

Administrative System of the Garos of Tripura

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This paper is based on the present author's general field investigation and experience in some villages of Udaipur C. D. Block under Udaipur Sub-Division of South Tripura district inhabited by the Garos. The villages Kalaban, Rajapur, Patichari, Duptali, Mursumpathar are under jurisdiction of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council and the villages namely, Holakhet, Basankhola, Gangachara are the areas outside the Autonomous District Council. The author is indebted to Manoj Roga, a Gaon Pradhan of Holakhet Gaon Panchayat, and some other Garo members of some Panchayats, who helped him much during his field survey.

History .

There are nineteen different tribes in Tripura with many other sub-tribes. Among them the Garos made their homes here probably in and around the first part of the twentieth century during the reign of Birendra Kishore Manikya (1909-1923). After consulting records about the members of Christian Garos in Tripura, Rev. Father Mathew Ullatil of Mariamnagar Catholic Church, Reshambagan, Tripura told the present author in March, 1975 that in 1920, a group of Garo Christians from Mymensingh district of undivided Bengal (now called Bangladesh) entered in Tripura and settled down in few pockets, and slowly more and more Garo villages were set up. Further it is learnt from different elderly Garo people in different villages that the first batch of the Garos were allured by the fertile Jhum land and made movements towards Tripura from Mymensingh district and settled down in Champamura near Puran Agartala. Gradually the Garos came to Tripura in large numbers and spread over in different sub-divisions of the State. They are now numerically dominant in Sadar, Kamalpur and Udaipur Sub-divisions in Tripura.

Let us now put forward the tables as per Census Reports.

TABLE 1 ; Tribal Population

Year of Census	Total Population	Tribal Population	Percentage of the tribal population
1931	3,82,450	1,92,249	50.26%
1941	5,13,010	2,56,991	50.09%
1951	6,45,707	2,37,953	36.85%
1961	11,42,005	3,60,070	31.53%
1971	15,56,342	4,50,544	28.95%
1981	20,53,058	5,83,920	28.44%

TABLE 2 : Garo Population

Year of Census	Tribal Population	Garo Population	Percentage of Garo Population
1951	2,37,953	7,362	3.09%
1961	3,60,070	5,484	1.54%
1971	4,50,544	5,559	1.23%
1981	5,83,920	* ..	-

* Not yet available. The author finds from the above table that the number of Garos in 1951 was 7,362 but after ten years, it decreased to a considerable extent and the total figure in 1961 was only 5,584. The present author enquired from various sources, the causes of the decline of the figure of the Garo population in Tripura, but the village elders of the Garos and also the contemporary records failed to furnish the reasons behind it.

Political Institution

The Nokmas : Each village of the Garos provides a territorial base of supremacy of a particular clan. Its head is the village chief known as 'Nokma.' The most important and notable of such clans are the Marak and Sangma.

A Nokma administers distribution of land for shifting cultivation among all households in consultation with the village elders. In all village ceremonies, Nokma is to lead the people. Inaugurations of certain ceremonies are to be made in his household or in plots of Jhum land used by that household.

No legislative and judicial system in modern sense appear to have existed among the Garos. Within the village, the functions

of both the organs used to be discharged by the Nokma with the common consent of the village elders as his council of advisors. There is no fixed rule or custom to regulate membership or composition of the council.

When a Garo has some complaints against another, he usually reports these to the Nokma. The Nokma in a meeting of a few leading persons of the village decides the disputes. The Nokma adjudicates the crimes like murder, adultery, elopment, insult and a host of others.

The usual custom to decide a dispute is to realise compensation or 'dai' in kind or cash from the party at fault. Now-a-days the 'dai' is collected in cash.

Panchayati Raj & the Nokma

With the introduction of the Panchayati Raj in Tripura, it was believed that the institution of the Nokma would automatically lose its importance.

The present author, after some field studies in Garo villages in Tripura, has seen with his own eyes that the Nokmas are still there and virtually there is no clash between the Nokmas and the Gaon Pradhans.

The village holds joint responsibility in respect of disputes involving its members. The disputes which are not decided by the Nokmas or which cannot be taken up by them due to their complicated nature are today brought to the Gaon Panchayat or the Autonomous District Council for a decision.

At present both the institutions of Gaon Panchayat and Autonomous District Council have extended democratic institutions in the interior of Tripura and have naturally created a lot of inspiration and hope both among the tribal and non-tribal people in the hills and the jungles. The Garos are no exception to these common aspiration of the tribal people of Tripura.

It is found from the records that the total number of elected members of the Gaon Panchayat in Tripura is 5902, of which 2245 are scheduled tribes and out of which only 18 (eighteen) are Garos. There is one Gaon Pradhan elected from the Garo Community. The following nine are the elected representatives in the Gaon Panchayat of Udaipur C.D. Block where the present author investigated the different Garo villages.

- 1) Mijendra Marak
- 2) Gazendra Marak
- 3) Samir Marak

- 4) Somendra Marak
- 5) Manoj Roga
- 6) Alias Marak
- 7) Sachin Roga
- 8) Jamendra Marak
- 9) Mahendra Marak

Although the number of Garos in Panchayat system of Tripura is rather negligible, still the attempts of the present Government to do economic upliftment of the rural people especially of the weaker sections and the down trodden people of the community to bridge the gap between the rural and the urban areas, through the Gaon Panchayat, naturally influences the hopes and aspirations of the Garos in Tripura who were so long neglected in every respect. Incidentally, we should mention that highest priority has been accorded by the Gaon Panchayat to agriculture, irrigation, communication, drinking water supply, animal husbandry, dairy development, pisciculture, horticulture and social forestry etc. The Gaon Panchayats are deeply involved in the implementation of all these developmental programmes.

Autonomous District Council & the Garos

There are 704 Gaon Panchayats in Tripura, of which 330 are within the jurisdiction of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council and 374 are outside the jurisdiction of the District Council Areas.

For the self government of the tribal and rapid development of the tribal compact Areas in the State, the Autonomous District Council was introduced in Tripura as per the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Act, 1979 under the 7th schedule of the Constitution which started functioning on 18.1.82.

The powers and functions of the council are broadly asfollowing:

- (1) Allotment, occupation, use or setting apart of land other than Reserve Forests;
- (2) Management of Forest;
- (3) Use of Canal water and water course for agriculture;
- (4) Jhum;
- (5) Village Council;
- (6) Public health and sanitation, etc.

TABLE 3: Area & Population

	State	District Council	Percentage
Area	10,478.78 Sq.Km.	7,132.56 Sq.Km.	68.10%
Population (1981 Census)	20,53,058	6,26,173	38.50%
Tribal (1981 Census)	5,83,920	4,46,049	76.8%

After a long struggle of the people of Tripura, both the tribals and non-tribals, the Autonomous District Council has now been formed under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution in pursuance of the Constitution (49th) Amendment Act, 1984 and started functioning with effect from 1.4.85.

We have a glorious oral history (though not yet written) of the fighting people of Tripura and great struggles against injustice and autocracy are not yet fully recorded. With the granting of the 6th Schedule by the Government of India in 1984, the long struggle of the people was crowned with victory. Along with the other tribal people, the Garos also rejoiced the same although they have no representative in the District Council from their community. The present author has come to learn from Mr. Manoj Roga, how the Garo youths have celebrated the great victory of the people of Tripura, when they saw that the 6th schedule was at last signed by the President of India.

It is learnt from some Nokmas that the Gaon Panchayat and the Autonomous District Council do not interfere with the local political system of the Garos. They are fully participating in the activities of the Statutory Gaon Panchayat and the Autonomous District Council and are contesting in the election. They have established symbiotic relation with the non-tribals of their villages.

Some changes in political consciousness are found due to contact with the Christian Missionaries. The Christian Missions like Catholic and Protestant (Mariamnagar and Arundhutinagar) are playing big roles among the tribals in Tripura. It has been observed that a large number of the Garos have already embraced Christianity.

In modern times, every society is undergoing some sort of changes. The Garos are no exception to this general trend. In political matters, most of the early organisations are on the wane. The provision of the 6th schedule of the Autonomous District Council and the Gaon Panchayat Acts are helping the Garos to take part in politics and administration in a broader way. The traditional system of the political institutions are being gradually replaced by the modern ones.

The family system of the Garos like Matrilineal family is declining and the system like patriarchal family is gaining ground in some areas. The role of the maternal uncle is also declining while that of the father's role is yet emerging as a substitute for the role of the maternal uncle. Their contacts with the non-tribals, the spread of Christianity, the improvement in the level of educa-

tion, the introduction of new ideas, modernization of the political institutions and the new system of administration have naturally influenced them to a large extent.

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