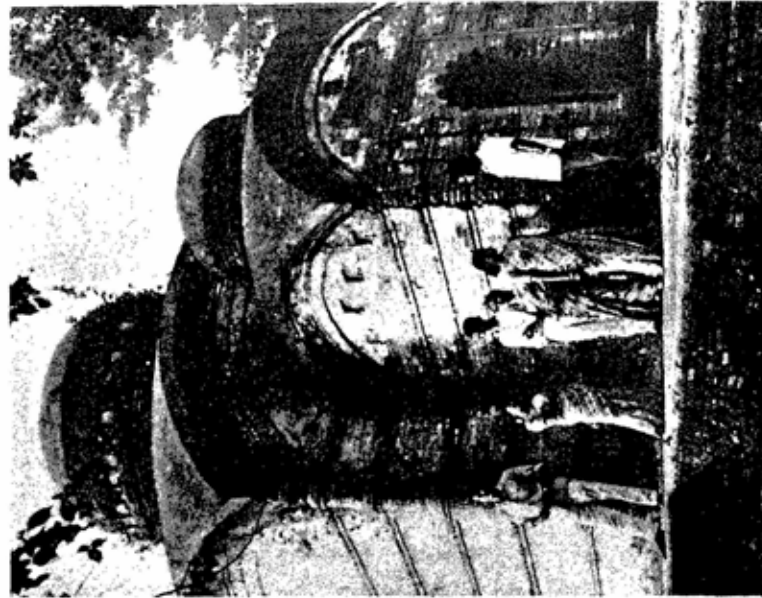
XIV. The people of Tripura love to sing and dance. These are the Dangdu, Kham, Sumu, Sainda & the Chagprag



XV. Time for leisure in the 'tong ghar'



XVI. A unique synthesis of indigenous religion and Hinduism—the 14 Gods of Chowda Devtabari, old Agartala



XVII. Bhubaneshwari temple at Udaipur

and knew many officers personally. On many an occasion he had brought his difficulties to their notice and action had also been taken to meet his demands. The forest department (the village is located in a reserve forest) is also liberal in issuing permits and in providing work to them. Some of the villagers have also been absorbed as forest villagers and derive some benefits from this status.

This village consists of a number of pleated bamboo and thatched huts some of them on the road side, the others a few hundred yards in the interior. I went and stood outside one of these huts and called out for the owner. An old weather beaten woman glanced out and quickly went in again. Presently, a small boy, naked and dirty, ran out of the hut past me and nimbly climbed the hill. A few minutes later, he returned leading a man. This man was naked except for a small loin cloth tied around his waist. He came and stood before me with folded hands. Not knowing what to say, I smiled to him and indicated that I would like to enter his house. Before he had a chance to respond, I stepped past him and entered his slightly elevated house.

It was pitch dark inside and, having stepped in from the bright light outside, I felt blinded. The man rushed in after me and both he and his wife (as indeed that wretched woman was) nervously spread a dirty sack cloth on the bamboo floor for me to sit. I looked around the hut once I had got used to the dark and was stunned to see what I did.

There was nothing there ! The thatched walls were entirely bare, the bamboo floor was also clear except for the dirty sack cloth and a small pot placed in the corner. To hide my sense of extreme shock, I hurriedly asked him what he had in the pot. The man immediately fell at my feet but I lifted him and requested him not to be shy and show me what he had there. Upon being implored, he went towards the pot and took out a potato like object and held it before me. Upon being asked he intimated and this was meant to be eaten. I was curious to see how it would taste. Shyly he gave it to me. I took one bite. It tasted like boiled potato and could have been edible if a little salt and pepper were added to it. Having satisfied my curiosity I threw it out of the door. I asked him how many of these could satisfy a man's hunger. He looked

at me wryly and showed me the empty pot. Subsequently I learnt that he and his family had nothing to eat for the last thirty-six hours. He had been given this Mishtee Aloo (Sweet Potato) by the local money lender, to whom he was heavily indebted, in lieu of his surrendering to the money-lender the right to draw his share of rationed rice. I have yet to live over my shame.

Poverty looks lovely when it adores the brush of an artist, but when it is the sole garb of a wretched human being it takes a gruesome shape. It kills not only the body but also affects the spirit and soul. It can make a devil of the purest of souls. Tripura must be an artist's paradise: the poorest people in the world, Congo and Sahel notwithstanding, live within its borders.

The population of Tripura rose marginally from 5,13,010 in 1941 to 6,45,707 in 1951. But then it spurted to 11,42,005 and 15,56,342 in 1961 and 1971 respectively. The main reason for this increase is the large scale immigration from the erstwhile East Pakistan. The population of the tribals only rose marginally from 2,37,953 in 1951 to 3,61,751 in 1961. The latter figure includes the Chakma, Mugh and Reang immigrants from the neighbouring Chittagong Hill Tracts. It appears likely that the indigenous tribal population has remained almost stationary, if it has not actually shrunk. More than half of the original tribals subsist on *jhuming*, living perpetually on the brink of starvation.

It has been estimated that shifting cultivation is capable of supporting a population of only 20 per square mile. To ensure a reasonable standard of living for all the *jhumias*, therefore, we need an area of more than 7,500 square miles. The total area of the state, however, is only 4,106 square miles.

After the latest survey and settlement operation, more than 3,000 sq. kms. have been settled as jotes. 3411.33 sq. kms. had been finally constituted as reserve forest after the earlier declaration of reserve forests was held to be *ultra-vires* the constitution in 1961 out of 3885 sq. km. ultimately proposed to be declared reserve forest. If we take away the land covered by the fast expanding towns, roads, tanks, etc., very little land is left for *jhuming*. This explains the sure and steady march of these luckless people to the jaws of poverty and want.

The welfare state, which succeeded the selfish, autocratic rule of the raja under the sovereignty of British Imperialism, did not fail to notice this trend. Crores have been spent till now for tribal welfare after independence. The good intentions of the Maharaja to induce the tribals to "give up *jhuming* and adopt plough cultivation" were given a concrete shape. The scheme for settlement of *jhumias* in colonies was first taken up in a systematic way in 1956-57 when the Bishramganj Model Tribal Colony was set up with 62 inmates. By 1960, 16 such colonies had been set up. But these colonies failed to serve the purpose for which they were meant. One of the inherent short comings of the scheme was the short span of time in which all efforts to improve the lot of *jhumia* inmates was concentrated. It was found that the inmates, who had been wedded socio economically to *jhuming* for ages, were unable to adjust themselves to the alien way of life introduced by Government. It was, therefore, felt that action would have to be taken in a well-planned, slow and sustained manner involving greater space in time to make the changes brought about in the life of the tribals more gradual and subtle. But, though by 1969, many dozens of these colonies had been established, the state had nothing to show by way of *jhumia* rehabilitation except long lists of deserters which every colony supervisor maintained! Unfortunately the programme still continues and 4943 *jhumias* are claimed to have been resettled in the Fifth Plan period.

Thousands of refugees poured into Tripura from the neighbouring districts of Bangladesh, the then East Pakistan. They were driven from their homes and fields and came to Tripura with practically nothing in their pockets. They were once the subjects of the raja of Tripura and now, finding themselves in dire trouble, naturally knocked at the door of those who had once ruled them. Some of the lucky ones had managed to swap their property in Bangladesh (Pakistan) with some property in Tripura. Some others, who could manage to retrieve their ornaments and cash, acquired property immediately on arrival. The rest threw themselves entirely at the mercy of the government, who tried its level best to provide for them. A survey and settlement operation was ordered in 1961. The operation continued for about seven years and

did some useful work, but at the end of the operation there were still a little under a hundred thousand families who did not have a secured tenure over the land they tilled. They were either shown as bargadars (share croppers) or as unauthorised occupants of government lands. Moreover, 86,340 persons are still classed as landless agriculturists. Their position is little better than that of the serfs of Russia before they were emancipated by Tzar Alexander II. Many of them are out of work for over 6 months in the year when they are occasionally called upon to do work gratis in the homes of their masters. It is true that the wages for agricultural labour have gone up about 60 per cent from Rs. 2.50 in the 1946 to Rs. 4.00 in 1970 but then the price of rice in the corresponding period had gone up 4 to 7 times. Their conditions therefore, deteriorated in this period. Though their wages have since gone up further since then but inflation has eaten into much of the gains.

The large majority of the land owning agriculturists (about 75 per cent) own less than two and a half acres of land, with a fair proportion of them cultivating less than half an acre of land. 46 per cent of operational holdings are of less than 1.25 acres of land. Till now the production oriented schemes of the government have hardly touched them. They have, however, gained substantially from the steep rise in prices of foodgrains and cereals. Despite this their economic condition remains near the subsistence level.

The formation of Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and the inenviable geographical position in which Tripura finds itself has brought other problems in its wake which affects every section in Tripura. Its substantial cotton trade with the East Bengal districts, which brought fair financial rewards for its mostly *jhumia* cultivators, has been blocked and its cultivation has suffered as a result. The area under cotton has come down from 7,000 hectares in 1958-59 to less than 2,000 hectares now. The export trade of cotton, already severely affected by the second war, never picked up. For other crops like tea and jute also, Tripura was cut off by partition from its traditional markets. Insurmountable difficulties of transport and communications, which the infant State of Tripura had to face, made it impossible to develop alternative markets.

Tripura has an international frontier of 930 kms. being

surrounded on three sides by Bangladesh. Its only link with the rest of the country is through a narrow corridor to Assam. The North Frontier Railway connects Dharma Nagar, a border sub-divisional town of Tripura, with Assam through a single metre gauge line. The distance of Gauhati and Calcutta from Dharma Nagar by Railway is about 500 km and 1,600 km respectively. Dharma Nagar is connected with the rest of the state by a narrow road which has to traverse three major hill ranges. The result is that the price of stone chips (required for building and other constructions) is as high as Rs. 10 per cft. in Dumber Nagar, the site of a hydro-electric project, as compared to Re. 1 in Silchar and a few paise in Delhi. The link is so tenuous that it is often affected by land slides and other natural calamities. There are numerous small streams and big rivers on the way which have been bridged with temporary wooden structures, which require huge funds for their maintenance and which are often swept away by sudden floods or land slips.

The only other route is by air to Calcutta over Bangladesh. The air distance between Agartala and Calcutta is about 315 kms. making it the cheapest and quickest passenger route between the two stations. The traffic, however, is practically restricted to human traffic, cargo rates being too prohibitive to permit any large scale movement. The traffic is at present practically restricted to import of some luxuries from Calcutta, their price being subsidised by government by exempting them from all taxation.

Lack of transport, the largest single problem that Tripura faces, has served to keep Tripura's economy backward and primitive and isolated from the rest of the country. It has successfully blocked all efforts to industrialize the state, modernise agriculture, develop its mineral and forest resources, and properly utilize its human resources by ensuring mobility and flexibility. It has contributed its share towards keeping a fair proportion of the people on the verge of starvation and famine.

Even in fields where the state has made undoubted progress, problems have arisen which the state is finding exceedingly difficult to master. The growth of education in Tripura has really been remarkable and would give credit to any administrator or politician. The policy regarding free and compulsory

education was first announced during Maharaja Bir Bikram's reign in 1937 simultaneously with the laying of the foundation stone of the M.B.B. College at Agartala. By the end of 1946 there were four such institutions functioning in the state with 867 pupils. In 1961 education up to class VIII was made free. Subsequently school education up to Higher Secondary stage was made free. An engineering college with an intake of 120 was opened and 127 students were admitted in the Polytechnic Institute at Narasingarh. Now over 4 lakhs of children are receiving education.

This fast expansion in the educational facilities created problems in its wake. The administrative structure could not expand fast enough to cope up with the fast multiplying problems of management. The absenteeism amongst the teachers, especially in the interior rural areas, increased and the standard of teaching went down. There were class rooms without furniture and science laboratories without equipment. The recreational facilities for the students were sadly lacking and play fields could not be constructed fast enough to meet their increasing aspirations. The class rooms were overcrowded and primary schools were raised to secondary schools, and secondary schools to high schools without preparing the ground for such change. The result was disastrous : it is reflected not only in the fast increasing percentage of failures but also in the ever-growing student unrest.

Not more than 10 per cent of students passing from High Schools get seats in colleges, the rest being thrown out on the streets at a stage when they are fit only to become lower division clerks in Government offices, or teachers in primary and secondary schools. Initially the problem presented no difficulties as the education department and the other governmental agencies were fast expanding and a good proportion of these boys could be absorbed. But soon the employment opportunities provided by government began to taper off and scores of these young men began to join the ranks of the educated unemployed. The number of job seekers on the live registers of the unemployment exchanges, which was 4,377 in 1961, shot up to 29,892 in 1971 and stood at 56,758 in 1977. The boys in the school started getting restive as they saw their senior colleagues pacing the streets in search of jobs, which did not exist.

Soon the graduates from the colleges joined their ranks and the problem started reaching alarming proportions. *Bekar Samitis* were organised all over the state and huge rallies, public meetings and demonstrations were organised. In the small, peaceful township of Melaghar the police had to resort to firing to keep violent crowds of unemployed in check. Most of them come from agricultural families. It is therefore, natural to think of educated boys going back to the farms and practising new and better modes and techniques, thus effecting a revolution in agriculture. The pressure on land is being increasingly felt. The majority of the farms are small, about 46 per cent being less than 0.5 hectare. The amount of cultivable waste lands now available may not even be sufficient for the large number of agricultural landless and *jhumias*. These boys could only be engaged on farms to the detriment of those already engaged there and without making any impact on the overall employment position. In any case it has been estimated that 60 per cent of the rural working force is under-employed.

Industry, once it gets going, could absorb all these boys and more. The conditions in Tripura are conducive for setting up small scale industries in handlooms and handicrafts, blacksmithy and carpentry units, Agro industries, china wares, jute based industries, etc. But the problem of marketing and the low volume of raw material availability stand in the way of any important development of industry. The tragedy of Tripura is that whatever it can make, Assam can make too. And Assam, not a very industrialised state itself, is nearer the markets and sources of raw material than Tripura is. The problem of transport ultimately stands as a great bottleneck in the way of Tripura's industrial progress, and as a key to its solution lies the question of India's relations with Bangladesh and in this Tripura has no say at all. A beginning has recently been made with a jute mill and a big paper project is on the anvil.

With increased production in agriculture and a rise of the standard of living, promised by the developmental plans, the volume of business is bound to expand. More shops, markets and warehouses will be opened, providing an outlet for at least some of the unemployed. But the opportunities thus provided will be strictly limited and will serve to merely scratch the

surface of the problem, the hard core will remain ready to explode at any moment.

The government has already expanded its bureaucratic organisation almost to the point of bursting. The government employees are too getting restive, putting in more and more demands with which the government is unable to cope. It is unlikely that the government will go in for large scale expansion in the next few years. Even if they do, it will at best serve to postpone the problem to some near date in the future. In any case it is not possible to absorb more than a small proportion of the unemployed.

The problem is an explosive as it is challenging. If the situation is not faced and the problem solved, the problem is likely to take a huge monstrous shape and cast an evil shadow on the entire future of the state.

More than thirty years after independence, the problem of the *jhumia* and the landless agriculturist in Tripura poses a challenge to the enterprise and ability of its bureaucracy and the broadness of vision and far-sightedness of its statesmen. The task of industrialisation of Tripura, in which lies the real secret of success for its manifold problems and which seems hopeless and impossible, has to be successfully undertaken and completed if Tripura's march to poverty is to be halted and if Tripura is to be taken away from the twilight between hope and despair to the wonderful dawn of freedom and joy.

PART II

*The People and their
Cultural Heritage*

CHAPTER 5

The Great Bodo People

She : Flies are buzzing in your tong-ghar; mine is at a height and a beautiful breeze blows here. If your house leaks, come into mine.

He : If I come to your house, who will protect my crops from the crows?

She : You have a bow slung on your shoulders; kill them and come.

He : I have no dao; will your father give me one for protection? I have nothing on; will your mother give me some clothes?

She : They will surely give. But you do not want to come. Keep your clothes carefully in your silver shelf and come.

He : But what if your father attacks me with a bamboo? What if he strikes me with his dao? Will you protect me then?

She : I will take his bamboo blows on my back and use my neck as a shield against his dao.

He : Tell your father to allow me to keep my dao with his and my clothes in your shelf.

She : My parents are already agreeable, but you do not want to come. Tell me truly, do you really want to come?

He : I will come; I will surely come.

This beautiful sound mingles with the breeze and with the gentle tweeting of birds and rises above the glistening *jhum*-fields to merge with the clouds above. The Tripuris are inspired by the gay abandon of the birds and the sweet fragrance of

the flowers. They are born optimists, cheerful by temperament, freedom-loving and happy-go-lucky.

The tradition and history of this simple and brave people can be traced to early Mongoloid or kirat movements. The kirats entered India through the Brahmaputra valley about three thousand years ago. From there they spread along the Himalayan slopes towards Himachal Pradesh where they were known to the Aryan settlers of the plains as a cave-dwelling people who provided them with essential herbs like the *soma*. At the time of the Ramayana and Mahabharata when a great synthesis was taking shape between the Aryan and Dravidian cultures the kirats had occupied the southern tracts of the Himalayas and the whole of north-eastern India including the Brahmaputra valley, Bengal and north Bihar. They were known to the Greeks as a flat-nosed people who occupied the Gangetic delta.

The kirats are described in the Mahabharata as gold-like in colour ("Taking up a Kirat resemblance, like unto a tree of gold"). They are associated with the Chinese. In the Ramayana the kirats are described thus: The Kirats, with hair done in pointed top-knots, pleasant to look at, shining like gold, able to move under water, terrible, veritable tiger-men, so are they famed. They were supposed to be rich in jewels and could expertly weave cloth of all varieties.

Their life was simple. They subsisted on herbs and roots and dressed themselves in skins. They were adept in the art of weaving and were rich with forest and mineral wealth. They were handsome and tied their hair in a top-knot over their heads (as some of them do to this date). In war they were ferocious warriors, cruel and terrible. Their language and dialect belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family. The kirats as a geographical and ethnic notion include the Himalayan tribes—the Bodos, the Nagas, the Kukis, the Ahoms, the Indian Tibetans, the Khasis, and the earlier tribes who have now become absorbed in the plains population of northern and north-eastern India.

The Bodos, unlike the Nagas, spread over the whole of north-eastern India. They are the most important of the Kirat tribes and constitute the basis of the present-day population of these areas. They appear to have first settled in the Brahmaputra valley, from where they gradually spread over to and occupied

the tracts of north Bengal and north Bihar. They occupied the Garo Hills and Mymensing areas, which tracts they continue to occupy to this day as Garos and Haijongs respectively.

The Haijongs, though Bengalised due to constant contacts with that language group, retain their essential Bodo characteristics. From Nowgong district of Assam they spread out through Cachar and Sylhet to Tripura where they founded a Bodo State. From here they occupied the tract to the east of the Ganges in Comilla and Noakhali districts. The whole of Assam, with the exception of the Khasi hills and north and east Bengal became the country of the Bodos. Today, except in a few tracts in Tripura, Cachar and Garo Hills, the Bodos have been absorbed in the great mass of Bengali and Assamese-speaking peoples. There may now be a little over a million Bodo-speaking people left in India.

Among the Kirats were the Himalayan tribes speaking languages like the Newari, Lepcha, Magar and Gurung. Amongst the earlier settlers are the speakers of languages like Dhimal, Khambu and Kanwari. They first settled in Nepal, where the Nevars held sway till the Gurkha conquest in 1767, from where they spread as far west as Garhwal and Kumaon. Of all these tribes only the Nevars have managed to preserve their language and traditions.

The Nagas, who are in occupation of the Naga Hills, have close linguistic ties with the Bodos. They have absorbed some Negroid blood and are split up into a number of rival tribes who cannot understand each other. The Kukis are an important section of the Kirats settled in Assam. They have close affinity with the Chins of Burma and settled fairly early in Mizo Hills, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Manipur, from here they came in fair numbers to Tripura where they are locally known as Darlongs, Halams, etc. By the fifteenth century the Meiteis or Manipuris entered the Hindu fold when the cult of Vaishnavism spread amongst them. Hinduism of the Shakti and Vaishnav cult has left a profound impression upon the Bodos of Tripura also.

From A.D. 1250 there was a fierce struggle in Assam between the Indo-Mongoloids and the Ahoms. The Ahoms were challenged by two Bodo states, the Chutiyas in the east and the Kacharis in the Dhansiri valley. Suka Fa (A.D. 1228—1268)

the first of the Ahom kings, forced the Kacharis to retire to the west of the Dikhu river. Sukang Fa (A.D. 1293—1332) waged war against the Western Bodo Koch Raja and forced him to pay tribute. Suken Fa (A.D. 1488—1493) was however, unsuccessful against the Nagas and was forced to retire. King Suhung Rung (A.D. 1497—1539), who later assumed the Hindu name Svargā Narayana, however, avenged his father and forced the Naga chief to send his daughter to his harem.

The Chutiya power was crushed by him for ever after a protracted campaign in 1527. A tutelary king was also installed by him in Cachar in 1531. The Turkish and Pathan invasion was also successfully resisted. Finally Cachar was also annexed thus ending the independence of the Assam Bodos. With the gradual decay of Ahom power by the 18th century, the Ahoms, along with the majority of the Bodo people they ruled, completely merged with the Assamese people, speaking a distinct Asamiya language.

A great achievement of the Bodo people was the Koch empire under king Nara Narayana in the 16th century. He was victorious over the Jaintia, Tipperah and Sylhet kings and also successfully resisted the Ahom invasions. He built temples and roads and patronised Vaishnav reformers. After his death, his empire soon broke up and was ultimately divided by the Rughab (Cooch Bihar) and the Ahoms (Koch Hojo). This great race of the Western Bodos gradually lost its identity, being transformed on the one hand to the Hindu caste of the Rajbansis and on the other to the still Bodo-speaking remnants of western Assam and north Bengal like the Rabhas and Reches.

Unlike their other western Bodo kinsmen, the Garos remained isolated in the Garo Hills and were not affected by the cross-currents of history till the Christian missions opened up in their area. Yet, like their Bodo kinsmen, the Garos possess a vivid imagination which has found expression in their folk-tales and songs.

While their kinsmen in the east and west were engaged in a fierce struggle for existence with the Ahoms, the southern Bodos were having a more subtle transformation. The Bodos of the south occupied Sylhet, Comilla and Tipperah (Tripura). The fertile Surma valley first attracted the Aryan settlers who

brought with them their language and culture. The Bodos were Aryanised. In A.D. 1303 Sylhet was conquered by the Turkish Sultan of Bengal and it practically became a part of that state, the Bodo speech giving way to the Aryan speech. Comilla was the seat of the two important Hindu kingdoms of Pattikera (A.D. 7th to 11th century) and Harikela (12th century), both were probably Bodo. Due to the influx of the Brahmins and later of the Muslims, Comilla too soon lost its Bodo identity and merged culturally with the neighbouring Bengal plains.

Tripura State is now the only area where the Bodos still largely retain their identity and speech though Aryan and Hindu culture is fast overtaking them. A substantial population in Tripura has been able to retain its medieval political and cultural milieu and its old Tipra or Mrung (now called Tripuri) language.

Of the frontier kingdoms mentioned in the Ashoka Pillar, now kept in the Allahabad fort, only Tripura is still in existence. Tripura was for long the stronghold of Shaivite Hinduism, having resisted for centuries the tide of Muslim invasion. It is traditionally considered the chosen abode of Shiva, Hinduism having taken deep roots among the Tripuris by the end of the 15th century. A popular myth shows Shiva slaying the demon Tripura, a symbolic representation of the grand synthesis of the aboriginal religion with Shaivism. Tripura is also a Pithasthan, the place where the right leg of Sati fell after she was cut to pieces by Shiva. As a holy place it ranks with Kamakhya in Gauhati and Dakhineswar in Calcutta.

In Tripura the Bodos have adjusted their culture and myths with that of the Hindus. For ages the Chaturdas Devta or the Fourteen Gods has been the ruling deity of Tripura. Its high priest, the Chantai, holds a position in society equal to that of the Brahmins. The Fourteen Gods are the Matai-Katar, the great Supreme God, now identified with Mahadeva, the twin deities Lam and Pra, depicting the Sky and the Sea, San-Grama, the most potent of the deities, the Himalaya Mountains, Tui-ma or the Ganges, Mailu-ma, the Goddess of Rice, now identified with Lakshmi, the Goddess of the Cotton plant, Khulu-ma, Burha-cha, the doctor God, his two sons, Bani-rao and Thani-rao, the seven Budirak sisters, six of whom are married and the seventh who attract men and grants favours, and the two

brothers Goraiya and the Kalaiya, the Fair One and the Dark One. It is interesting to note how the 14 main deities of the Kirats people have been identified with the deities of the Hindu pantheon, probably as early as the 13th century.

At the height of its glory, the Tripura empire spread beyond the Ganges towards the west, to the Brahmaputra towards the north, to Manipur in the east and the Bay of Bengal in the south. It held the Garo, Lushai and Khasi areas, the larger part of the Brahmaputra valley, and parts of Arakan and east Bengal under its sway.

CHAPTER 6

The Kuki-Chin Tribes

Of the various tribes and clans only the Darlongs, now confined largely to Kailashahar, claim to be indigenous to Tripura although they too probably came from outside. The rest are southern Kukis who migrated to Tripura from Lungleh a couple of centuries back following the large-scale invasion of Mizo Hills from tracts in Burma.

The first mention of the Kukis is found in an article, written by the then Civil Surgeon of Dacca and entitled "On the manners, religion, and laws of the Cu'ci's or mountaineers of Tipra".¹ It is mentioned that "a party of Kukis visited the late Charles Croftes, Esq. at Jafarbad, in the spring of 1776, entertained him with a dance, they seemed much pleased with their receptions". This shows that a substantial number of Kukis then resided in Tripura (then including a portion of Mizo Hills as well). The account describes them as a fierce, savage tribe whose sole occupation was head-hunting and war. The article states:

"When they have resolved on war, they send spies before hostilities are begun, to learn the stations and strength of the enemy, and the conditions of the roads, after which they march in the night ; and two or three hours before day-light, make a sudden assault with swords, lances, and arrows. If their enemies are compelled to abandon their station, the assailants instantly put to death all the males and females who are left behind and strip the houses of all their furniture;

1. Asiatic Researches, Vol. II, pp. 193.

but, should their adversaries, having gained intelligence of the intended assault, be resolute enough to meet them in battle, and should they find themselves over-matched, they speedily retreat, and quietly return to their own habitations.

If at any time they see a star very near the moon, they say, 'to-night we shall undoubtedly be attacked by some enemies', and they pass that night under arms with extreme vigilance. They often lie in ambush in a forest, near the path where they are used to pass and re-pass, waiting for the enemy with different sorts of weapons, and killing every man or woman who happens to pass by. In this situation, if a leech, or a worm, or a snake, should bite one of them, he bears the pain in perfect silence; and whoever can bring home the head of an enemy which he has cut off, is sure to be distinguished and exalted in his nation.

When two hostile tribes appear to have equal force in battle, and neither has hopes of putting the other to flight, they make a signal of pacific intentions, and sending agents reciprocally, soon conclude a treaty; after which they kill several head of gayals, and feast on their flesh, calling on the Sun and Moon to bear witness of the pacification: but if one side, unable to resist the enemy, be thrown into disorder, the vanquished tribe is considered as tributary to the victors; who every year receives from them a certain number of gayals, wooden dishes, weapons, and other acknowledgements of vassalage.

Before they go to battle they put a quantity of roasted *alus* (esculent roots like potatoes) and paste of rice flour into the hollow of bamboos, and add to them a provision of dry rice, with some leathern bags full of liquor. They assemble and march with such celerity, that in one day they perform a journey ordinarily made by letter-carriers in three or four days, since they have not the trouble and delay of dressing victuals. When they reach the place to be attacked they surround it in the night, and at early dawn enter it, putting to death both young and old, women and children, except such as they choose to bring away captive. They put the heads which they cut off into leathern bags; and if the blood of their enemies be on their hands, they take care not to wash it off. When, after this slaughter, they take their own

food, they thrust a part of what they eat into the mouths of the heads which they have brought away, saying to each of them, 'Eat, quench thy thirst, and satisfy thy appetite : as thou hast been slain by my hand, so may thy kinsmen be slain by my kinsmen.' During their journey they have usually two such meals; and every watch or two watches, they send intelligence of their proceedings to their families."

It is further stated:

"In ancient times it was not a custom among them to cut off the heads of the women who they found in the habitations of their enemies; but it happened once that a woman asked another, why she came so late to her business of sowing grain : she answered, that her husband was gone to battle, and that the necessity of preparing food and other things for him had occasioned her delay.

This answer was overheard by a man at enmity with her husband and he was filled with resentment against her, considering, that, as she had prepared food for her husband for the purpose of sending him to battle against his tribe, so in general, if women were not to remain at home, their husbands could not be supplied with provisions and consequently could not make war with advantage.

From that time it became a constant practice to cut off the heads of the enemy's women, especially if they happen to be pregnant, and therefore, confined to their houses; and this barbarity is carried so far, that if a Cu'ci assail the house of an enemy and kill a woman with child, so that he may bring two heads, he acquires honour and celebrity in his tribe, as the destroyer of two foes at once."

That the Kukis have not changed much in their attitude to war is obvious from a study of their recent raids on villages and installations in Tripura. Early in the morning on July 2, 1970, at about 3.30 p.m. the power house at Tirthamukh, the police post in Rambhadrapara and the officers' colony at Jatinbari were simultaneously surrounded and attacked by light-machine guns, mortars and rockets by hundreds of hostile Mizo raiders. About 6 hours earlier they had crossed over into Tripura and by forced marches over the most tortuous and rugged hilly terrain, criss-crossed with innumerable streamlets

and small rivers, with only a small period of rest at one place, had managed to break up into three different groups and take up positions without giving the slightest inkling to their hapless victims.

For the next two hours they systematically fired on these places to cause panic and to prevent rushing of reinforcements. At the same time they plundered the shops and houses, looted government and private cash, snatched valuables and jewellery and burnt the market. They destroyed the power house, fired rockets at the concrete bridge and bayoneted three luckless workers who blundered into their path.

At first light, after taking stock of their plunder, they retreated in good order and by noon had crossed over the border. So precise was their timing and so accurately planned their retreat that it took the bewildered security forces a good forty-eight hours to even determine the direction from where they came and another forty-eight hours to retrace their path on the ground.

There is reason to believe that during this entire period they took rest only once and covered a distance with their heavy equipment and loot in six hours which would take a normal, healthy person not less than three times that time to cover. The only concession that they made to the modern times was that they did not carry back the heads of their victims as their worthy forefathers would doubtless have done.

The Lushais

As early as 1931, an observer had noted that "the Kukis are generally of a violent nature". He went on to add :

"When a Kuki raja or chief sardar dies, his body is preserved in a trunk for 90 days. The trunk is lighted from all sides. They keep a lot of food and drink around the trunk and feast on it throughout this period. During this period the more heads they can put in the grave the more pride they feel. For this reason they raid neighbouring villages to cut their heads."²

The Kuki raids on Tripura villages are nothing new. In 1931 this observer had noted :

"The Kukis are a very fierce type. On many occasions they raid villages in Sylhet, Comilla, Chittagong and Hill Tripura and indulge in murder, arson and loot. To stop this the British government and Tripura government has had to take very strong measures. Due to this they have become pacified, but their natural extremity (*ugrata*) is not yet gone down."

The most advanced of the Kuki-Chin tribes of Tripura are the Lushais who mainly occupy the villages on the ridges of the Jampui and Sakhan Hills.

The term Lushai is now generally believed to be derived from the name of one of the ruling sub-castes, Lushei or Lusei. Some others say it is derived from the word Luchai (*Lu*=head; *chai*=to cut). It is widely believed that their ancestors were dislodged by their more powerful neighbours. By the 18th century they had finally entrenched themselves in the Mizo Hills district of Assam after driving out the other kindred tribes like the Rankhols, Baites and the Thadous to the north.

It is said that before they left their habitations in western Burma, they planted a banyan tree at Khampat village about 50 miles from Kaley-myo. The belief is widely held that when the branches of this tree will touch the earth the Lushais will return to their home land. In 1921 when the branches of this tree touched the ground, many Lushais, amongst them Mr. Hanner of Lakhipur, Capt. Laikhuma of Aijal, Capt. Ckhuma, Capt. Vanpui Lal and Capt. Lalmuana, all of active service, returned to Burma where Lushais now number over 20,000. The reverse migration is taking place even now. In Burma these Lushais have taken to plough cultivation and industries, forming a prosperous and flourishing community.

Many Lushais believe that man emerged from Chhinlung, a hole in the earth. A great darkness descended upon the earth followed by a devastating catastrophe. All men were converted to beasts and wild animals and re-peopling started when people began to emerge from the hole. As the process was continuing, two persons of the Ralk clan started chattering which made God think that too many people had come out; so he closed the hole. The world was considered flat, resting on the back of a huge tortoise. There were earthquakes when the tortoise moved.

The supreme spirit is called by them Pathian, the creator of everything and a benevolent being. The demons or the evil

spirits, called *Huais*, were however, more important with human affairs in that they caused harm to mankind. Whenever anybody fell ill or was visited by misfortune, sacrifices were offered to appease their ire. One very known, and much dreaded, spirit was known as *Khaw-hring* which possessed certain people, generally women, and then went forth to possess others. Such women were shunned in society. The only cure known was through exorcism, accompanied by shouting, drum-beating and gun-firing.

The spirits of the dead were believed to inhabit the other worlds. Those whose spirits were admitted in *Pialral* (beyond the *Pial* river) could live in a state of perpetual bliss. A much inferior world is the *Mitthi Khua* (dead man's village). The spirit left a man through the crown of his head and then went to *Rih* lake, believed to be three miles from the international border in *Chin Hills*. The spirit then returned to his original home for three months, where one seat is kept vacant at meals by the bereaved family. At the end of this period the spirit is given a send-off by performing the *thitton* rite. It then departs weeping to *Mitthi Khua*, passing *Hringland Tlang* hill on the way from where he can get a good last look at the land of the living but is not allowed to look back. Finally it reaches the *Lunglo* (heartless, feelingless) river, the water of which is clear and transparent. It reluctantly drinks this water to forget all about the land of the living.

The spirit has yet to face another dreadful experience : in *Zing-teawan* village it faces the immortal *Pawla*, at whose house all the paths to the world of the dead converge. *Pawla* has a big and powerful bow from which he shoots huge egg-like pellets. The spirits at whom these pellets are fired are barred from entering the *Pialral*. *Pawla*, however, is not allowed to shoot at *Thangcbhual* (he who has given the five prescribed major feasts and killed in a chase certain animals) and *Hlamcuihs* (he who dies in infancy).

The heavily forested areas of *Jampui*—the dreaded place—, which was the north-eastern frontier of the princely state of *Hill Tipperah*, were inhabited for ages by mighty elephants, wild boars, snakes and other animal and reptiles of all varieties. To the *Lushais*, inhabiting the nearby ranges of the *Mizo Hills* district of *Assam*, this hill for long marked a limit to their

expansionist designs as it was supposed to be a most inhospitable, unfriendly and dreadful region because of its abundance of wild life. This mighty range rises from Damcherra to a height of about 1,000 metres at Phuldungsei and then after about 8 to 10 miles merges into the Sajek Range of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The total length of this range in Tripura is about 50 kilometres and the ridges on the top form an almost unbroken plateau. The Sakhan Hill, which is separated from the Jampui by a deep and beautiful valley, is about 8 kilometres to the south. This was for long famous as a pass for wild elephants and is therefore, more sparsely populated than the former.

The Lushais first came to Tripura in 1912 after the terrible Mizo district famine in 1911. Phuldungsei was the first village to be set-up on the Jampui Range by Hrunghunga Sailo who was conferred with the title of Raja by the then Maharaja of Tripura. They then slowly spread out and occupied the whole ridge and then spread out towards Sakhan range also. Now all the villages on the southern Jampui are dominated by the descendants of Sailo. The Lushais are now concentrated mainly in the 10 villages on the ridges of Jampui and the 3 villages on the ridges of Sakhan.

In building their homesteads on the top of the crests on the Jampui ridge, the Lushais here have only chosen the path set by their neighbours in Mizo Hills. Only in one village near the valley, that is Longtherik, are the Mizos residing in sizeable numbers. Apart from these 10 predominantly Lushai villages, there are at least 33 other villages in the Jampui Hill area, but these are mainly populated by the Reangs. Almost all these villages are in the valley both towards the Longai river and towards Deo. In the Sakhan range there are 3 Mizo villages on the ridge.

There was some trouble amongst themselves in the first few years of their coming to Tripura. Raja Dakhuma was incharge of the villages on the southern side of the range. On his death there were disputes regarding the succession. During his lifetime his son Huaplina was incharge of Vanghmun and his concubine Kapthiani and her son Thanzauva were incharge of Hmanpui. His son-in-law had come from Mizo Hills to help him. He had been appointed the inspector of schools by the mission, and stationed at Hmanpui.

After Dakhuma's death, Huaplana wanted him to be incharge of Hmanpui. Saikhuma openly declared that "it (public) is no longer to repair Kapthiani's house but my house". On April 8, 1933, on hearing rumours, Hrangavunga proceeded with 30 followers to Vangmun and entered Kapthian's house. The following day the concubine agreed that the former will look after the village till Thanzauva comes of age. On the 17th, when he went to take over the village, he was opposed by Huaplana. A scuffle ensued in which Hrangavunga got the better of the opponent. When the Maharaja called both the parties to Agartala, he refused to go. It is likely that he subsequently refused to obey the Maharaja's order not to enter Huaplana's village.

There were some disputes amongst themselves regarding their Church also. When L.H. Thanga set up the Independent and Self Governing Church (Tripura Christian Association), Pastor N. Luaia and Pastor Zabiaka of the North East India General Mission forcibly took possession of their Church. This matter could also not be amicably settled.

Almost all the Lushais in Tripura are *Jhumias*. The state did make efforts from time to time to wean them away to a more settled mode of cultivation. In 1920 the Chief Dewan wrote to the two Rajas as follows :

"Hitherto your clan has been used to 'Jum' cultivation only. It is a wasteful method of agriculture and should be replaced by regular plough cultivation gradually. I shall be pleased if for the good of your people and the state and yourself you make an effort in this direction. I am prepared to grant a perpetual settlement of low lands on the Langai, Deo and Manu valleys to you and other Lushai chiefs."³

Though the chiefs replied that they "shall apply to the divisional officer for a place when a suitable site is found out", actually they made no effort to do so to this date. They remain as much committed to *jhuming* as they were on that day.

Modern system of communications are almost unknown in Jampui hills. To pass an important message, however, the Lushais often use torch signals. The time for passing on the message between one village and another is fixed. A powerful

3. A Government file in Tripura Archives.

torch is held horizontally over the right shoulder and a short and long flash is given to denote the dot and the dash. Almost all the adults seem to know this Morse code. It is said that an important message can be passed on from Tualsen to Mizo Hills in less than an hour.

For communicating important messages or exchanging greetings they also use the whistle signals. The range of this type of the signal would be 2 to 3 hundred yards and by means of the short and long whistle signal can be passed on in day time. Another method of passing a signal in day time is the flash from a mirror, but this is more tedious and requires a higher degree of skill. Apart from this, there seems to be no other way of communication with each other except by physically going there across the steep and tortuous paths.

The life of the Lushais is simple and primitive. Their needs are few and they hardly need anything which they cannot provide for themselves. They grow cotton, jute, mustard, chilly, paddy and vegetables in their *jhum* fields. All the houses are simple and austere and are slightly raised from the ground. They are built on steep hill slopes and are made of plaited bamboo with a thatched roof. Sometimes wood is also used to support this frame. It usually consists of only one room with an outside porch though in some of the more prosperous houses there are two rooms with one being used as an improvised drawing-cum-living room and the other as a bed room and a kitchen. The latrines are open and are located behind the bedroom on a bamboo platform. The scavenging work is mainly done by the pigs who live in the space under their homes. Sweepers are almost unknown.

Almost all the families have small kitchen gardens as well as small poultry farms and piggeries. Some of them also keep bees for which they grow flowers in their gardens. They have also taken to growing banana, guava and orange trees in their courtyards. They carry water from the water point in long hollow bamboo poles and store it in pitchers made out of dried and hollowed pumpkin and bottle gourd skins.

The males generally wear the conventional western style dresses and some of them keep abreast with the latest style of men's wear of Gauhati and Shillong. The girls are more colourfully dressed with a blouse and a piece of cloth tied

round their waist. They wear little or no jewellery. Most of them go round bare-footed, but the girls make up heavily. They also like wearing their hair in the western fashion. They are fond of music and any occasion, from a welcome to a distinguished guest to a memorial gathering in the Church, is considered good enough excuse to sing and dance. In the nights also small groups of boys and girls collect in vantage points in the village and sing and talk till late in the night. From the drum of their forefathers they have advanced to the Spanish guitar and the harmonium.

In a corner in the bed-room they light a fire. This fire is used not only for cooking their food but also for drying jute, tobacco, vegetables, etc. The members of the family also gather around it in the night to chat and smoke. Their meals are simple and consist of boiled *jhum* rice, which is coarse and thick-grained, boiled vegetables and boiled pork. They use no other cooking medium but water and their curries are full of chillies.

The Village Council is the apex of the political and economic life of the village. The Village Council has 5 to 10 members, the number varying from village to village, though the two key functionaries are the President and the Secretary. It is nominally elected every three years by all the members of the village who assemble in a central place and record their choice on a slip of paper. The Village Council has its own code of laws and it metes out summary justice. The President has the privilege of selecting his *jhum* fields first and in effect also decides as to which *jhum* fields each member will have. This makes him the *de-facto* arbiter of the economic destinies of the village. The members form themselves into groups and the *jhum* fields, which are also grouped accordingly, are allotted by lots to these groups. The Village Council is not only the spokesman of the village, but is also the final arbitrator in all village disputes. The Council is autocratic and is all powerful in the village.

The President of the Village Council has the privilege of engaging as many labourers free as he requires for the construction of his house. He can direct free labour for other works in the village like construction of church and schools, etc. In

the Jampui Hills such free labour is almost wholly provided by the Reangs living in the foothills.

Almost all the Lushais in the area are Christians. The majority of the Lushais belong to the New Zealand Baptist Church while a dissenting minority owes allegiance to the Independent Church. The Baptists are puritanical in their outlook and their Church is simple and austere and is located on the highest ground in the village. The establishment of the Independent Church is apparently a revolt by the indigenous Lushais against the influence of the foreign missionaries. All the padres and pastors are Lushais. There is surely an attempt at a purely nationalist Church in keeping with the trend elsewhere in the country.

Due to their extreme economic dependence on the Lushais some of the Reangs have not only moved into the Mizo villages, but have also been converted to Christianity. Most of the other Reangs, however, continue to remain Hindus and Kali temples can be seen in many villages.

The songs of the Lushais are most patriotic and extol the beauty and past of the Lushai people and of the hills which they occupy. Their songs tell tales of joy and happiness. Most of them are tuned to music written by the New Zealanders which is a unique amalgam of an indigenous Lushai and imported Western music. The drum, which was popular with the Lushais before the missionaries came, has given way to the Spanish guitar.

The most popular dance amongst the Lushais is the *Cherolam*, that is, the Bamboo dance. In this the bamboo poles in pairs are spread on the ground and young girls, to the accompaniment of song and music, dance rythmically as the poles are sounded against each other. They also have the flower dance and the welcome dance. All these dances consist of a few rhythmical and graceful movements and are very pleasing to the eyes mainly because of their simple, charming and harmonical movements. The stories of *Puchhera*—the foolish-man—are also very popular amongst the children. These stories are short and charming and must be overwhelming to the youngsters for whom they are meant.

The economic life of the Jampui Lushai village revolves round *jhuming* and horticulture. As a result of the educational

efforts of the missionaries, an educated middle class has developed. One of the boys from here is in the customs service and quite a few of the boys and girls are working as teachers and in other white-collar jobs. This area has not yet produced any doctor or engineer. Some of the traditional Lushai trades, like blacksmithy, have been lost completely, probably due to the comparative isolation of the Lushais in the Jampui Hills.

The people are wholly dependent on the forest for their continued existence. For *jhuming* they cut down the forest and set them on fire to make the land ready for cultivation. They build their houses solely from forest products and most of their utensils and furniture is also made from forest products. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that they are so completely dependent on the forest that were the forests to be removed for even one day they would starve to death.

Next only to the Village Council, the family is a powerful institution. The ancient Lushai custom of Zawlbuk, wherein all boys above the age of 14 had to live together, is no longer in vogue in the Jampui Hills. The family, therefore, is probably as strong a unit as it is in the rest of the country. Every family has its own piggery and poultry farm and some of them also rear bees in their houses. The marriages are more or less arranged though for pretence's sake they are called 'choice marriage'. The boy has to pay a sum of money of the order of Rs. 300 to Rs. 500, to the girl's father for the marriage, as is the custom amongst the Tripuris. There are no burial grounds in the village and all the bodies have to be buried either in the courtyard or in some other place chosen by the family.

The bamboos are used by almost every family for carrying water, for making pitchers, for new construction, making baskets, mats, hats, furniture and torchlights. They are also used for fuel and sometimes the tender bamboo shoots are also eaten. Apart from the guns, the Lushais also use a type of sling which is shaped more or less like a bow. The lady carries the younger ones behind her back while she goes to work and not many seem to live in fear of ghosts and spirits. The young people have hardly any pastime and hobby as they are kept so busy in their *jhum* fields. All the villages, however, have football fields where the boys go to play in the evening. The girls

usually weave and stitch in their house. The only other recreational activity is going to Church on festive occasions.

Darlongs

According to Dartuah Liana of Nalkata (75 years old) the Darlongs came from eastern Burma more than three centuries back. Like the Tripura Lushais they must have come via the Mizo Hills where there is a range called Darlong Hang. They first came to Unakuti and then to Srimangal, some of them going to Brahman Baria in East Bengal. One *Lal* (chief) Hrunjavunga lead a party through the Unakuti range and the other through the Longtherai. In honour of the *Lal* of Longtherai, Lianlura, a three-metre high memorial stone was erected in the Longtherai range with engraved pictures of buffaloes decorated with flowers. Hrunjavunga's son died issueless. The Darlongs occupied the area from Teliamura to Unakuti under these two chiefs. According to a belief amongst the Darlongs, Kailashahar, a sub-divisional town, was previously known as Kulashor, after Kula, the son of a Darlong *Lal*. According to Dartuah Liana, about 50 years back this town was inhabited by only Darlongs, there being only 2 or 3 Bengali families.

The Darlongs had a number of guns, which they were allowed to hold without licence. They also were exempted from paying any taxes. Reangs were not allowed to settle without the permission of the Darlong *Lal*.

The *Lal* was hereditary and functioned like a benevolent dictator and was previously paid Re. 1 per head as tax. A village council (*Nupa*) was elected by the villagers. The members, generally aged people selected by consensus, continued for life. *Nupa* did not have any say in land matters or in cultivation of *jhum* tracts. They functioned only in criminal and civil matters. The fines generally ranged between Rs. 4 and Rs. 16 and went up in multiples of 2. The highest fine of Rs. 16 is called *sepui*.

If a person kills a wild beast he is required by custom to feed everybody. If he fails to do this he is fined by the *Nupa*.

When a Darlong dies, nobody is allowed to leave the village for a day. They believe that the soul comes back to the village after his death. For feeding him the bereaved families hang

cucumber, sugarcane, etc. from the walls, for one year. After this period, there is a function called *raibeer*, which is the last function held in honour of the soul.

The Darlongs love music and song. Their songs are of three types—*Lam Khojoy* (ceremonial songs), *Saluzai* (to celebrate victory in war) and *Hlalem* (love songs).

The Halams

When the southern Kukis moved into Tripura, some of them were given by the Maharaja the title of *Halam* (Tripuri : *Ha*=earth; *lam*=road). The *Halam* collected taxes from the rest of the Kukis and governed their relations with the Maharaja and were the fiercest warriors in his army.

The Halams were originally divided into 12 clans known as the *Baro Halams* though they later appeared to have multiplied. The 1931 Census Report lists as many as 18 clans. The more important of these tribes, whose number in 1931 exceeded 500, are the Kaloi, Kaipeng, Charai, Mursum, and Rupini. Of these the Kaois and the Rupinis speak a dialect which is more closely aligned to the Tripuri language. Culturally also, these two tribes are very closely inter-linked as indeed all the Halams are in varying degrees with the Tripuris though they still retain in important respects their essential Kuki traits.

The population of the Halams went up only marginally from 12,054 in 1931 to 16,294 in 1961, clearly indicating the gradual absorption of some of the Halam clans in other tribal communities, especially the Tripuri. No explanation can be given for this except that a section of the Halams find their association with the Kukis rather unpleasant.

Though undoubtedly a branch of the Kukis, the Halams are quite different from them in their customs, habits and religion. Due to active aid and encouragement of the state and due to constant socio-economic contact with the Tripuris, they have been profoundly affected by the way of life of their Tripuri neighbours. Most of them have become Hindus, the profound impress of which is so evident in their folk-tales, songs and style of living. Some of them, especially amongst the Rupinis and Kalois, have given up meat and fish under the influence

of Vaishnavism and speak a language which is more akin to that of the Tripuris.

Like the other tribal communities of Tripura who have adopted Hindu practices, the Halams continue to observe their tribal rituals. Among other gods they worship is Sandaroy-Bakundaroy who is symbolised in a bamboo planted in the ground. They believe that in the olden days, the bamboo used to bend its head to drink the liquor offered to it but now nobody knows the right *mantra*. They do not admit outsiders to their village when they perform *Ker Puja*.

The political structure of the Halams consists of the Kans-kow, the Ghalim, the Gabor, and the Rai in that order. The Rai heads the Court, which is the adjudicator in all criminal and civil matters. The Rai, appointed for a fixed tenure of five years, is succeeded by the Ghalim, who is in turn succeeded by the Gabor and so forth. Each one of these functionaries are assisted by two volunteers, who are appointed in serial order in terms of existing rules and regulations. The volunteers in their turn become Kanskows and so on. All these functionaries work on behalf of their children, those having none being barred from holding office.

The justice that the Court metes out is summary and prompt. In case of elopement if a woman is found at fault she is fined Rs. 120 but if the man is in fault he is fined only Rs. 15. The fine for murder is Rs. 140. Similar fines are laid down for other offences, the most serious being murder and elopement. The quantum of fine varies in different areas.

In the past their village was circular in shape, with all the houses facing the centre where a rest house (known as *Vaisgim*) for guests was prepared by a common labour. All the male youth were required to sleep there though they took their meals and worked in their homes. The youth leader (known as *thangval U*) is made responsible for looking after the guests. The guests are well looked after by the village.

Like the custom in most other tribal communities, the boy has to pay a bride-price to his parents-in-law as a pre-condition for his marriage. The price varies according to the economic well-being of the community, it being Rs. 80 to Rs. 150 in the case of the Halams and Rs. 300 to Rs. 1000 in the case of the Lushais. Among the Rokhum Kukis this is known as *Hman*.

To give the boys and girls a chance to freely mix and choose their partners, the boys usually go to the girls' house in the evenings. The consent of the boy and girl is the main consideration on which the match is made.

If the boy desires a certain girl, he or his parents will contact a *Palai* (the marriage broker) who is sent to the girl's house with token sum of Re. 1. If the girl, or her parents with her consent, accept this gift (the ceremony being known as *Thilkhang*), the girl and boy are considered to be formally engaged. After this no other boy can propose to this girl; those doing so are produced before the village council and fined, the fine paid to the aggrieved boy.

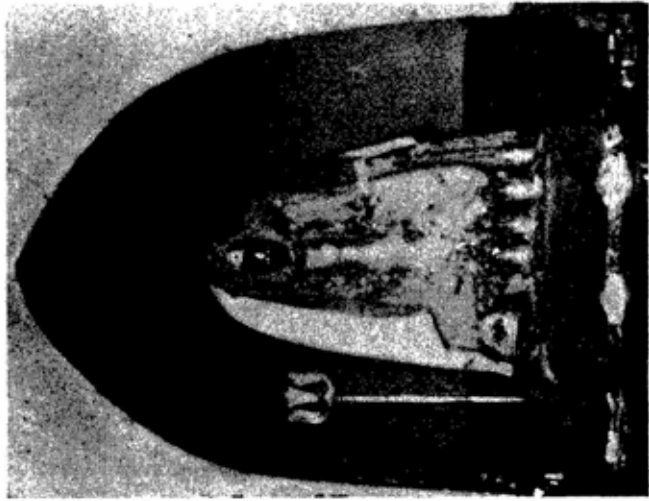
The marriage date is fixed by the *Palai* and separate feasts are arranged at both the houses. The bride price is paid and the bride's father slaughters a four-legged animal, *Sakhum*. This is the moment when the marriage is considered to be solemnized.

In the evening the bride comes to her husband accompanied by his sisters and friends. Apart from her wearing apparel, her dowry consists of a dao (*chem*), a bamboo basket (*Lonkhai*) and a loom. At the boy's house there is a grand feast in which the entire village joins. It is an occasion for merry-making and drinking at the end of which the boy and girl are left alone. Sexual relations before marriage are not taboo, the boy and girl being allowed to marry. In other cases, the boy is fined a token sum of Rs. 10. The next morning the girl returns to her parent's house for some time. Divorce is easily effected by the man saying so and by the girl returning the bride-price.

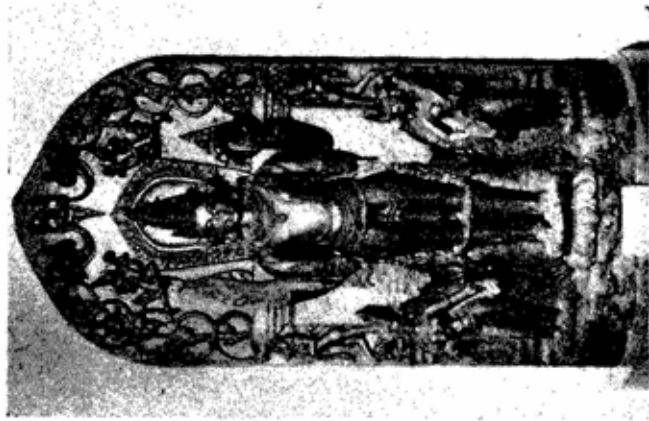
Some of the Kukis of Tripura, like the Rokhums, cremate their dead; others bury the bodies. A cock is slaughtered near the feet of the dead man after which a big feast is arranged in the room where the body lies. Those who cremate the dead do so after washing the body. The bones are brought back to a house and worshipped.

The bones are ultimately thrown in a local river or in the Ganges as per the preference of the deceased. The slaves of the dead chief are usually slain so that their spirits can accompany him.

The Kukis are a ferocious tribe. Their name was used for decades by mothers to put their young ones to sleep. Thus,



XVIII. A stone idol of Tripureshwari at Udaipur. It is believed that no traveller can leave Tripura without visiting this shrine; otherwise he has to come back again



XIX. A black stone idol of Lord Vishnu dating back to the 11th century A. D. found during excavation of a pond at Udaipur in 1960



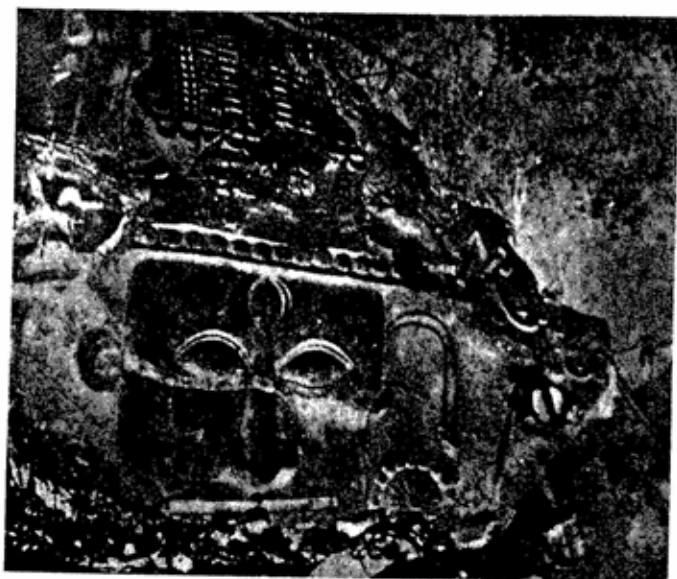
XX. Trimurti at Unakuti hills near Kailashahar



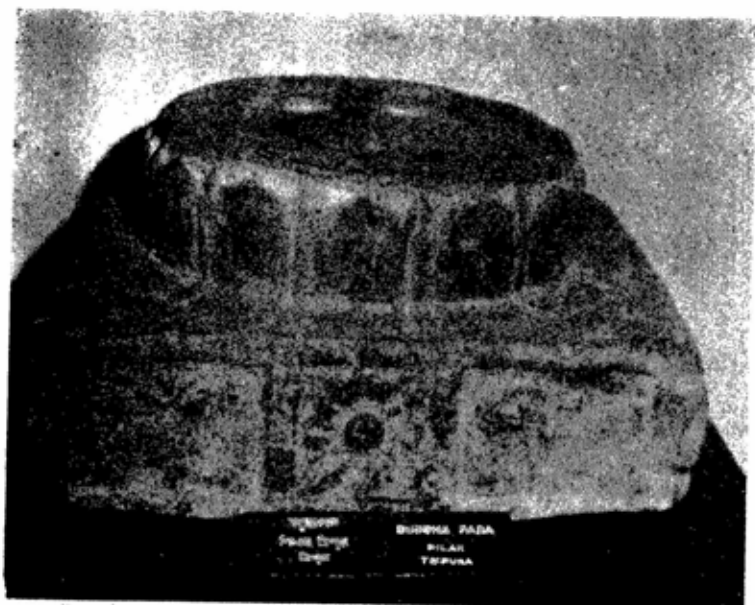
XXI. A terracota found at Pilak, Belonia



XXII. Trimurti—made with burnt clay, dating back to the 18th century



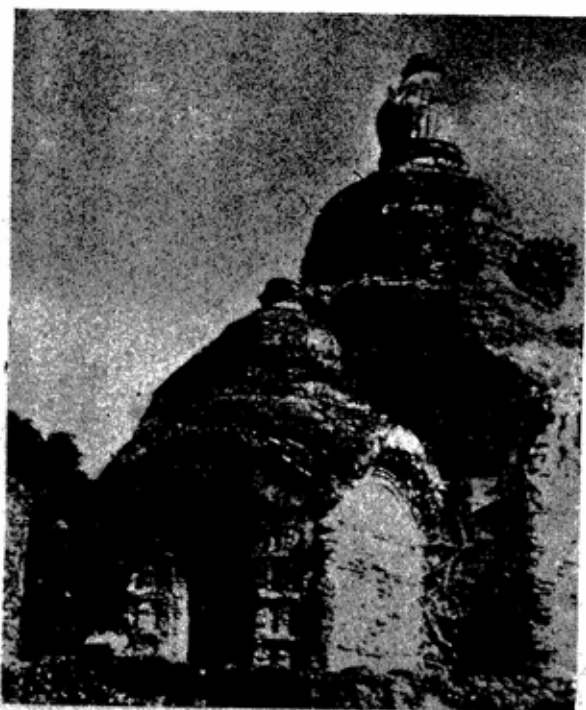
XXIII. The undertones of the Saivite cult run throughout Tripura. This is a rock cut of Lord Siva at Unakuti



XXIV. Tripura was once a flourishing centre of Buddhist culture. This is a Buddha Pada found at Pilak



XXV. Another terracota found at Pilak, Belonia



XXVI. Hari Mandir at Udaipur

it is found, when the Kukis become educated they change their names and call themselves Darlongs, Kaipengs, Rankhals or some such title. One of their favourite sports is a wrestling competition between the youth of two villages. The whole village follows their chief to the boundary of another village where they are met by the people of that village. Then there is a free-for-all wrestling. The losers consider themselves humiliated.

In the past the Kukis often declared war on their neighbours, mainly for food. Whenever they found themselves short of food, they picked up their spears, swords and shields and declared war on another village. They used to cut off the heads of the defeated and carried them home as trophies. These heads were decoratively spread on the floor and meat of roasted pig spread over them. They then drank wine and ate this meat. The defeated chief's head was retained as a trophy while the heads of the others were buried in the ground after a couple of days of merry-making and feasting.

With the exception of ear-rings, the Kukis hardly wear any jewellery. The men wear a small wooden stud or bead of amber suspended by a string. The women wear ivory discs and amber necklaces. Long hair is greatly admired on women, some men also preferring to wear it long.

The Rupinis

The Rupinis claim to have come from the Lengdi mountain beyond Aijal where there is a big, legendary lake. This reference is probably to the Rih, which is about 3 miles from the international border in Chin Hills. Their origin then is, as is widely believed to be, the same as the Mizos and the Kukis. They believe that they came to Tripura before the Rajas of Tripura were called Manikyas. They believe that in fact it was one of them who founded the present Manikya dynasty of Tripura.

They were influenced at a very early date by Hinduism and are now mostly the devotees of Vishnu. They shun meat, fish and liquor. That this conversion is very recent, not more than 40 years old, is proved not only by their songs and stories, which make amply clear that they at one time kept fowls and

domesticated animals and relished meat, fish and wine, but also by the census report of 1931 which shows only a small percentage of the Halams as Vaishnavs. Today most of the Rupinis of Tripura are Vaishnavs and most of their customs and social rules conform to its forms.

It is said that once a white elephant appeared in the forest. Tribals from all over the area went there to see it and trap it, but failed. People wondered who would finally manage to capture this beautiful animal. Then, before the eyes of all the awe-inspired people, appeared a light-skinned fair and beautiful youth. With great ease he captured the white elephant and before their bewildered eyes, rode it away. Everybody wondered who the fair youth was. As they could not find out his name, they called him *Rupini* (fair one). From that day they all came to be known as Rupinis.

Rupinis mainly reside near the foothills on both sides of the Baramura range in Sadar and Khowai sub-divisions. They are much better off economically than the other tribals and some of them are substantial land-holders. Some of them do *jhuming* to supplement their income as agricultural labourers or as share-croppers. In the Tarachand Rupinipara, for instance, which is about 5 kilometres from Teliamura, out of 55 Rupini families, 15 have average holdings of 4 to 5 acres where they manage to get two or three crops every year. Many of the others are cultivating the land of the Jamatias, who live nearby, on the *barga* system. Only a few of them go to *jhum* in the nearby hillocks of Baramura.

The Rupinis prefer to live on hillocks even though they are now cultivating plains land. Their houses are small, about 3 metres wide and 8 metres long. There are no partitions inside. In the far corner they have a small fire-place used as a kitchen and also to keep them warm in winter. They have a small projection made of bamboo about 2 metres from the ground in the room where they keep dried vegetables, utensils, clothes and other things. The construction is mainly of bamboo, even though bamboo may have become scarce in their area. Many Rupinis have discarded the *machan* type of construction and have mud plaster on the floor and walls. The roof is of dried bamboo leaves or *chan* grass.

Every village has a Vishnu temple, the roof of which is

usually made of GCI sheets. It is located in a central place and often has another hut, open on all sides, attached to it. Only the *purohit* is allowed to enter the temple, others sitting in this hut. The construction of the temple is similar to those made by the Manipuris, who are also settled in substantial numbers in Khowai and Sadar sub-divisions and who have been Vaishnavs since the 16th century.

Rupinis are classified into four sub-clans namely Puran Rasti, Nutan Rasti, Thaithak and Paithak. Their social hierarchy consists of the Rai, Karim, Kabor, Chapiakha, Kanskow, Yaksong and Singja. The present functionaries of the Thaithak sub-clan are Rajkumar of Champak Nagar, Bijoykumar of Dhan Chakma, Pendai of Belphang, Bahadur of Athukhang bari, Badia Singh and Chandra of Raktiacherra and Manik Chandra of Tuichakmapura respectively. The Singja is elected by the General Assembly of the Rupinis and his tenure is for five years. After five years he will be promoted as Yaksong, the incumbent of that post being promoted as Chapiakha and so on. This means that Manik Chandra, who is now the Singja, will automatically become Rai after 30 years, having served five years on each of the intermediate posts.

The Singja is a peon and his functions are to serve the summons, to carry out orders of the Rai, etc. The Yaksong functions like a chief prosecutor, the Kanskow is the Chief Protocol Officer at the general meetings and the meetings of the Supreme Council of Three, the Chapiakha explains and conveys the proceedings to the Rai, and the Karim, Kabor and Rai comprise the Supreme Council which is the final arbitrator in matters civil and judicial referred to it.

These functionaries get no salaries; they share the fine that they impose. If a boy and girl run away without the consent of the parents, the boy is fined Rs. 25 and the girl Rs. 20. If both are unmarried, they are ceremoniously married after the fine is paid. If the boy refuses to marry the girl, a fine of Rs. 100 is imposed on him.

The Council generally aims at resolving disputes amicably. A few years back Tarachand Rupini complained to the Council that Jogendra Bahadur had stolen ten kilos of paddy from his house. Before the Council, Jogendra pleaded guilty and begged for mercy. He was left off with a warning.

Often disputes are resolved by subjecting both the parties to a test. Both the parties are taken to a *cherra* or a pond where the Council of Three and the *ojha* offer prayers. Both the parties are asked to dip their heads in the water before everybody. Whoever comes out of the water first is considered to be in the wrong.

Another test is sometimes performed to find out whether a person is in the wrong or if one's wishes will be fulfilled or not. One leaf is taken in each hand between the thumb and the index finger. They are held horizontally against each other and the fingers are twisted around so that the leaves turn a full circle and then, with a flip, are released. If both the leaves fall with the same side up, the person who threw the leaves is said to be in the wrong or, if he has wished something, his wish will not be fulfilled.

The marriage cannot be solemnised without the consent of the parents. The delinquent couple is fined but then married. Marriage is not possible unless the boy and girl are removed by five generations. The marriage ceremony is similar to that of the Hindus.

The language of the Rupinis, though it still retains the Kuki-Chin characteristics to a certain extent, is now distinctly akin to Tripuri, both in its grammar and vocabulary. The imaginative minds of the Rupinis have made it a vehicle to convey profound ideas and philosophy in a simple way.

The Rupinis are fond of singing and dancing. Their songs are very musical and portray deep philosophic thought. Their dances are vigorous and alive and usually accompany group singing. Their musical instruments are the *sarangi*, violin, flute and the *dholak*.

In their social customs and way of life, the Rupinis are a unique example of the way a clan of the fierce warriors have been converted into the non-violent and humane philosophy of Vaishnav Hindus.

CHAPTER 7

The Tripuris

The Kshatriyas of Tripura are generally known as the Tripura Kshatriyas. The 12 classes of Thakurs, who enjoy the highest status amongst them, are said to be continuing from the days of Trilochan. The *Rajmala* states as follows :

*"Trilochan Ghar Barah Putro Upajilo,
Baro Ghar Tripura Nain Tar Khyati Gailo"*.

(Twelve sons were born to the house of Trilochan. The fame of the twelve households reached all over Tripura).

Since the time of Kalyan Manikya, the members of the royal family were given the title of Thakurs, who were also known as Barah Ghariya. The Thakurs were very influential persons and enjoyed status and prestige only next to the Maharaja. As they inter-married Kshatriyas in other parts of the country, their customs have also percolated to them.

The Tripuris can be subdivided into five sections, namely, Old Tripuris, Deshi Tripuris, Reangs, Jamatias, and Noatias. In 1931 their total number was 1,53,450 which has more than doubled by now. The number of Deshi Tripuris was only 1,494 in 1931 though it has grown over the years. They have almost completely submerged their identity in the Bengalis.

Old Tripuris

During the Maharaja's reign the Old Tripuris enjoyed influence and prestige just next to the Thakurs. They too have

been greatly influenced by Bengali culture. In 1931 their number was 77,580 and it must have doubled by now.

They have been divided into 12 *huddas* (titles), according to the functions they were entitled to perform in the Durbar. These are *Bachal* (holding the emblem and performing the puja), *Seok* (hunters by profession, they were entitled to hold the tray when awards were being given), *Koatia* (to arrange garlands, light the incense etc.), *Daityasingh* (the standard bearers), *Hujuria* and *Chiltia* (to perform miscellaneous functions in the durbar), *Apeya* (to buy fish), *Chatra tuiya* (to hold the *chhatra*) *Deorai*, *Ba Galim* (to perform *Ker* and *Kharchi* puja), *Sube narayan* (to cut fish on pujas), *Sera* (ostracised members of above Huddas) and *Julai* (to perform the remaining work).

The social customs of the old Tripuris are similar to those of the Bengalis. In the 18th century the Assamese ambassador noticed the Bengalis in very close contact with the ruling class. This long contact has intimately affected the Tripuris socially and culturally.

The Reangs

There is a story that in the old days the Reangs lived in the Maiyanithlang area of Lushai Hills, bordering on and stretching into the Arakans of Burma. It is probable that at that time they spoke in a tongue closely related to the Austro-Asiatic family of languages. In that case they must be close kins of the Kuki-Chins. They must have been the lower castes amongst these clans and, due to heavy demands made on them, they migrated to the Karnaphuli valley of Chittagong Hill Tracts during the reign of Ratna Manikya in the 14th century where they set up small settlements. Later, when the Kukis too followed them there and sought to reassert their authority over them, they fled to Hill Tipperah (now Tripura) and, starting from Amarpur, spread gradually over the whole state. The feeling of master and slave that must have existed in the past between the tribes of the Kuki-Chin group and the Reangs is still evident today wherever these tribes have come in contact. In the Jampui Hills of Tripura the more numerous Reangs are nothing more than serfs of the Mizos, a position which the Lushais claim as

natural and the Reangs accept as their fate. Lewin¹, speaking of the Reangs of Hill Chittagong, says that "their villages formerly were far away in the Kookee country, and they took part with the independent tribes in the savage raids on British subjects, the preparation of which led to the direct administration of the Hill Tracts by our government." Similar Reang participation in recent Kuki-Lushais raids on Tripura villages and posts has been noticed. All these facts indicate a close racial and historical affiliation between these two tribes.

As the Reang settlements spread over Tripura, there followed years of constant intercourse with the Tripuris as a result of which their language got synthesized with the Tibeto-Burmese which the latter spoke. Their culture and customs also got intermixed with that of the Tripuris. Their first known contact with the Tripura ruling classes was when they worked for them as palanquin-bearers. Gradually, over the years, they got absorbed in the armed forces of the state, a role to which their physical prowess and rugged built especially suited.

By the time of Dhanya Manikya they had established themselves in the army and two of his foremost generals, Rai Kachan and Rai Kachag, were Reangs, but their fiercely independent nature never endeared them with the rulers that were; the *gharchukti* (family tax) they were required to pay to the state was always high. Time and again the Reangs revolted against the autocracy of the rulers, the latest revolt being in 1942 when they succeeded in overthrowing their *Rai*, Kharendra.

The Reangs have a story which tells how they happened to come to Tripura. Before they came to Tripura, it goes on to say, they had a king, Kachak, who was particularly cruel and tyrannical. Being unable to bear his rule, the people dispatched six emissaries to the court of Govind Manikya. These emissaries got lost in the huge valleys and forested peaks of Devtamura and so were forced to take the river route along the river Gumti. As fate would have it, this route had been closed by the king as he was performing Ganga puja near his capital at Udaipur. The emissaries were arrested and were about to be sacrificed when the king reprieved them. After hearing their tale he despatched a huge force with them to

1. T.H. Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers therein*, T.H. Lewin, 1869, Calcutta.

destroy Kachak. But the troops did not return; some were killed by the Reangs and the other married Reang damsels and settled down there.

Many expeditions sent later similarly failed to return. The raja got worried and sent seven of his most faithful warriors to unravel the mystery. These people were not only brave but were also very wise and clever. They were accosted by Kachaks minister as they entered the Reang country. He was armed with a *dao*. The seven wise men got him engaged in a conversation on bravery telling him that only the person who can cut seven bamboos with a *dao* could be considered brave. Then they cleverly stuffed the bamboos with stones and handed them over to the minister whose *dao* became blunt by the time he had cut four. He was easily overpowered and killed. The king of Reangs, acting without his wise minister's counsel, was easily overpowered and arrested. The Tripura army then entered the land and arrested everybody and condemned them to death. The Tripura maharani, being commanded in her dream, interceded on their behalf and got them a reprieve. When she visited the jail, the Reangs thought her to be goddess. She told the Reangs she had no children and would like to adopt them. She made them drink milk from her breasts and take a vow of fidelity to the state. From that day the Reangs started living in Tripura.

The political system of the Reangs was headed by the *Rai*, the Supreme Chief. He was assisted by his Prime Minister, *Kachak*. It is interesting to note that the title of the fabled ruler of the Reangs was given to the Prime Minister of their *de-facto* ruler. Each one of these functionaries were assisted by a number of *sardars*. The *Rai* was assisted by *Chapiakha*, his successor, and *Chapia*, the *Chapiakha's* successor, the three of them forming a sort of Supreme Council. The *Rai* was also assisted by *Darkalam*, the chief priest, *Dalui*, the counsellor, *Bhandari*, the store keeper, *Kanda*, the attendant, *Daya Hazara*, the drum beater, *Muria*, the flutist, *Dugria* and *daoa*, the musicians, and *Saikrak*, the distributor of meat after the *pujas*. The *Kachak* was assisted by *Yakchung*, the *nazir*, *Hazra*, the attendant, *Kang reng*, the *Yakchung's* attendant, *Khan Kalim*, the umbrella holder of *Yakchung*, and *Khandal*, the collector of foodstuff.

There were 26 leaders holding the afore-mentioned 19 titles. They were known as *Katardafa* (big castes) and were exempted from the payment of *gharchukti* (family tax). The Council functioned as the final arbitrator in all matters, civil or criminal. These administrative functionaries were not paid but they could appropriate the fines. This Council has now become defunct after the successful revolt against Kharendra Rai in 1940—42. This revolt, now dubbed as a *swadeshi* movement by some, was nothing but the result of an internal rift amongst some of the clans and, though put down ruthlessly by the Maharaja, succeeded in completely demolishing the authority of the *Rai*. Some of the *Katardafa* still enjoy a lot of status and respect even though they have been stripped of their power and functions. I once met the Chapiakha of the Khowai area, Bhujanjoy Reang Choudhury, in one of the Atharamura villages. He was received with great reverence by the villagers and his feet were washed by the local headman as he entered the hut where I was putting up. The 76-year-old chief still retained much of his pride and regal glory but one could see that he felt much like any of the innumerable princes of India, now dethroned.

The *Para* chief, once at the bottom of the hierarchy, still remains all powerful at his level despite the vicissitudes of the last two decades, disposing of divorce, theft, and other civil and criminal matters.

The *Rai's* decision on all matters was final. In murder cases, the *Rai* carries out an enquiry. He administers justice more or less on the basis of the dictum, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." If death has been caused by strangulation, this process will be repeated on the murderer, short of causing death to him. In the meantime, if he repents, he is fined and let off; otherwise he is handed over to the police.

The fine is always in multiples of 6, i.e. 6×20 rupees, 6×1 rupee, $6 \times \frac{1}{2}$ rupee, $6 \times \frac{1}{4}$ rupee, etc. The maximum fine is Rs. 120 and is awarded in cases of murder and adultery. The fine is usually appropriated by the council which awards it, apart from the compensation which is paid to the victim.

To impose its decisions, the council engages the services of the *Tuisi*, the constable-cum-peon. He is paid from the fine money collected.

The Reang village councils are active to this day. Mitrajoy, headman of Nunacherra, narrated two incidents to me in which the council of village headmen had effectively imposed their decisions. In 1969 Purbajoy Reang committed dacoity in the house of Krishnaroy of Gulicherra and made away with Rs. 200 in cash and one and a half maunds of rice. He was produced before the council and fined Rs. 5 and made to return the stolen property. In another incident in July 197 the daughter of Jagnishi (17 years old) eloped with Saturoy (20) Jagnishi reported the matter to Mitrajoy who immediately convoked the council. A *Tuisi* was sent out and he brought the couple with him. The girl was restored to her father. After summary enquiries, Saturoy's father's plea that the girl was responsible for the elopement was accepted by the council. Jagnishi was fined Rs. 25 of which Rs. 10 was given to Saturoy.

The unit of the Reang social organisation is the joint family. It consists of the father and mother, their unmarried children, and their sons and their families. In some cases the brothers may be staying together with their families. The eldest male member is the authoritarian head of the joint family. According to Bhabananda Mukherjee², the family entails four principles, namely to propagate progeny to have kin, to attain virtue, to educate children in tribal culture, and to live amidst paddy and riches. The eldest male member, as the custodian of the family tradition for which he is respected and obeyed, is to ensure that these basic needs are fulfilled.

According to Mukherjee the "primary functions of the (Reang) family is to foster the spirit of integration in the social life of the members of the group. This integration is achieved through care, education, work loyalty to authority and observance of family usages" (Page 11). He adds that the relation between husband and wife is not based on sex only but on the feeling of mutual dependence, responsibility, love, and trust. A woman cares for her husband who too acknowledges her status and role.

The family is integrated into the village by the headman or *Choudhury*, who wields in the village almost as much authority

2. The Reang: Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology, Vol. VIII, No. 1, January 1959

as the father in his family. The *Rai*, in his turn, was heading the social hierarchy of all the Reangs and, in his office, integrates it with the political structure. But with his overthrow, there is now no integrating and rallying force left amongst the Reangs leading to fissures and cracks in their traditional solidarity. Reangs, for this reason, are now the most unstable, and therefore, unpredictable tribal group in Tripura.

A Reang marriage is settled by negotiation usually carried out by the parents. In rare cases 'love marriages' are permitted. The marriage ceremony, *Kailaimi*, consists of sprinkling three drops of water by the *Achai* (priest) on the head of the bridegroom and on the breast cloth of the bride and is accompanied by feasting and drinking. The bridegroom stays on in the bride's house for three years, his labour during that period constituting the bride-price. There is no objection if the couple starts marital relations at this stage. If the boy leaves before completing the period, he has no right to marry the girl who is free to marry anybody else. If the bride's father agrees, some other person can be sent on behalf of the groom to perform the labour. Nowadays in some cases money is also paid in lieu of this labour. After that period the couple stays in his house. Divorce is easily obtained. Due to the smallness of their *paras*, marriage amongst cousins is common.

Reangs cremate their dead, the bones of the dead being kept for a year in a shed (*simangnok*). The bones are then brought back to the house by a widow and the shed is burnt down to drive away the spirit. After a period of feasting and dancing the bones are immersed in a river on a bamboo raft. The belief in the immortality of the soul and its reincarnation is very strong. It is believed that life divides into two parts, the soul mixing with the wind and body taking refuge in water.

The Reangs have a rich material culture. They weave and dye their own clothes and set all sorts of traps to hunt game. The women use expensive silver coins as necklaces and dress in colourful loin cloth. The Reang women take special care of their hair. They like flowers more than ornaments. They use flowers not only for their hair but also stuff them into their ears and noses. At one time they did not believe in any artificial make up, but now they use soap, perfumed oil and other scents.

They move freely in their village with hardly any garments above the waist. In one village in Atharamura I saw an entire family sitting stark naked around a fire joking and chatting while the mother prepared the evening meal. A substantial part of their rice production goes into the making of wine, which they consume in abundance on all occasions.

They give a hearty welcome to their visitors. The whole village is decorated with flowers and the men and women turn out in all their finery to greet an honoured guest. All the women touch his feet while the wife of the headman presents him many bottles of wine which the whole village shares. When he departs an egg is placed on a banana leaf which is placed on the outskirts of the village. The departing guest is then asked to gulp down a glass of rice-beer and, amidst the beating of drums, the egg is slit cleanly into two with a sharp *dao*. Everybody eagerly watches as the two pieces sway on the banana leaf. If one of them is convex up and the other concave up, it is considered very auspicious and every body rejoices and drinks. It is in this festive spirit of joy that the guests depart.

The Reangs who in 1931 numbered 35,881 and now number over 65,000, practise a religion which is a blend of their old animistic faith and Hindu beliefs and practices. Noting the effect of Hinduism on their traditional religion, Mukherjee states that of their original 66 rituals, only 28 are now regularly performed. Their mythology now include the names of many Hindu deities like Ram, Sita and Shiva. A number of Shiva and Krishna temples have been set up where worship is done by Reang priests. They are also taking to *Kirtan* (community singing of devotional songs) after the example of their Bengali neighbours. Most of the Reangs, except those who have embraced Christianity, now call themselves Hindus of the Shakta cult. The few (13 in 1931) who have adopted Vaishnavism abjure fish and meat and have given up animal sacrifice. Their number has gone up considerably over the years.

The Reangs believe that once *Achu Sibrai*, the Supreme Being, was engaged in deep meditation on two sacred stones for the creation of the Reangs. Nearby his wife, symbolised as a bird, while hatching two eggs, felt hungry and picked up these two stones, taking them to be fruit and carried them to her nest. Not being able to eat them she hatched them. After twelve

years *Debtarani* and *Deblakshmi* were born from these stones. They became the ancestors of the Reang people. *Sammlimland* and *Tampuima*, born of the two eggs, became the ancestors of the Reang deities. *Achu Sibrai* woke up and blessed *Debtarani* and *Deblakshmi* and, instructing the deities to keep watch on them, left. Since then the deities live in this world, threatening the human beings with death and disease when the world becomes sinful.

Of the deities, *Achu Sibrai* becomes dead drunk, he is reincarnated as *Buraha*, the dreaded god of destruction, who can be loosely equated with Shiva. The other deities are *Tuima* (the goddess of the river), *Garai*, and *Kalai*, *Sangrama* (the god deity of the hills), *Buracha* (the lord of the forests), *Khulangma* (the goddess of cotton), *Mailong Ma* (Laxmi), *Buruirao* (the deities of evil spirits), and *Lampira* (the god of the sky and the ocean). The Reangs believe in a very close relationship between them and the deities, who can do them much harm or good. If Reangs do not abide by the laws of *Achu Sibrai*, these deities will punish them and draught, pestilence and famine will follow. Rituals have to be regularly performed to appease these deities.

The evil spirits, or *Buruirao*, have to be worshipped near their homesteads or the boundaries of their villages. The visible form of the ghosts is believed to be a forest fire. Ghosts are also believed to be the cause of the thumping sound heard in a bamboo forest.

The Reangs believe that good and evil pervades the world. Goodness comes out of the happiness that emanates from truth and righteousness and evil from the lack of it. The idea of *Kahau* (sacredness) and *haia* (profanation) are also well developed in them. Sacredness comes out of performance of prescribed rituals, cleanliness and sanctification. Cotton is also considered sacred and is used in almost all rituals. Eating without taking a bath is considered profane.

It is believed that diseases are caused by some specified deities and evil spirits who have to be regularly appeased. For any disease medicine is prescribed by the *vaidya*, but it cannot be warded off by medicine alone : rituals have to be performed by the *achai* or *ojha*.

Mukherjee while classifying the rituals as those performed

by the individual family, by the members of the clan and community and by the chief, states that they aim at achieving economic, social and personal security for the person who performs it. The rituals act as intermediaries between the Reang and his deities. He classifies the rituals into three categories : one, *Nokhungswami* which aim at keeping the house sanctified; two, *Khangmi* which aims at recovery from illness; and three, *Khangkachang Khangmi* aims at keeping the individual sanctified from birth until marriage. These rituals comprise of oral invocation, offerings, divination and sacrifice.

Rituals are performed before cutting the *jhum* for prevention and cure of disease, for the protection of a newly-built house, for protection against snake-bite, for rains, for wealth, for the welfare of the clansman, and for various other individual and clan needs. In addition, they offer worship to all the rivers including the Gumti, Karnafuli, Muhuri and Feny. They also perform Lakshmi puja, Ker puja, Matangi puja, Tripura Sundari puja and Chitragupta puja every year.

Every family participates in one or more such pujas every year. Each of these rituals may cost anywhere from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 10,000. The money is collected by subscription by the *Katardafa*, whose responsibility it is to organise them. The occasion of the rituals gives an opportunity to Reangs from all parts of the state to meet and demonstrate their unity. This occasion is also utilised for a meeting of all the chiefs and all disputes are solved and misunderstandings removed. These pujas, once a powerful integrating force, are now dying out mainly due to the decay of the power and influence of the *Katardafa*. The Reang community is consequently breaking up, with diverse local interests tending to pull in opposing directions. As pointed out earlier, Reangs are now the most unstable tribal society of Tripura and pose a serious challenge to the administrator and the politician.

The Jamatias

Jamat in Urdu means an assembly of persons. The former ruler of Tripura used to recruit his army from a class of tribals who were not only warriors but also had proved their loyalty to him. A fair proportion of his armed forces were drawn from

amongst the Jamatias, who formed a group in his army, and it was from this fact that they derived their clan name. They were given a special position amongst the tribals and were exempted from *gharchuk ti* and given settlements of vast tracts of fertile land mainly in the Udaipur division. As a result of this the Jamatias, though they once belonged to the Tripuri tribe, managed to evolve a political system of their own and develop economically and socially.

In 1931 the population of the Jamatias was a little over 11,000. In 1961 their population had gone up to 24,355 and may be of the order of 30,000 now. The bulk of these people stay in the fertile valleys of Udaipur and Amarapur sub-divisions though isolated pockets of Jamatias are found in almost all the other sub-divisions as well.

Lewin has described the Tripuris as a "restless" tribe, shifting their villages every now and then in nomadic fashion. The Jamatias have, however, disproved this thesis. They have shown that given the necessary incentives and facilities and cultivable and fertile lands, the tribals are as much able to settle down as any other plains community. By 1931 almost all of them had given up *jhuming* and taken to plough cultivation (1931 Census Report). During my tour of some of the Jamatia areas of Tripura, especially in the Maharani area of Udaipur, I, however, found a tendency amongst them to *jhum* the nearby hillocks to supplement their income. The reason for this is not far to seek. Due to the fast increasing population not only of the Jamatias but also of their neighbours, the pressure on the cultivable land has increased and its productivity for this reason has gone down and it is difficult for these people to satisfy their economic needs from plough cultivation alone. For this reason some Bengalis have also, in past years, taken to *jhuming*. Increased emphasis on horticulture and popularisation of double or triple cropping will, it is hoped, bring back these tribals to their land.

At the apex of their political hierarchy, the Jamatias have two functionaries, known as *Akra*. One of them is Kripa Moi Sardar of the Bagma area and the other is Chander Mohan of the Baisha bari-Maharani area. Tripura is divided into 16 *mahals*, each under the charge of 2 *Panchais*. These functionaries for the Jampuijala area are Arjun Pada Jamatia and Deb Barma Jamatia. The *Panchais* are elected by all the village headman

known as the *Choudhury*, who in turn, is elected by the people of the *para* (village). Heredity is taken as no criteria for filling up these posts. There is no fixed tenure; the incumbents continue as long as they enjoy the confidence of the people, after which they are replaced.

The *Akra* is the authority for disposing of criminal and civil matters. The maximum fine is Rs. 176 and 36 paise (one hundred rupee coins, one hundred eight-anna bits, one hundred four-anna bits, one hundred anna-bits and one hundred paises). This is awarded in case of elopement and abduction. The fines for other offences vary. Physical torture and caning is also often resorted to as a punishment. Murder cases are referred to the police.

The Jamatias live in big *paras* and villages. They have long back discarded the Champa-Khampa type of construction and are now mud plastering their walls and making their floor with earth after the fashion of their Bengali neighbours. They have big courtyards and grow fruit trees in their backyards. They love good things of life and like to live and eat well.

They have some time back adopted Hinduism. The 1931 Census Report mentions how they came to be converted. During the reign of Bir Bikram there was one official Okhirai Hazari who was cruel and tyrannical. The Jamatias rose in revolt against his oppression. The Maharaja sent his army to put down the revolt but his forces were repelled. He then called the Darlongs to his aid, who succeeded in crushing the rebellion. They brought with them over 200 Jamatias with their leader in chains to Agartala. The then magistrate, Mangal Shah, wrote that the heads of these Jamatias were cut off and hung up in the streets of Agartala.

Bir Bikram, however, spared the life of their leader. Touched by this gesture, the sardar went back to his area and enjoined all the Jamatias to follow Hindu customs. From that day they started worshipping Hindu gods and abjured meat and fish. In the 1931 Census Report it is mentioned that apart from 803 Jamatias, who subscribed to the Vaishnav faith, all others belonged to the Shakti cult. Many of them go every year for pilgrimage to Kashi and Brindaban.

In addition to the Hindu rituals, they retain many of their old pujas. Like the Tripuris and Reangs, these pujas are perform-

ed by collecting subscription. They worship on the banks of Gumti, Burima and Khawai rivers. They also perform the Tripuri pujas like the Garia. These rituals are performed by the *ojhas*. The person who offers the puja is known as *Kherpang*. *Daria* is the drum-beater and *Matai Balnou* is he who traditionally carries the idols.

In respect of their culture, social customs and way of life they are not dissimilar to the Tripuris, whose language is akin to theirs. The system of *jamaikhata* has lost much of its rigours with them. The girl is never required to take a dowry with her. They are not very fond of strong liquors, satisfying themselves with mild doses on ceremonial occasions.

The Jamatias are generally a peaceful and loyal tribe but recently some discontent has been noticed amongst them. Some of them, especially the youth, are tending to align themselves with the disruptionist forces. The main reason appears to be the frustration for having lost most of their special privileges after the beginning of a democratic polity in Tripura.

Noatia

Noatia means new. Their customs are very similar to that of the *Jamatias*.

CHAPTER 8

The Other Tribes

The Chakmas and the Mughs

The total population of the Mughs and the Chakmas was in the region of 33,000 at the time of the 1961 census. All of them are Buddhists. It is now widely believed that Buddhism was known in Bengal even before Ashoka's time, but information for this period is rather scanty. A copper plate found in Gunaighar, near Comilla in Bangladesh, records a land grant in favour of a Mahayana Buddhist Sangha. Excavations in Mainamati and Paharpur have indicated a flourishing Buddhist civilisation in the area of Bengal which borders Tripura. Some Buddhist images have been found in some parts of Tripura, namely, Dharmaganagar, Bishalgarh and Amarapur, but they have yet to be scientifically studied.

It is likely that this area of Tripura was part of ancient Samatata. This is the view of Dr. Heinz Bechert. Such a view would, of course, conflict with the account given in the *Rajmala*, the chronicle of the rulers of Tripura, which asserts that Tripura has always been a Hindu kingdom. There seems to be no doubt, however, that ancient Tripura had meaningful contacts with Buddhism. The Buddhism that we now find in Tripura, as being practised by the Mughs and the Chakmas, has, we can be certain, no direct connection with the Buddhism prevailing in ancient Bengal and Tripura.

The Chakmas

The oldest book of the Chakmas is the *Agartara* (*tara*=stranger or dharma; *agar*=written). It is mentioned therein that the Chakmas came originally from Champaknagar. There are divergent views, however, whether Champaknagar is in Khmer (Cambodia) or Bihar. It is said that the King of Champaknagar had two sons, Bijoygiri and Samargiri. When Bijoygiri was away on a campaign of conquest in the east, his younger brother usurped the throne and prepared to resist by force his return. On hearing this Bijoygiri decided not to return, and settled down in the hilly regions he had recently conquered. The Chakmas are said to be descendants of Bijoygiri.

Another story of their origin, prevalent in Lewin's time (1869), is that they were Mughals. It is based on the fact that many of their kings had Muslim names. This is no longer believed as it is well-known that most Arakanese kings kept Muslim names a few centuries back.

Recently *L.G. Loeffler* has put forward a theory that the Sak tribe, a small tribe living on the borders of Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Arakans, descended from the same people as the Chakmas. From a linguistic study of the Sak language he concluded that they are related to the Kadu of Upper Burma and to the Lui of Manipur. He asserts that during the 15th to the 17th century the main group of the Sak population appear to have adopted Bengali culture and language and became Chakmas in the modern sense of the term. Dr. Heinz Bechert asserts that "there can be no doubt that the Chakmas have been Buddhists since long".¹ He states that Buddhism spread to the 'Kuki lands' (eastern India and Burma) during Ashoka's time. When the Muslim's conquered Magadha, a larger number of monks fled from there to the 'Kuki lands'. Bechert asserts that the conversion of Chakmas to Buddhism probably took place around that time. Various attempts have been made in the past to baptise them, but without result.

Rani Kalindi was the last of the independent rulers of the Chakmas. One Nilchandra Dewan revolted against her. To

1. *Contemporary Buddhism in Bengal and Tripura*, Educational Miscellany Dec. 67—Mar. 68.

destroy him the Rani called the Kukis and the Lushais to her aid to which Nilchandra's reaction was to invite the British to intervene, thus leading to the Lushai expeditions and gradual extension of their influence in the area. It was shortly after this that Chakmas in large numbers started emigrating to Tripura.

It was during her reign that the reform of Bengal Buddhism was initiated before her successor Raja Harish Chandra was forced by the British to move his residence from Rangania to Rangamati in 1873—1875. To remove the corruption in the Sangha she invited Sangharaja Saramitta Mahasthavira of Arakan to come to her kingdom. Saramitta headed the reform movement in 1864. This movement deeply affected the Bengali Buddhists of Chittagong as well. It is reported that in 1956 there were over 310 vihars and temples in east Bengal, over 240 in Chittagong alone. There are 50 vihars in Tripura where the leading personality of the Buddhist revival movement is Arya-mitra Mahathera, who is the head of all the Bhikkhus of Tripura. The Chakmas belong to the Theravada Buddhism.

The *Genkhuli* (bards) sing the songs of Chakma kings; they are invited on festive occasions. On such occasions there is much merry-making and feasting for nights together. These bards tell in musical terms the tale of the love and final parting of Radhamohan and Dhanapati. These stories give an idea of the social customs and way of life of the Chakmas of those days. They also narrate the story of the pious king Dadingri, the goddess of rice, Lakhi, the story of man and woman, *Langia Lagoni*, and many other tales.

Besides the Taras there are some other works of Chakma literature. Some additional Taras deal with medicine and astrology. Some other books are written not in the language of the Taras but a more archaic form of the present-day Chakma language. The Raulees (non-orthodox priests called upon to perform customary rites on every important occasion by the Chakmas) have a number of *mantra* books in the Chakma script.

The Chakmas were originally *Jhumias*. They first came to Tripura in search of fertile, virgin lands. In 1884 over 4,000 Chakmas were reported to have crossed over into Tripura. They are said to have originally sailed from the Arakans along the Bay of Bengal and embarked at Chittagong after crossing the Matamuhuri, Teknaf and Sankh rivers. In the course of their

travels, they were often engaged in fierce battles with the Mughls and the Portuguese sea pirates who were then plundering east Bengal. From Chittagong they followed the Karnafuli river and crossing it came to the Kasalong and Mayoni tracts. At that time Tripura, Chittagong and other neighbouring areas were under the temporary sway of the Arakanese (Mughls).

It is said that the Mughls have hidden priceless treasures looted from these areas all along the river banks in Arakans and Burma. The *Bijkas* mention the details of the places where these treasures are hidden. They then crossed over from Govindbari into the Chhamanu and Manu valley. Then, following the Deo river, they spread out to Pacherthal, Machmara and Kanchanpur. In all these areas substantial numbers of them are now settled. They built their settlements on the banks of these rivers, leaving them only when they were required to go to their *jhums*. They brought the river beds also under cultivation, spending 6 months near their *jhums*. Their habit of living on the river banks earned them the title *Khyyoungtha* (children of the river) from Lewin.

They build their houses on *machans* (raised platforms). Their houses are mainly constructed with wood and bamboo with a *chan* grass thatched roof. The construction of the Noatia and Chakma houses is essentially the same. Unlike that of other tribals, their house consists of several rooms separated by bamboo partitions. Access to the house, which may be six feet from the ground, is by means of bamboo steps or footholds cut in the trunk of a tree placed in the front and which can be removed in the night. Under the platform, pigs, fowls and other domesticated birds and animals find shelter. Now-a-days many Chakmas are avoiding the *machan* type of construction and making their houses on the ground like the Bengalis.

Their house is about 25—30 metres in length and has an open verandah in front known as the *ijar*, two separate verandahs for males and females known as *chana* used as dining halls and connected with the *ijar* by a single communicating door, a guest room known as *singaba* used by the guests and, in their absence, by the young men of the family, separate bed rooms for the married children known as *ranansal*, and a big room for the women known as the *ojaleng*. The kitchen is between the *ranansal* and the verandah for females and has a *pucca* fireplace.

The *ijar* is used to store pitchers of water and also to dry the paddy.

The guests are required to wash their feet here before they enter the house. There are no windows in the house except in the *ojaleng* and the guest room, the rest of the rooms having small ventilators. The practice of all the youth of the village sleeping in a common house has been discarded just as it has been given up by all the tribals of Tripura. There is a house for the young men of the village. This house is known as the *Dharmshala*, which serves as a youth club-cum-guest house. The youth are required to look after the needs of the guests when they come and stay there. The Noatias do not have such houses, because not being Buddhists, they do not feel it incumbent to have *dharmshalas*.

The head of a Chakma village is the *karbari*, whose main function is to collect rent and serve summons issued by the *dewan* or the raja. The whole state of the Chakma raja (now in Bangladesh) was divided amongst the *dewans* and the *talugdars*. Each clan had one *dewan* or *talugdar*. They were most powerful in revenue and judicial matters. They could try all cases except those of murder, which were tried by the raja. They acted through the *karbaris*, whom they appointed, and who were supreme at the village level. The *dewans* had to pay *nazar* (tribute) to the raja. In between the *dewan* and the *karbari* there is a functionary known as the *khisa*, but his functions are minimal. A *khisa* is only appointed if the clan is so large that the *dewan* cannot administer it directly. Even today these functionaries retain a great deal of their old power and glory and the experiment of village level democracy is tending to perpetuate it.

Boys and girls are not allowed to marry without the consent of their parents. The delinquents are punished. In case a boy elopes with a girl, he has to pay a fine of Rs. 25, a pig and several bottles of rice beer. The girl has to give a cock and Rs. 15. If they elope again, the fine is repeated. After a few similar occasions the marriage is conceded. In this respect there seems to have been little change since Lewin's time. The bride has to come to the groom's house for the marriage.

If a man divorces his wife without any fault, he has to give her all the ornaments and dresses and the suckling babies. The other children are free to choose between the two. Until the

divorced wife remarries, she is entitled to compensation and her children will inherit the property. On remarriage she forfeits all her rights.

No cremation can take place on a Wednesday. When an old person dies, his body is preserved for days so that his relatives and friends can all have a glimpse. A big ceremony is arranged if a *raja* or *dewan* dies. A huge chariot is made on which his body is kept. Drums are beaten as two groups pull huge ropes tied on the two ends of the chariot. The body is burnt at sunset. The funeral pyre is kept east to west and hymns from the *Agartara* are recited for the whole night.

The Chakma language is a mixture of Sanskrit and Pali.

The Mughs

The term as applied to these colourful people is entirely a misnomer. As Lewin has pointed out, this name exclusively belongs "to a class of people residing in the Chittagong district, called Rajbunsis or Mughs, who are the offspring of Bengali women by Burmans when the latter possessed Chittagong. They are well-known in Calcutta as Mugh cooks". The people to whom Lewin was apparently referring are found even now in Tripura and are popularly known as Baruahs. The term Mugh is commonly used by the plains people for robbers and pirates in east Bengal and this may be one of the reasons why many of them now prefer to call themselves Marma, which in the Arakanese tongue means Burmans. The term Mugh in its vulgar sense cannot be applied to the people who are now known by it and who were described by Lewin as manly, upright and noble.

The total number of Mughs in Tripura had gone up from a little less than 6,000 in 1931 to a little over 10,000 in 1961. Their population may now be of the order of 13,000 to 15,000. To trace their history we will have to refer to the Burmese book '*Maharajuang*' and the Arakanese chronicles. According to the *Maharajuang*, Sakya Singh was one of the rulers of this clan. He was succeeded by one Adhiraj during whose reign there was a lot of internecine warfare as a result of which he was forced to change his capital to Tagaon on the banks of the Irawati. On his death his two sons, Kanrajagi and Kanranji, fought over

the throne. A compromise was finally arrived at that whoever could construct a temple in a night would succeed to the throne. The younger son Kanranji succeeded and was elevated to the throne. The elder brother left the state and set up his empire lower down in the Arakans. The Mughs claim to be the followers of this king.

There is a belief—of course it conflicts with the account given in the *Rajmala*—that the Arakans empire once embraced the whole of Tripura. It is said that a few centuries back Tripura was seized by Jujharu Fa from the Mughs. From then on the Tripura state was in constant strife with the Mughs. "This tribe appears to have migrated from the Arakan Hills, as both Burmese and English accounts of the 18th century make frequent references to the Marma refugees who were driven out of Arakan by the Burmese invaders in 1783-84".

Rajput adds :

"They moved through the Matamohuri Valley into Cox's Bazaar area in the south, and from there scattered into the interior of the Hill Tracts. In fact, there were two separate waves of immigration about the same time : one which settled in the Mong Circle in the north, and the other which occupied the Bohmong Circle in the south."² It appears that the Mughs first came to Tripura shortly after the Chakmas. They can therefore, be considered the most recent of the immigrants. That they have yet to take roots in Tripura is obvious from the fact that even now their priests come from Burma. I found during one of my visits to a Mugh village in Sabroom that their priest had arrived so recently from Burma that he could not speak any of the Indian languages.

The Mughs are a deeply religious people. The most imposing structure in their village is the temple wherein a few brass images of the Buddha are kept, around which they burn candles. In the Mugh area of Sabroom, where Mughs live in substantial numbers, it is common to find wayside resting places where the traveller can take rest.

The Mugh chiefs are given the title of Bohmong Choudhury or Tehsildar. They solve their own disputes and seldom, if

2. A.B. Rajput, *The Tribes of Chittagong Hill Tracts*.

ever, go to court. They have no castes or subcastes and are free to marry anybody they please, irrespective of caste. Theirs is a very free society in which girls and boys are allowed to mix freely so that they can choose their life partners. Divorce is not very difficult to get. The boys and girls have equal rights to remarry. After marriage the boy usually lives separately, though near the house of his parents.

They have been greatly influenced by the Chakmas in the matter of dress, customs and manners. There is very little difference between the two tribes in customs relating to marriage, inheritance, elopement, disposal of the dead and the mode of living. The Mugh society is patrilinear, like almost all the other tribal societies of Tripura, and the property passes on from the father to the eldest son. Though they are Buddhists, the Mughs take meat of various birds and animals. They also do not abstain from meat and fish during the mourning period, as the Chakmas do.

The Mughs may not be as fond as the Reangs and Tripuris are for singing and dancing, but they have a high appreciation of poetry. I once heard a beautiful song from Mugh youth which, in its depth and intensity of feeling can be compared to Kalidasa's *Meghdoot*. Hearing the nightingale singing, the love-lorn youth, sitting forlornly by the side of the lake, asks the bird not to sing her songs to him at a time when he is pining for love. He requests her to fly to the lake where his beloved sits, hear the songs that she so sweetly sings, and then come back and sing those songs to him. The song sung with great feeling, has left a permanent impress on my heart.

The Mughs are an intelligent, hard-working and resourceful tribe. In the 1931 Census it was reported that they were then mainly dependent on shifting cultivation though they were to plough cultivation. Now, 47 years later, they are the most prosperous cultivators in Tripura, ploughing huge tracts of fertile valley land. They have almost entirely given up *jhuming*.

The Santhals, Mundas and Oraons

The Santhals, Mundas and Oraons came to Tripura from the tea gardens in Sylhet where they worked as labourers a few decades back. They had come to Sylhet from the

Chota Nagpur area generations ago. In Tripura they settled in the heavily forested areas of Khowai, Kamalpur and Sadar sub-divisions. They cleared the lands but, before they could settle down, were driven away by the communist-inspired Dev Burmans of that area. They lead a closely-knit social life, dominated by their *sardars*. The final court of appeal of the Santhals is the council of 48 *Sardars* drawn from different areas of Tripura known as the *Mandal*.

All these tribal communities have faith in a Supreme Being. The Oraons call him *Dharmes* and the Santhals and Mundas *Singbonga*. They ascribe to him all goodness, order and power. *Dharmes* is worshipped and all sacrifices are offered to him. He saves the family from the evil eye and other ills. The Oraons have the *Palkhansna Danda Katta* and *Bhelwa-Phari* ceremonies on the occasion of sowing seed, harvesting and feast of the first fruit respectively. The Supreme Being is approached through the lower deities and spirits.

These communities have the village as their physical base which has many guardian spirits. The Lady of the Grove *Chala Pachho* for Oraons and *Jaher Bari* for Mundas helps them in their agricultural operations. This is described as a fertility cult. She looks after their bodily and spiritual needs also. In March-April every year the *Khaddi* or *Sarhul* festival is organised in Her honour.

Darha is the boundary spirit and acts as the *chaprasi* of the Lady. This guards the village from outside attack. *Khunt* is the clan spirit, *Baranda* the family deity, and *Achrael* the class deity of women.

The deceased members of the family ensure a continuity with the living. The Mundas have a special abode, *Ading*, for departed ancestors in the house. The Oraons have an ancestral pit (*kundi*) in which bones and remains of the dead are gathered and kept till the annual *Harbori* when they are drowned in the river. These spirits are offered a few grains of rice at each meal. The living and dead are separated only in form.

The medicine man is the *Baidh* who has either acquired knowledge by personal *sadhana* or acquired it from some other *Baidh*, or got instruction in dreams. The *Deonrahs* (witch doctors), *Matis*, and *Bhagats* (devotees) are also said to know the secrets of medicine.

Marriage amongst the Santhals has to be by the consent of the parents and is negotiated by a *raibar*. 'Love marriages' are permitted in rare cases. The prevailing bride price in the area is Rs. 22. Divorce can be permitted by the council of *sardars*, the party found at fault being liable to pay a fine.

The Santhals of Tripura have almost forgotten their ancient customs and lore having been away from their original homeland for such a long time now. They are exceedingly poor and neglected. They have learnt Bengali. They are still adept in the use of the bow and arrow. Their songs are mostly in Hindi, possibly composed recently.

CHAPTER 9

The Bengalis

The Bengali immigrants came into Tripura in successive waves as communal frenzy displaced them, from time to time, from their native villages and cities of the then East Pakistan. The displaced person, now settled permanently in Tripura, is a dominant and volatile section of Tripura's population. Their life and problems are typical and different.

Rina was the daughter of a small peasant in Sylhet. She was the eldest of a family of four, and her father found it very difficult to manage his affairs with the meagre income from his farm.

One evening, when Rina returned from school, he summoned her. "My daughter" he said, "Our condition is known to you. We will ultimately have to migrate to India. I have arranged for you to go to your uncle in Kailashahar and complete your studies there".

This was in 1955 and Rina was only 11 years old and studying in class VI. She matriculated in 1960 and, before she could get a job as a teacher in 1962, she had done her intermediate also.

She took a separate house and invited her younger brothers and sisters to come from Sylhet and stay with her. They were admitted in the local school at Kailashahar. Her father soon arranged a deal with a Muslim, exchanged his property, and came and joined his family. This was in 1965. Now 34 year-old, Rina is still unmarried. She cannot think of marriage before her younger brothers and sisters are well-settled in life.

Rina's is not an isolated case in Tripura. Many other eldest daughters before her had to shoulder the responsibilities that she was discharging. Partition did not have the same effects in Bengal as it had in Punjab, where millions were forced to flee their homes in the face of violent communal riots in the first few years after partition. In Bengal there was no such sudden convulsion, the fuse of the time bomb was delayed and deferred. The influx never stopped, Rina and many others like her continued to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their loved ones.

Rina was lucky. She had passed out of school in 1960 when jobs were a plenty due to the expansion of the administrative personnel. Had she come in 1970s she would have, like Bimal Chakravarty who approached me for a job, joined the ranks of the jobless.

Bimal Chakravarty appealed to me for a job as follows:

"I beg most respectfully to state that my unmeasurable sorrowful conditions. Such as I have been searching a job for 6 years but I am not getting one. Now I am helpless. I have not a place to stand. I am moving here and there. I have no food. I did not eat any kind of food yesterday. Today morning one gentleman gives two breads. I was cutting yesterday night on the footpath. I have none anything else in this world but I have only one thing which is my S.S.C. examination pass certificate securing 54% marks. I passed that examination from the Board of Comilla in 1964. I want to live in this world but cannot. Now I am going to die. It was my last hard struggling to stay in this world. My all life is futility. Now where am I going ?

In the intolerable perilous sufferings I request you with my heart and soul you save my soul instead of anything else. I desire to live if I get a house servant's job also. If I do not get anything that I must be died."

The cases of Bimal and Rina highlight the predicament in which the young refugees find themselves in Tripura today. The Bengali refugee has to compete with thousand of other unemployed persons for a job which is just not there. And then he has very little in the nature of a family income on which to

fall back upon. The result is that he soon becomes frustrated and disillusioned and vents his anger against the social and cultural institutions. Badal Chowdhury, head of the politically active Students' Federation, told me that he had joined the Federation in 1967 because he felt that a system in which his parents could not get enough food, shelter and clothings must be changed. He could well have added that a system which paid stipends to a young man while in school and then threw him to hopelessly swell the ranks of the unemployed must be changed.

The frustration of their senior colleagues must be percolating to the children in schools making them vie with the former in venting their anger. Udayan, a young lad of eight, in his capacity as the Prime Minister of the Abhoynagar school, led a deputation to the Chief Minister, Tripura, demanding a science laboratory in his school. He was stopped outside his house but when we found that he and his group were determined, if necessary, to break through the police cordon, an act which might have resulted in a clash with the police, I personally went out to speak to these youngsters. "My little boy", I pleaded, "The Chief Minister is busy in a conference. You give me your memorandum I shall give it to him." Young Udayan, with fire in his eyes, cried out in Bengali: "You bourgeois *dadal* ! You go and tell your Chief Minister that he dare not refuse to meet the Prime Minister !" It took an hour of persuasion to convince the young chap that the educational department authorities would look into his demands.

Any excuse is good enough for a strike in schools and colleges. Whether it is a rise in prices of essential commodities or arrest of some employees in West Bengal, the young 'Prime Ministers' are always ready to announce a boycott of the classes. Hardly any tests or examinations can be held mainly because not many students have maintained minimum attendance. When the time for decision for promotions arrives, there are again a series of demonstrations and protest rallies which force the government to promote everybody. The result is that a new class has developed in Tripura : the illiterate educated.

The refugees who came to Tripura have suffered as much, if not more, than his counterpart now living in the

slums at Scaldah or holding the begging bowl in Cannaught Place, or living at Mana camp to collect his dole. But the difference is in his attitude, in his outlook. He is reluctant to call himself a refugee, almost ashamed of being called so. In many cases he left his homestead in Bangladesh not so much because of the atrocities committed against him but because he felt it natural to move towards the east. It was the fashionable thing to do. He never relied on government aid for his rehabilitation, from which in any case he is barred for the last decade and a half.

He soon settles down and resumes life as if he were since ages a part of Tripura. I have met refugees, who have crossed the border only a couple of weeks before, discussing the local politics with as much passion as would be displayed by an old Tripura hand. A family may cross over in 10 to 15 years, as in the case of Rina, and then prepare to receive their other near relations. This gap gives them enough time to get adjusted to the change and, by the time the last of the family moves, he has more emotional ties with Tripura than with his ancestral home in East Bengal. He soon forgets his *majhi* songs and merges himself in the lyrical tunes of Tagore. The transformation for him is easy and natural and is not accompanied by any strain and stresses.

The refugee in Tripura is poor, but happy. Before he came to his new home, he knew that its streams contain no gold and its soil could not cough out diamonds. He knew that he would have to work hard to earn his daily bread. He knew what Tripura offered him and he smilingly accepted his fate. He does not expect much so he is happy with whatever little his labour brings him. He does not quarrel with his fate. He bravely carries his cross on his shoulders with a smile on his lips.

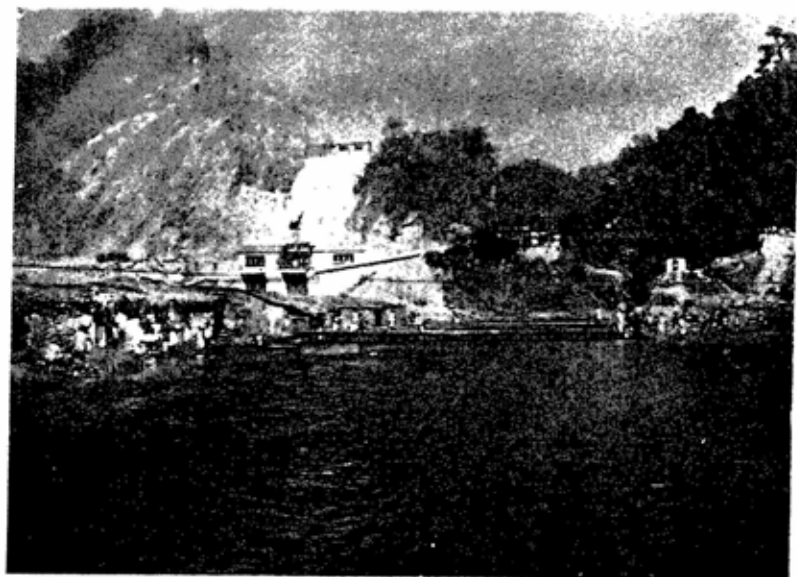
On the spiritual plane the Tripura refugee is at peace with his soul. He has smiled away his suffering, refusing to burden anybody else with his problems. He has given his land, property and worldly possessions in exchange for whatever little bit he was offered. He has no debts to repay, none to thank for favours done. He has not exploited anybody nor has he taken anything that was not his due. He can now look anybody in the eye and can stand erect before anybody. This makes him a



XXVII. The Government has made some ineffectual attempts to regulate 'Jhum' cultivation



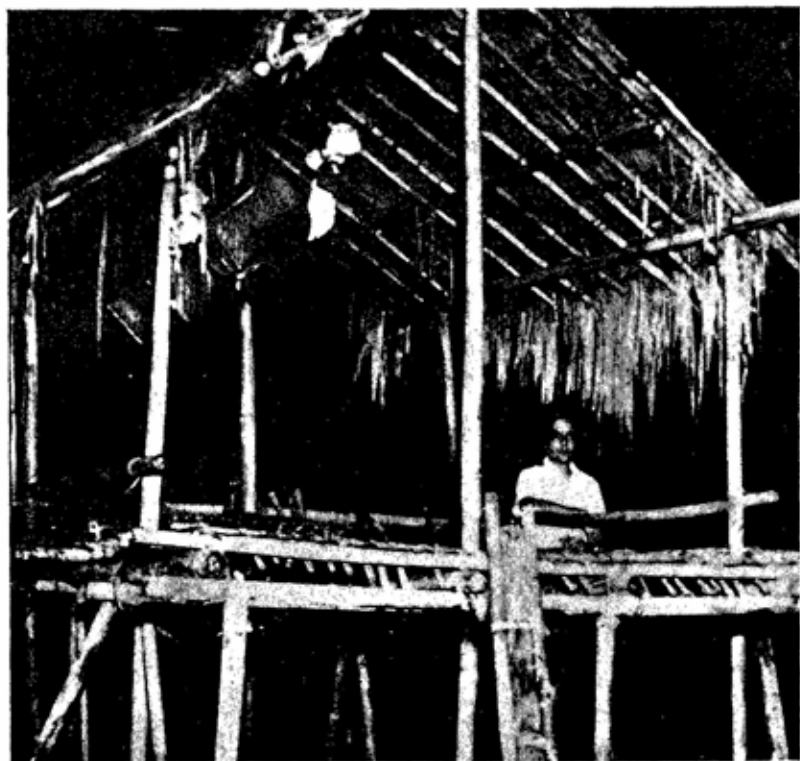
XXVIII. The Mundas and Oraons are mainly engaged in the tea gardens in north Tripura



XXIX. Tirthamukh – the site of the Gomti hydel project



XXX. A sunset harvest scene



XXXI. The author standing besides a 'tong ghar'



XXXII. The author during a tour in a Reang village in Atharamura



XXXIII. The Maharaja of Tripura, Kirit Manikya, at the time of his coronation



XXXIV. The magnificent Ujjayanta Palace now houses the Tripura Legislative Assembly

very proud man—proud of his little hut, of his family and of his cultural heritage.

But his pride does not make him vain and diffident. He is humble and is prepared to open his heart to everybody. His doors are always open to everyone who cares to call on him. He is very social and welcomes all his visitors with his very special sweets.

The refugee in Tripura displays commendable tolerance and understanding. Their extreme patience is symbolised in their elected former Chief Minister who once sat continuously for 36 hours with the leaders of a certain trade union listening, explaining and persuading, without once thinking of food nor even tea, and sleep and without once losing his temper or raising his voice. Dissidence is tolerated, if not actually welcomed. When the whole country is being corrupted with regional tendencies, Tripura welcomes and adopts all people. A couple of thousand settlers from Andhra Pradesh have been happily absorbed in the Lengtibari area of Khowai sub-division and now march arm in arm with their tribal and Bengali neighbours. Communal riots are unknown in Tripura and people live side by side in harmony irrespective of their differences of caste, creed or religion.

The Tripura refugee is very emotional. He tends to take himself, his views and his culture very seriously. He is emotionally attached to his field and home and displays a sense of deep involvement with whatever he does, whether it is singing in his house or acting on the stage, or making love to his sweetheart. Issues which have an emotional appeal, whether it is a murder in Calcutta or some burning political issue grip him mentally. He is apt to allow his emotions to carry him away and he can momentarily lose his bearings and balances also.

Once there was a small incident outside an Agartala cinema involving an army jawan and a local inhabitant. The soldier, during the sharp exchange of words, remarked something about the Bengali being thin and lean. The news spread like wild fire and a huge angry crowd collected. The shops put down their shutters in-protest and traffic came to a standstill. The soldier was assaulted. When a huge contingent of the army came to the spot with loaded rifles and machine guns to rescue the soldier, the crowd stood their ground, prepared to fight to

the last. The situation could only be brought under control by the complete withdrawal of the army.

Their emotions have many a times led them astray. False rumours have brought them rushing out to the streets only to find that there was really no reason to be excited. Only a foolish man, however, will excite the emotions of the Tripura people ! Many a times interested people have tried to use these emotions for their private ends but more often than not it has rebounded. Once a certain political party spread a rumour that a certain shopkeeper (a Marwari) had abused Bengalis when a group of young boys had gone to him for collecting subscription for Durga Puja. When the crowd learned that the report was incorrect, they turned their attention to the interested political party and burnt its office.

Tripura is a small state and that has had its effect on the people. Because of the complete geographical isolation of the place in which they live, they hardly get an opportunity of going out of the state. I have met people in Agartala who have never been south of Bishalgarh and north of Jirania. Not more than three per cent of Tripura's people get an opportunity of availing one of those daily Indian Airlines flights to Calcutta and not even all these can really afford the fares they have to pay

Their concept of the world is what they see around them and that is not much. They do try to break the shackles tied around them by their isolation but succeed in only a limited way. On holidays one can see over-crowded jeeps, taxis and trucks, with a loudspeaker loudly blaring Hindi film songs, leaving the towns and proceeding towards the few picnic spots that are there. After the picnic is over they again settle down to their routine of humdrum life.

Their outlook, being naturally conditioned to the small space in which they live, is tending to become narrow. Every event in the life of another person, who may be slightly better known than the others, is worthy of interest to every one else. What a particular officer has had for lunch will be known in the city's gossip corners within an hour. There is no way in Tripura to verify the veracity or otherwise of rumour; it is so widely spread and believed that there is no time to confirm or refute it. From the police man to the high government official,

from the humble rickshaw puller to the affluent merchant, every one will repeat the same gossip with almost the same degree of intense belief.

There was a rumour that Pakistan will invade Tripura on August 14, 1971. This had no better basis than the fact that this was Pakistan's National Day ! No amount of argument could dispel it. When the day dawned, half of Agartala's one hundred thousand population had taken shelter in the interior parts of the state. When the day passed without any incident of any sort the gossip-mongers announced, without batting an eyelid, that the attack had been put off to September 15 !

The refugee in Tripura finds another outlet for his pent-up emotions and that is in his love life. In Tripura few seek the solace of a prostitute or find release in homosexuality. A young man of twenty-four, whom I met in Agartala, told me about his first experience of sex. About 10 years ago, when he was 14 years old, he had gone out for a walk with his two friends. It was the time of Durga Puja and everybody was out of his house to participate in the festivities. On the way they met another friend who was accompanied by two young girls, both not more than 13 or 14 years old. The girls were approached and they both agreed to have a fling.

They went to the house of a friend, who along with his family had gone out for a visit to the Puja pandals and occupied two rooms there. "I shared a girl with another friend", the young man told me in a matter of fact tone, "and it was all over in 15 minutes." That girl is happily married now and he would not think of repeating his experience with her. He was of the opinion, and I have no reason to disbelieve him, that over 70% of the boys and girls have had experience of sex before they are sixteen. Most boys get married before they are twenty. All of them would be horrified at the slightest suggestion of sex outside their marriage, they are so absolutely contented with their marriage.

The highly emotional Tripura Bengali is essentially a dreamer. The world around him is so small that he has to give vent to his imagination to escape from its narrow confines. Hindi films, in which a poor hero usually entraps a rich heroine and then goes for a honeymoon around the world, hold a great fascination for him and there is usually such a great rush for

these films that a flourishing black market in cinema tickets has developed in Agartala. Every young man loses himself in his dream and momentarily rises above his narrow world. But he is firmly entrenched in the soil of Tripura and does not allow his dreams to drown him in their illusory glamour.

One handsome young man I met was for ever dreaming of becoming an actor. When later he became a clerk in a Tripura government office, he was not disillusioned or frustrated. "My dream will still be fulfilled", he told me with a sense of deep conviction. "My son will be a great singer whose name will be reverently mentioned wherever the strains of music are heard."

PART III

Work and Leisure

CHAPTER 10

The Romance of Jhuming

If there is one thing that distinguishes tribal life and provides the wherewithal of their existence, it is *jhuming*, or shifting cultivation. This is the oldest known method of cultivating hill slopes without expensive capital investments. The life of the tribal, probably every aspect of it, is intimately interwoven with *jhuming*. The political power of the chief flows from the fact that he enjoys the right to farm out the *jhum* land and the social life is similarly organised by the compulsions of *jhum* farming. Their social and religious customs, the love life of their youth, their songs, tales and other leisure activities are intimately and organically related to the needs of *jhuming*.

The *jhumia* is a happy man. Imagine a tribal, sitting in his *tong ghar* (jhum house) with his beloved singing songs of love to him, the cool mountain breeze-merrily stroking and caressing him, looking down at the plains farmer in the valley ploughing his land, his legs upto the knees sunk in slush and his brow glistening with sweat! Will he consider his way of life a primitive one?

Before the onset of the monsoon, the work of selecting the *jhum* field starts. The whole process of selection is shrouded by the tribal in his mind in mystery and romance. Different tribes employ varying magical practices; the Tripuris split a bamboo and throw the two split parts on the ground. Only if the contrary positions turn up in the two parts is the plot selected. The whole process is accompanied by song and dance and a lot of merry making. The practices employed by the

different tribes may differ in their particulars, they all have one thing in common : the method does not give advantage to one person over another. When it does, it is because of the freely given discretion to the chief.

Once the field is selected, a distinguishing mark is left either by sticking in the ground a bamboo pole or otherwise. On a suitable day, accompanied again by dance and music, the forest is cut down, not only by the person who owns the *jhum* but by the whole community. Then they wait for the wind to blow in a certain direction. When the wind direction is favourable, they set fire to the slash. Then at the first rain the *jhum* is sown, this time by the entire family. A hole is made in the ground with the *dao* and a number of seeds of paddy, *mesta*, chillis and vegetables are poured in it. Then a *tong ghar* (a raised bamboo hut) is constructed and the work is finished. The only thing left is to protect the field from birds and wild animals.

And when the grain ripens, it is harvested, threshed and stored in huge bamboo baskets till it can be consumed.

The whole process of *jhuming* is clean and keeps the tribal in the open, enjoying the cool mountain breeze, singing and dancing. No wonder the tribal refuses to go down to the valleys to lead a more "settled" life on the paddy field ! Work and leisure for him are not two distinct and mutually opposing entities; they are two sides of the same coin.

It is difficult to say when *jhuming* was first recognised as a 'problem'. There is reason to believe that for centuries, even at the time of such enlightened rulers like Ashok and Akbar, *jhuming* was not only permitted but was also actively encouraged by the state. That it was practised on an extensive scale in the hilly regions of India is a well-known fact.

What is not so well known is the fact that as late as in the twenties it was practised in a few areas of Germany. In Europe, until the middle ages, it was the general practice to clear-fell derelict forest, burn the slash, cultivate food crops for varying periods in the cleared areas and plant or sow tree species either before, along with or after the sowing of the agricultural crop. After a rotation-period varying from 7 to 12 years the some forest was again felled down, burnt and cultivated. For certain regions this was not only the suggested mode of cultivation but was also considered the most efficient.

This technique is now considered by experts to be "primitive, wasteful and uneconomic" and, "besides being a menace to forest wealth, it leads to soil erosion and the consequent decrease in fertility".¹ This view seems to have gained currency after the rise of the concept of scientific forestry at the end of the last century. The forester demonstrated how forests could be converted into great money-spinners for the state and also provide the fast growing industries with essential raw materials. The forests help to prevent soil erosion and localize rainfall were subsequently put forward as strong arguments in favour of the forests but the rulers, motivated by selfish monetary profit, did not need any more convincing. *Jhuming* was soon banned by statutes and condemned as primitive and wasteful.

Nobody paused to consider why *jhuming* was not considered evil for the greater part of the history of man. It has been estimated by Nye and Greenland that shifting cultivation is capable of supporting a population of 20 persons per square mile. If scientifically practised, *jhuming* may not be destructive to forest wealth and may not lead to soil erosion and consequent decrease in fertility. The problem arose sometimes in the nineteenth century when man first mastered epidemics and disease and the birth rate overtook the mortality rate by a big margin. The population started jumping up fast.

The population of Tripura has gone up twenty times in the last one hundred years. The population in both the hill areas and in the plain areas increased considerably. As a result small uneconomic holdings of 0.5 to 2 acres became common. Similarly in the hill areas, the population far exceeded the 20 persons per square mile that shifting cultivation could support and was supporting. The rotation period therefore, came down from the required level just as the holdings in the plains had been reduced to an uneconomic size. It was at this stage that the destructive effects of *jhuming* become highlighted and it came to be condemned as a mode of cultivation of a primitive race. Sub-consciously the plains man started considering it his mission to emancipate the highlander from his primitive mode just as the European imperialists enslaved Africa to discharge the white man's burden. *Jhuming* came to be associated less with a mode of agriculture but more with a way of life, a culture.

1. NCAER report on Tripura.

'The plains man's burden' was to civilize the hill tribal by making him discard the slopes and heights of mountains and come down to the plains and adopt not only a more settled mode of agriculture but also a superior way of life.

Sizeable chunks of land were selected in the plains and colonies set up. To motivate the tribal, substantial cash grants and subsistence allowances were given. But to the dismay of these self-appointed missionaries of culture, the tribal always managed to go back to his hill top and his age-old mode of life, however, uneconomic it may appear to them.

In Tripura the scheme for settlement of *jhumias* was first taken up in Bishramganj in the year 1956-57. In the next ten years over 60 colonies had been set up and, on paper over 6000 *jhumias* settled. But, alas ! the government gained nothing but a huge list of deserters for all the money and effort it had expended.

One of the Tripura SDO's, Mr. R.N. Chakravarty, once told me how he argued for hours with a tribal trying to convince him of the futility of trying to make a living on the hills. "Why don't you come down," he implored him, "and live a life that we live ?" The tribal was adamant. "Why don't you come up, Sir", he said sweetly, "and live the life that we live ?" It is foolish to argue with a man about his way of life and culture. Can you argue with a mendicant not to waste his time singing hymns to God when he could more usefully employ himself on a lathe ?

The tribals have been practising *jhum* cultivation for centuries. It has served them well. It has sheltered them from the vicissitudes and cross-currents of history and has provided them with their sole means of subsistence for ages. They are now not only socio-economically wedded to it, but are also psychologically and biologically attached to it. Most of their folk songs and dances eulogise it and their religious and daily practices conform to it. Any propaganda or scheme that threatens to wean them away from this mode makes them instantly suspicious and hostile. Once their hostility has been aroused, no form of inducement or threat is likely to produce any permanent results.

It is very good to tell the *jhumia* that his method of cultivation is uneconomic and wasteful and that a more settled mode

will yield him higher dividends. But consider the question from his point of view. For ages he has been solely relying on this practice for his livelihood. He is therefore, naturally reluctant to discard this familiar practice for one which is new and strange to his traditional way of thinking. He becomes even more suspicious when we ask him to leave his known village and go to a strange and unfamiliar colony where he would tend to feel lost. His suspicion is confirmed when he finds a large number of his fellow villagers returning from these colonies after having been frustrated in their attempt to forge a better life for themselves.

The amount of success attained in a colony may depend on various factors like the quality of the supervisor, the amenities provided, the quality of land, etc. But the basic factor operating against all these colonies remains the same. *Jhuming* permits the tribal to have a gay and open life with vast empty spaces all round. He naturally feels claustrophobic being surrounded by the four walls of a colony and the discipline that it entails.

Another disadvantage of the colony scheme is that though it possesses the advantages that arise from planning, the adjustment of *jhumias* to the new environment is a slow process and often leads to a great deal of friction and consequently to reduced productivity. This is essentially the case in the tribal societies of Tripura, in which the horizontal and hierarchical relationships are decided on factors such as birth and quality of leadership. The advantage of settling *jhumias* in the villages where they have continued to reside for ages are that the facilities in regard to sanitation, water supply and recreation either already exist, or, if they do not, the government is not blamed for their absence. Most important, the social structure has been evolved over a long period and the village society is, therefore, more stable.

A successful *jhumia* rehabilitation scheme must therefore, aim at settling him in his old village and habitat. The scheme should aim at weaning away the tribal from his traditional mode not so much in *principle* as in *practice*. This will largely depend on the provision of incentives, social amenities and services and marketing facilities. The success of such a scheme could contribute to rural stabilisation, to the prevention of exodus

of population from the villages and to the provision of a spatially balanced national economy. Apart from the creation of a social climate, it is necessary to ensure that the economic advantages which accrue to the farmers are sufficient.

Due to these reasons the stupendous efforts of the government in the past to promote the welfare of the tribals have not been as successful as was hoped. The result of this has been that the economic lot of the *jhumias* has deteriorated day by day as their food output has failed to keep pace with their outstripping population growth. They are, therefore, plagued periodically with the triple horror of hunger, malnutrition and famine compelling the governmental agencies to go in now and then for famine relief operation on a fairly large scale.

A new approach to the problem is called for. "The improvement of primitive agriculture and its replacement by more advanced method is not a biological one, but also a socio-economic one. What are required are not only analyses of those physical factors of the environment which interact in the production of plant species, but also investigation into such socio-economic phenomena as the land tenure systems, the family and kinship organisations, and their effects on land use, the input/output relationship of the various agricultural crops, the minimum economic farming units and the traditional land-use practices. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the introduction of new techniques to the agricultural sector, if done hastily and without regard to the time honoured modes of thinking, will almost certainly lead to failure".² When the man land ratio becomes too high single use of land must give way to multiple use.

Agro Horticulture Taungya Scheme

Taungya, Burmese for hill cultivation (*taung*=hill; *ya*=cultivation) is a method of raising tree crops in combination with agricultural products. This is a form of quasi-multiple use of land, which must replace single-use when the man/land ratio becomes too high. The total cultivable land in Tripura may be of the order of a million acres. About 30 per cent of this land is *lunga* (plain land between two hillocks) land, which has already been reclaimed and brought under the plough by the plains population. A

2. K.F.S. King.

small proportion of this is being cultivated by some tribal communities like the Mughs and Chakmas, who are also supplementing their income by *jhuming*. The rest is *tila* (undulating and hilly) land which is either used for *jhuming* or is being slowly reclaimed for settled plough cultivation. About 5,000 acres of *tila* is also under orchards.

The tribals, though yet unprepared to take to the plough, are tremendously enthused by the results of the small orchards that they have. Many of them would like to go in for horticulture in a big way but are discouraged by the absence of requisite incentives and marketing facilities. Provided some basic requirements, like a secure land tenure, help for land improvements and necessary inputs, and adequate marketing facilities are available, a fair proportion of the tribals would gladly go in for a scheme of agro-horticulture based on the *Taungya* system. This scheme will permit them to *jhum* for a few years and simultaneously develop their orchards. The development of horticulture would be not only an adjunct to but also a necessary part of their practice of shifting cultivation.

A part of their *jhum* lands will be cut out and settled with them. The process of clear felling and burning of the derelict forest on this settled land will be broken up into a number of years, say three years. One part could be *jhumed* in the first year and the horticulture crop could be planted along with the agricultural crop or a little later depending of the species. In the subsequent years the other parts of this plot can be similarly taken up and three years later we could have an orchard of 3 or 4 acres, which will by this time start giving an yield also. Once the *jhum* crop has been harvested, we can inter-crop with pineapples, jute, *til* or other short-term crops, which can be grown on *tilas*, till the canopy of the tree species closes at the top.

The necessary inputs like fertilizers and fruits grafts and plants, will, of course, have to be provided free of cost by the government. These may be supplied in kind to ensure proper utilisation. The contribution towards land reclamation and improvement may also be paid as daily wages after the work has been done under the supervision of government officers. Technical advice will also have to be given at all times.

A scheme on the lines suggested above has been tried in a

few villages on the Atharamura range a few years back. There are 48 *paras* (small villages) on this range with a total population of about 700 families. Most of the tribals on this range are Reangs, who are probably the most economically backward group in Tripura. The whole of this range has been constituted into a forest reserve and *jhuming* has been made a penal offence. Forest beat officer have been established near every major *para* to enforce the forest regulations.

Before these restrictions were imposed, *jhuming* was a profitable occupation. This is apparent from the facts given to me in 1970 by Sardar Marshu Rai, one of the tribal chiefs of the area. One able-bodied person can do two to three *kathas* of *jhum* every year. One *katha* is equivalent to 16 kilos of seeds and in one acre one and a half *kathas* of seed can be sown. One *katha* of *jhum* can yield 1 to 2 maunds (1 maund=37 kilos) of cotton, 1 to 3 maunds of *til*, 8 to 12 maunds of *mesta* jute and Rs. 20 to Rs. 25 worth of vegetables in addition to 5 to 7 maunds of paddy. The total yield of a *katha* of *jhum* in monetary terms is about Rs. 650. The annual income of an able bodied person would, therefore, be of the order of Rs. 2000. The income of a family of six, with three able bodied persons, would be Rs. 6000 per annum, which is twice the per capita income in the country. This conclusively disproves the notion that *jhuming* is a wasteful and uneconomic mode of cultivation provided enough *jhum* land is available.

So great was the enthusiasm amongst the tribals for the Agro-horticulture Taungya Scheme that it was with great difficulty that the scheme was restricted to only two groups of nine *paras* each. This is in marked contrast to the attitude of the tribal to the colony scheme where he was more interested in getting his share of the money than in getting the land and the plough.

There is need for complete change not only in our approach to *jhuming* but also in our attitude to the tribals in the wider perspective. The tribal people are justifiably proud of their cultural heritage and most of their habits, attitudes and practices are very much a part of their culture. All social and cultural changes must originate from within. The transformation from a tribal economy to a more resilient one must be slow and subtle making the inevitable process of change as painless as

possible. It is true that the state cannot afford to remain a silent observer to the slow and steady elimination of the tribal. At the same time, it cannot force a change without gradually preparing the tribal society for it. How the state and the society tackle the problems of its backward and economically depressed classes is the biggest test of a functioning democracy.



CHAPTER 11

Folk Songs and Folk Tales

Some Folk Songs of the Halams (Rupinis)

These songs were sung to me by Pushnarayan Rupini of Tara Chandra Rupini Para near Teliamura.

Song No. 1

*Nung boroneing angba boroneing
Hobey Putra thansa;
Khulmu lilini dugma bai dugsa,
Japhang moramang thansa.*

*Athuk karo bai tal bai togoise,
Nokha machangoi thango;
Tipra kharni tuisa yormun,
Yormun nirthangsa.*

*Sikhla mishi toiphang tanguise
Panda machangoi thango.*

Where do you belong? Where do I belong ?
Basically we are one;
Like the *dugma* and *dugsa* creepers
We have the same roots.

The stars and the moon
Make the sky beautiful;
All the rivers of Tripura
Flow to the same place.

The leader makes the group beautiful
The group becomes beautiful.

Group Song

Song No. 2

Chikon Srangda dukhoi chikonbi

Atitaston thadi;

Dada phikhi khoraichaano

Atitaston thadi.

Chikon srangda As'uk buleya

Adonse bulekuo;

Khurangso jani mibotoyi nungdi

Khorang songsomayi nadoyi.

Ani khorangba wakobayi khorang;

Nini khorangba jongkhanting khorang

Ukrayu phedung skangmuniram

Rajbariya mano yagruggrug yakong hanangiya.

Kharjonjapri manomukhangnayebo mukhang

Changkhungnayebo behalachangkhung;

Khanjanayebo bangtraceng khaja

Boro Khahabja tungno.

Pull the wire a little in the *chikon srangda*

Don't pull the string too hard;

Dada will rebuke if it breaks

Don't pull the string too hard.

It is difficult to play the *chikon srangda*

Only those who play it well are considered good;

If you can't sing take rice and water

To clear your throat and then you can sing.

My voice is like that of broken reed

You sing sweetly like a *jongkhanting*

You are slim and have a beautiful smiling face

You are as pretty as a princess.

Your face is betel-leaf shaped, your legs are like a

Khanjan's; (bird)

Your waist is slim like a *behala's* (violin)

Like the milk and *haldi* hue of *bangtrung* are your breasts;

That is why I love you.

Jhum Song

Song No. 3

Mokol naibo muk romoi romoi,

Mokol nai thoigiya dilai;

Nung bai ktaise kaitho suitelai

Nung baise matung khamum.

Suilai suikhana titi bramun

Kali kuphaiya janbai.

Phatai braini par karmanee

Janbai manlaiyan krvi.

Soglombraine Parkoinaiba

Janbai manlaiyan tungo.

When I see your eyes I find them smiling

That is why they are so pretty

If the Lord had made us for each other

Then I could have lived with you.

'Tis likely that the Lord has so decreed

But alas ! 'tis not so.

I have taken the test with the betel leaf

And I find there is no chance for me.

But no, I checked again with *Saglom* leaf

And find we are destined to be one.

Love Song

Song No. 4

Habai durpaibai toibai pothibai

Janbai dinkaisa janbai

Janbai dinkaisa ongiaphaphale

Achai dinkaisa janbai.

Kwaichathani khukebang shuba

Khukeband bagsa janbai

Dwalba thani sakebang shuba

Sakebang bagsa janbai.

Sukoi dug kutoi koltring trang

Nungmasong koisomani

Kwaiphang kutoi pengthrung thrung

Nungmasung pengsomani.

Litai laikroi laikroi karkha

Tuma nungmasung nohun

Borong Borkorui bornaowi karkha

Tuma nungmasung nohun.

Toisa tilogbi wanal anglaubi

Takrai bosor logbi.

As *durpa* grass with earth and *Pothi* fish with water
So, my love, I am with you.

While chewing betel I measured the size of my mouth
And found that it was same as thine, my love.
While crossing the door I measured the size of my chest
And found that it was same as thine, my love.

Like the crooked coils of the *sukuidug* creeper
Your mother appears unwilling
But as the areca tree is erect
Your mother is willing.

I broke and kept a leaf in the *laitai* and then I came
Why then is your mother calling ?
I cut some wood and kept it in the *borung* and then I
came

Why then is your mother calling ?
As the *cherra* is long and as is the distance between two
knots of *wanal* bamboo,
So is this year (i.e. period before marriage when boy has
to work in his parents-in-law's-house) very long.
A jhum song

Song No. 5

(Does not appear to be complete)

Balong toikherrai jasasebat
Chongai jakhunoi bat
Sutoi bachadi chuangnung Phidi
Chutoi duknang maiyosamtoiyo.

Kosukarika doyal klaikhai
Risa sadrop mano
Mayan leng krang tauthru bokrang
Kaisini bringkrang.

The *toukherrai* leaps with one leg in the forest
But we can leap with two;
Hurry back after urinating and drink
This old wine and bring some salt for the rice.

You are no longer young
Kindly put on your *risa* (breast cloth)

The *mayan* (grain store) is by the side of the nest of *tauthru*
 The meat is as soft as the underbelly of a tortoise.

A Sod Song

Song No. 6

Khurmusiari rang chakwatai
Adisha krai kotoi
Aichuk batawoi harimung-laiya
Haribabeno manja.

Khurimaphano nindsasamane
Changori kroi dekha
Khurimaphano nindsasamane
Ah oh maikroi dekha.

Haba khkhru tankhouno mano
Kapal tankharno manja
Bharato puthi porenai mano
Kapal Porena manja.

(A few verses missing)

Haphong maikanang hunoi kaimonnai
Haphongmaikroi ungo
Toibu aknang hunoi satmonayi
Toibu akroi ungo.

Krai langkhado gangani kulo
Haribabino manja.

It is raining gold in a forest as dense as fog
 The whole country has become beautiful:

He who does not get up at first light and take his name
 Does not attain Him.

If I criticise my mother and father
 I will not get a waist cloth
 If I criticise my mother and father
 I will never have rice in my stomach.

We can cut the *jhum* vegetables
 But our head we cannot cut
 We can read all the books of India
 But we cannot read out fate.

With the hope of a good harvest I planted the *jhum*
 But I did not get rice on the hill,
 With the hope of catching fish I put a net on the *cherra*
 But when I drained the water I could get not fish.
 I have now fallen into the sea
 But I could not take His name.

A song of the Darlongs

Lam khojoy

150 stanzas

Eza borin vuaia lam naw ning,
Tuisia riat pangfui a lo to,
A par e zun ra emaw e lengna
A per zik maw zun va chang ken chuang
Hailen bang tual lai leng tang a ti

If none is cheerful I shall not dance
 There is a *pangfui* (a flowering tree) near the sea
 When this tree flowers many birds hover above sucking
 its juices
 Like the little birds we are also flying and enjoying the
 flowers of the world
 Only *lailen* (a little bird who cannot fly but hop) will
 remain on the earth.

Mizo Songs

I Hun I Hmang Thaem ?

1. *Av hun leh kumte chu*
Nitin an ral zel o
Mihausu leh mi ropuite
Sang lam tak an liamta;
Kan Hlimn I leh laom lal ni pack.
2. *Kan pan lai hunte leh*
Kan pan lai nite kha

*Doun kwin lunglen o zual em !
 Thinlai kaw! ang a hnim.
 Ngai Mahila, Av Mah ila,
 Mual av llamta, Kir an relro.*

3. *Hei erawh min chhangteh,
 I hun I hmang tha em ?
 Thil tha tein, svalna do la
 Nunna karg dik zawhla
 Tin chabian lawmn nei ang
 Hun dang lam tawh lohnaah chuag.*

Are You Using Your Time Well ?

1. Day by day time is rolling away
 Great, wealthy men are daily dying
 Our happiness too flies away
 Alas ! never to return again.
2. How unhappy we become when we
 Look back upon our infancy and youth,
 We long and pine for bygone days
 Alas ! they shall not return again.
3. Answer me, are you using your time well?
 Do good, shun bad; follow the good way of life.
 Then alone will you happy be,
 A state unchangeable, through life.

Saluzai

50 stanzas

*Khuang an ring va la u kulva aina,
 Nghaknu lenthau va ko u zai in awi ding;*

Bring a big drum to celebrate the victory over the enemy
 Let the young girls come together and join me.

H la lem

*Nangma hin maw pualva tuk tum,
 Min an hril vung,
 Khanthang dam ring sensira miukizui lai ha,
 Dam sung hnini awm ta naw ni.*

Are you the girl who is said to be the most beautiful
everybody says so.

When I was accompanied by one girl even then I couldn't
forget you

I shall never forget you.

SOME FOLK TALES OF THE RUPINIS

No. 1

Nobosani (The Stork)

A man had two daughters. On the death of their mother he moved into his younger brother's house where his wife could look after the two girls. This man was kept very busy looking after his *jhum*; so he could not devote much time for his daughters who were left entirely to the care of their aunt. Slowly time passed and the girls grew up to womanhood.

The elder girl had an independent nature, so she was not liked by her aunt. When she asked her aunt for something to eat, she was given the droppings of hens and the refuse of pigs. When again she asked her for water, her aunt would angrily spit into her mouth and cry : "Drink this !" She was very much distressed and saddened by all this and decided to complain to her father when he returned from the *jhum*.

When she reported to her father, he also rebuked her and commanded her to be more obedient to her aunt. At this she started weeping and said : "I will not live here any longer. If you will not let me leave, you will have to kill me !" On hearing this her father gave her a good beating and, enjoining her to stay in the house, left.

The stork, which was flying overhead, saw all this and was deeply grieved. He called the whole flock and they all started fluttering overhead. They cried out to the poor girl : "Fair dames! Tell us if we can help you in any way !" She looked up and asked the storks to give her one feather each. The birds happily obliged. Having collected the feathers she asked her aunt for a needle and thread, but was chided.

She then borrowed it from a neighbour and started stitching the feathers together to make two wings for herself. She glued the two wings to herself and, after many failures, succeeded in flying away.

Her younger sister asked her : "Where are you going ?" She replied, "I am going to the *Nowi* birds". Saying this she flew away and joined the flock of storks who were fluttering overhead.

By this time her father also returned from the *jhum* and, on learning about her from his younger daughter, cried out : "Where are you going" ? His daughter replied : "I have become a *Nowi*. I will fly away with them". On hearing this the father was very repentant and wept bitterly, but his daughter did not return.

CHIBUKSANE (THE SNAKE)

No. 2

There was an *ojha* (witch-doctor) in a village which had six score and six houses. He had two young daughters who had to cut and look after the *jhum*. As their father was kept very busy in his work, he could not make them a *tong* house to take shelter from the sun and rain in the *jhum*.

One day when the sun was particularly fierce, the elder sister, exhausted after a hard day's work in the *jhum*, swore : "I will marry anybody—even though it be a snake—who can make a *tong ghar* for me ! Wouldn't you ?"

The younger sister went to the side of the hillock to make water and saw a new *tong ghar* in the distance. Wandering who had made it she went nearer. She was horrified to see a huge snake weaving a big basket which is carried on their backs by the tribals to carry paddy.

She rushed back to report to her sister, who was intrigued and said : "Let us go and see". Though the younger sister refused to go, she was forced to accompany her elder sister.

They then went towards the serpent. On seeing the serpent, the elder sister said : "Don't be afraid, my sister. He is your *Kumoi* (brother-in-law) as I have vowed to marry anybody who can make a *tong-ghar* for me".

Saying this she entered the *tong-ghar* with the snake and, after having rice, went with him. The terrified younger sister ran home and reported to her father. She said : "O father, sister has married the serpent ! I was terribly afraid ; so I have come back. Please come and see".

They went to the *jhum* to verify. As the serpent had gone to fetch water and the elder sister was also away, they found

the *tong-ghar* empty. He asked his daughter to call out for them. She cried : "Kumoi ! Kumoi !"

On hearing this the serpent returned and, on seeing his father-in-law there, bowed low before him. At this the agitated *Ojha* cut it into small pieces with his *dao* and buried the pieces in the *cherra* (streamlet) which flowed nearby. When the elder sister returned she saw the blood there and worried about it. Her sister lied : "This is the blood of a leech which had got stuck to father's foot".

When the snake did not return, the elder sister got apprehensive and asked the younger one to call him. The younger sister cried : "Kumoi ! Kumoi !" On hearing this a small bird came out and tweeted : "Kumoi is dead !" The elder sister wondered why she was saying like this and threw a stone to shoo away the bird.

She followed the bird and accidentally stumbled into the *cherra* where a large number of *khumpoi* flowers were blooming. She liked the flowers and wanted to break one but she only managed to uproot the whole plant. To her horror she saw the chopped pieces of the snake buried there. She was grief-stricken and cried : "He (her father) has killed my husband ! They were lying to me ! O how I wish that the *cherra* becomes a big lake and the flowers multiply and become a fitting memorial to him !"

Her wish was instantly fulfilled. She drowned herself in that lake and, in death, united with her serpent-spouse.

On her death, her younger sister wailed : "Sister ! How will I live without you !" As she wept she heard her elder sister's voice from the water : "Go ! You will find a tree with seven branches which kiss the earth at a place where seven roads meet. On this tree you will find a gold *Charkha* (spinning wheel). Go and spin on this wheel for as you spin the *raja's* men will come and take you. You will then marry the king".

She obeyed and found the gold *Charkha*. As she spun it, she sang : *Ang, ang, kukat; rajani bihi ung maya kayi. Ang bruiha paka.* (I am no woman if I cannot marry the king). *Sacha'a sini manovi maya khayi. Ang hun brouya paka.* (I am no woman, if I cannot give him seven boys).

On hearing this the king's men arrived and asked her who she was, she replied that she was the *Ojha's* younger daughter.

They went and reported to the king that the woman was saying that she is no woman if she can't marry the king and that she is no woman if she can't give him seven sons. "What should we do with her?" they asked.

The king ordered them to bring her to the Palace. When she came to the palace, the king married her. She soon became pregnant with seven children. When the time for giving birth came she started wondering where she could deliver the seven children. The king also had no *jhoola* for seven children; so he decided to go to heaven to get one.

He took one rope with him, giving the other end to his relatives commanding them to pull it when the children were born so that he could return. The queen went from place to place to find a suitable site where she could deliver her children but the others would not agree on the apprehension that the king would not approve.

Finally she came to the big lake where the *khumpoi* flowers were blooming. There her *dasis* informed her that she would have to tie seven cloths round her head and stuff seven maunds of cotton to plug her ears as she was to give birth to seven children. She did so.

When the seven boys were born they slipped into the lake and were drowned. The elder sister, who was living with her husband in the pond, took these boys under her care and nourished them.

The queen returned alone to her palace where she found that the king had returned from heaven with the *jhoola*. Afraid that the king would be angry if he knew the truth, she dressed seven stones as children and started swinging them in the *jhoola*. She sang: *Rajani basaba hunjago halungsha krungkrang* (people say they are the raja's sons; but actually they are only stones !)

The raja overheard this and, finding that they were actually stones, was very angry. He cut off her nose and ears and threw her in the remotest corner of his state.

In course of time the raja's sons grew up in the pond. They took seven boats and sailed to the king's *ghat*. At the *ghat* they started saying: "Ri Ri Ri Ri"! *Chou wat lau chou. Maiya harini nogo tungoise baburai Paturka*. (We are on the boat. Our mother is living in a distressed condition in some remote corner while our father is flourishing).

Saying this they would sink in the water and pop out again. The water men at the *ghat* noticed this and reported to the king. The king came to the *ghat* and asked the children who they were. They replied : "Until our mother's milk will pass our lips we will not tell you who we are". The raja asked : "Who is your mother ?" They replied : "We will not tell you. You first bring her before us then only we'll tell you".

Then, one by one, all the women of the state, except their mother who was living in a remote corner, were brought there. When she came the children were under water. She dropped seven drops of her breast milk on the water and the boys popped out of water.

They told the king : "You don't know the entire story. If you want to know you will have to arrange a *mahotsava* (great celebration) for seven days and seven nights. The raja did accordingly and there was a lot of feasting and merry-making in his state.

At the end of it he was told the whole story and the seven children lived happily ever after with the king and queen.

TOIMATETNI (THE HEN)

No. 3

Once upon a time a cat and a hen were on very friendly terms with each other. One evening when the hen was having her dinner, the cat came and asked : "Where will you sleep tonight ? I want to bring you some vegetables". The hen replied : "I will sleep in my basket".

Actually she did not sleep in the basket but slept in the *khacha* (the bamboo under the sloping roof). When it was dark, the cat, thinking the hen was in the basket, attacked it there. Not finding the hen there, it returned disappointed.

Next day the cat asked the hen : "Where were you last night ? I went to the basket to give you some vegetables but had to return with them. Where will you sleep tonight?" The hen replied : "Tonight I will sleep in the *khacha*". Actually she slept in the basket and the cat, who came at dark and attacked the *khacha*, had to again return disappointed.

Like this many days passed and the hen went on deceiving

the cat till one day the cat got wise to the trick and succeeded in catching the hen. Before the hen was caught she laid an egg. The chick inside the egg vowed to take revenge on the cat who had deceived his mother and devoured her.

The chick came out of the egg and strode out to kill the cat. On the way he met a dog who asked : "Where are you going, young 'un ?" The chick replied : "I am going to kill the cat who deceived and devoured my mother". The chick added : "Yes, And I have vowed to take revenge". The dog said : "You are young and will not be able to kill the cat alone. I will come with you".

So both of them went on together. On the way they had to cross a *cherra*. As they were crossing the *cherra* the *singhi* (a fish with two sword-like horns sticking out of her head) fish came out and enquired : "Where are you two going ?" The chick replied : "We are going to kill the cat who deceived and devoured my mother". The *singhi* fish said : "I will also come with you to help you".

So the three went on together. On the way they met *boroi* (a fishing rod with hook) who asked : "Where are you three going?" The chick said : "We are going to kill the cat who deceived and devoured my mother".

The *boroi* said : "I will also come with you to help you". So all four went on together. On the way they met *wanthar* (a type of blade made of bamboo) who enquired : "Where are you four going ?" The chick replied : "We are going to kill the cat who deceived and devoured my mother". The *wanthar* said : "I will also come with you to help you".

So all five went together to the cat's house.

The chick knocked at the cat's door. The cat came out and enquired : "Why have you come here ? What do you want ?" The chick said : "You are my mother's friend. So I have come with my friends to stay with you". The cat said : "It is a great pleasure ! Come stay and eat with me".

After taking their food, the friends took to their beds. When the cat had retired, they got up and had a conference on how to trap him. The chick entered the egg and hid himself in the fireplace. The dog went and stood outside the door, the fish entered a utensil full of water, the *boroi* hung on the door, and the *wanthar* hid himself in the woven bamboo wall.

The wife of the cat, who was old and could not see clearly in the dark, got up at midnight with a view to check up if her guests were comfortable. To rekindle the fire she went to the fire place and blew into it. With the force of the blow egg the burst and her face was spattered with its contents.

She wiped her face with her hands. As she was trying to wipe her hands against the wall, her hands were cut by the blade. She cried in pain and rushed towards the utensil of water. As she dipped her hands in the water, the *singhi's* pincers bit deep into them and she shrieked with pain. She rushed out of the room with horror.

As she was crossing the door, the tackle of the *buroi* stuck into her eye-lids. With great difficulty she managed to remove it. As she rushed out, the dog attacked her and tore her two pieces.

The five friends happily went back having taken revenge for the hen's cruel murder.

RANDI CHUKMANI (THE WIDOW)

No. 4

There was once a widow who lived all alone. Because she could not work on the *jhum*, she had nothing to eat and no good place to live. She lived in an extremely distressed condition.

One day, when it was raining heavily, one of raja's men stopped near her house. As he could find no other suitable place, he was forced to take shelter in her *tong-ghar*. The house was raised from the ground. He tied his horse below it and slept in her house.

In the night the tiger, who had been watching the widow for many days, came to eat her but, finding the horse there, devoured it. The tiger slept under the hut after his hearty meat.

Not knowing this, the widow was narrating her tale of misery to the raja's men. "I am not at all afraid of the wild animals and tigers but this terrible *chachurat* (rain) greatly inconveniences me as my hut leaks and quivers in the breeze".

The tiger heard this and thought : "This old widow is not afraid of me, the king of the forest, but she is afraid of *chachurat*. What sort of an animal *chachurat* was ? No doubt it is more powerful than me".

Before it was dawn the raja's man got up and put the saddle

and bridle on the tiger, taking it in the dark to be his horse, and rode away. As the bridle had been put in the mouth of the tiger he could not bite. The tiger thought: "No doubt it is *chachurat* who is riding me! I am the king of forest and there is none in this forest except *chachurat* more powerful than me".

Thinking this the tiger was afraid and meekly walked on. His natural inclination took him towards the forest but the rider repeatedly whipped him to go towards the town. The tiger, in great pain, entered a very narrow cave. The rider was thrown away.

The cave was so narrow that the tiger got stuck inside; only his tail remained outside. The rider pulled his tail so hard, that his tail came off. The disappointed rider took the tail and went to his house.

After some time, with great difficulty, the tiger managed to come out of the cave. As he was in great pain he went to the nearest *cherra* and sat in the water. There one *kekra* (crab), getting a scent of his blood, came out and bit the tiger near the wound. As the fangs cut into his skin he screamed and ran away. The fangs however, remained stuck to him. Though the tiger tried very hard to remove the fangs he failed.

A few days later the tiger died from the pain. And thus the widow was spared a violent death from his claws.

Folk Tales

A FOLK TALE OF THE DARLONGS

Sakhi Darlong (The deer)

There was once an issueless widower who lived alone. One day he killed a deer and brought it to his hut. He preserved half the meat. Then he went to his *jhum*.

When he returned he found his meal already cooked. Nobody could tell him who had cooked. The next day again his meals were prepared.

Next day he hid in the corner of his house to find out. He found that the part of deer became a lady and she prepared his meals.

The widower jumped upon the girl and caught her. She said : "Don't touch me." The widower said, "I want to have you as my wife". The girl said : "Promise me first that you will never call me *Sakhi* (deer) *Darlong* and then I'll become your wife".

He promised and they married. They had two children. The father was invited to a party to drink wine. The mother asked the children to call their father home. When the children called him, he said : "Not now, I'll come later".

Repeatedly the children were sent but they returned with the same reply. Finally the father got annoyed and said : "Your mother is *Sakhi Darlong* !" The little girl wanted to tell this to the mother but the elder one objected. Finally when they told her this, she became a deer and went to the forest outskirts.

When the small girl became hungry she was taken there and fed.

The father married another girl. The new girl was wondering how the baby was getting her meals. The new wife learnt the facts. She requested her husband to kill the deer.

Thereupon the deer-mother gave him her breast and asked him to place it somewhere so that it becomes a *simul* tree which will feed the baby. When the step-mother came to know of this she requested her husband to cut down the tree also.

When the matter was reported to the tree, the tree said, "When they cut me, you put the same dust in the river and then I'll become a fish". The husband did this and the fish took the children to the safety of the sea.

A FOLK TALE OF THE TRIPURIS

Keran

Long ago, two orphaned brothers lived with their grand mother. One day, while cutting their *jhum*, they found a bird's egg. After boiling the egg in a hollowed out bamboo, they ate it.

When they returned home, their grand mother enquired : "What did you eat ?" They replied : "We found an egg and ate it". Their grand mother was hurt with this and she told her old man : "We always share our things with these boys but they have not shared their egg with us. Let us also go and ate alone".

They cut a boar when the brothers had gone to their *jhum*.

After eating the meat, they left the place leaving the two brothers behind. When the brothers came home, they found their grand parents had left and they went all over the dense forest searching for them.

There was one very big tree therefrom which a fruit was hanging. One brother said : "The fruit is ripe. Let us eat it as we are hungry". As soon as the elder brother ate the fruit, he became a bird. The younger one, named Anto Kumar, who was now left alone, felt very despondent and cried. He made his home in a small hole in the trunk of the tree where he stayed eating tender bamboo shoots.

Nearby was the *jhum* of a childless widow. This boy started stealing fruit from her *jhum*. The widow asked him : "Who are you ?" He replied : "Mother, I am a lonely boy and I have had nothing to eat for 3 or 4 days".

The widow thereupon took pity on him and asked him to stay with her. He however, refused and continued to stay in the hole.

At mid-night, *Jamdoot Devta* came to him and asked : "What are you doing here in the forest" ? The young boy replied : "I am staying here as I have nobody left in this world".

On the *devta's* query as to whether he wanted anything, the young boy replied that he did not know. On this, the *devta* came to him and gave a magic gold ring saying that the ring would supply him all his needs. The name of this ring was *Jhairuwansa*. Thereafter, all his needs and desires were fulfilled by the ring.

One day, he made a beautiful *Tong-Ghar* for the widow. All those who saw this house wondered how a human hand could have made such a beautiful house. He finally made 120 such houses for the widow.

The widow asked him to stay with her as her son. He replied : "I am shy, mother. How will I go to such a beautiful house" ?

The Kanskow Raja came to the house one day on hearing about its beauty. He had a very beautiful daughter. He also had a 12 year old animal. The Raja had declared that anybody who could behead this animal with one stroke would marry his daughter. Anto Kumar had never seen a young girl before and felt very shy. But a little bird approached him. He could see straightaway that this was actually his brother. With the help of

the ring, the bird again turned into his brother. With the encouragement of his brother, he took up his *dao* and beheaded the big animal with one blow. The Raja thereupon congratulated him and happily married his daughter to him.

And they lived happily ever after.

A NOATIA FOLK TALE

(*Narrated by Dashman Doaza of Tarabencherra*)

Jangpha Bakharok Tree

The hill people learned to wear clothes after they came in contact with plain people. Jangpha, however, refused to wear any clothes. He got married to the Kanskow Raja's daughter but despite various invitations, he refused to go to his father-in-law's house for the traditional period of labour which he had to undertake as the bride price.

One day, when he had gone to the market, his wife, along with her two children, finding the opportunity, slipped away to her father's house. She left behind a dog, a hen, a cat and a pig with instructions to make sounds (like bow, bow etc.) when Jangpha returned home so that he would not realise that she had left.

When Jangpha returned, the animals made sounds accordingly and though he searched his house, he could not find his wife and children. This made him very angry and he cut the cat and with her skin he made a drum. Beating the drum, he went everywhere in search of her. He sang :

"Aini Telesa Batesa Buingbo Thanka Tung Tru Tru Tru"

(My son and his younger brother—where have they gone ?)

After a tiring day's search, he met a girl who was carrying some wood. He asked her :

"Aini Telesa Batesa Buingbo Thanka Tung Tru Tru Tru."

(My son and his younger brother—where have they gone ?)

The girl replied : "If you collect wood for me, I will give you information about your wife."

He collected some wood for her. Thereupon, she showed him the way. Again beating on the drum, he blessed her as under :

"Ham Zabak Thu, Rag Zabak Thu"
(Be well; be happy).

After this, he went singing along his way singing as follows :

"Aini Telesa Batesa Buingbo Thanka Tung Tru Tru Tru"
(My son and his younger brother—where have they gone?)

On the way, he met another girl who was collecting banana leaves. He asked her :

"Aini Telesa Bates Buingbo Thanka Tung Tru Tru Tru"
(My son and his younger brother—where have they gone?)

This girl too asked him to collect the banana leaves for her and she would show him the way. As he had done before, he helped her with the banana leaves and she showed him the way.

Near his father-in-law's house, there was a tree. He sat near the tree and thought : "How can I go to meet my father-in-law as I have not met him all these years?"

So he sat near the tree. When his son saw him there, he informed his mother and she prepared food for him. When his son went to call him, he said : "But my wife has not called me," and refused to go. When his wife called, he said : "But my father-in-law has not called me". When his father-in-law called him, he said : "But my mother-in-law has not called me". He only agreed to go when his mother-in-law had invited him but when they gave him rice, he said there were no vegetables. When they gave him vegetables, he said there was no meat and so on. When everything had been provided he had his food and went out to throw the banana leaves.

As he was about to throw the leaves, his brother-in-law said : "Do not throw it there. It is the flower garden of my mother". Similar objections were raised when he was throwing leaves at other spots.

Finally, he threw the leaves in disgust in some place. Thereupon, his brother and sister-in-law felled him to the garden where a dog bit him and he died. They cut his body in to small

pieces and told his children to throw the pieces away. His son sang :

*"Sidal Sidal loibone
Babu Matha Kowa Khaiya (Bengali)
Kawa Matha Chichi"*

(Will you take dry fish,
The crows will eat my father's head
Throw away the crow's head).

When the pieces of his body had finally been thrown away, his mother-in-law felt sorry for him. Every now and then, she would go to the place where his severed head had been thrown. This had grown into a *Chalta* tree. Even now, the *Chalta* tree is known as *Jangpha Bakharok* tree (Head of Jhangpha) amongst the Tripuris.

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