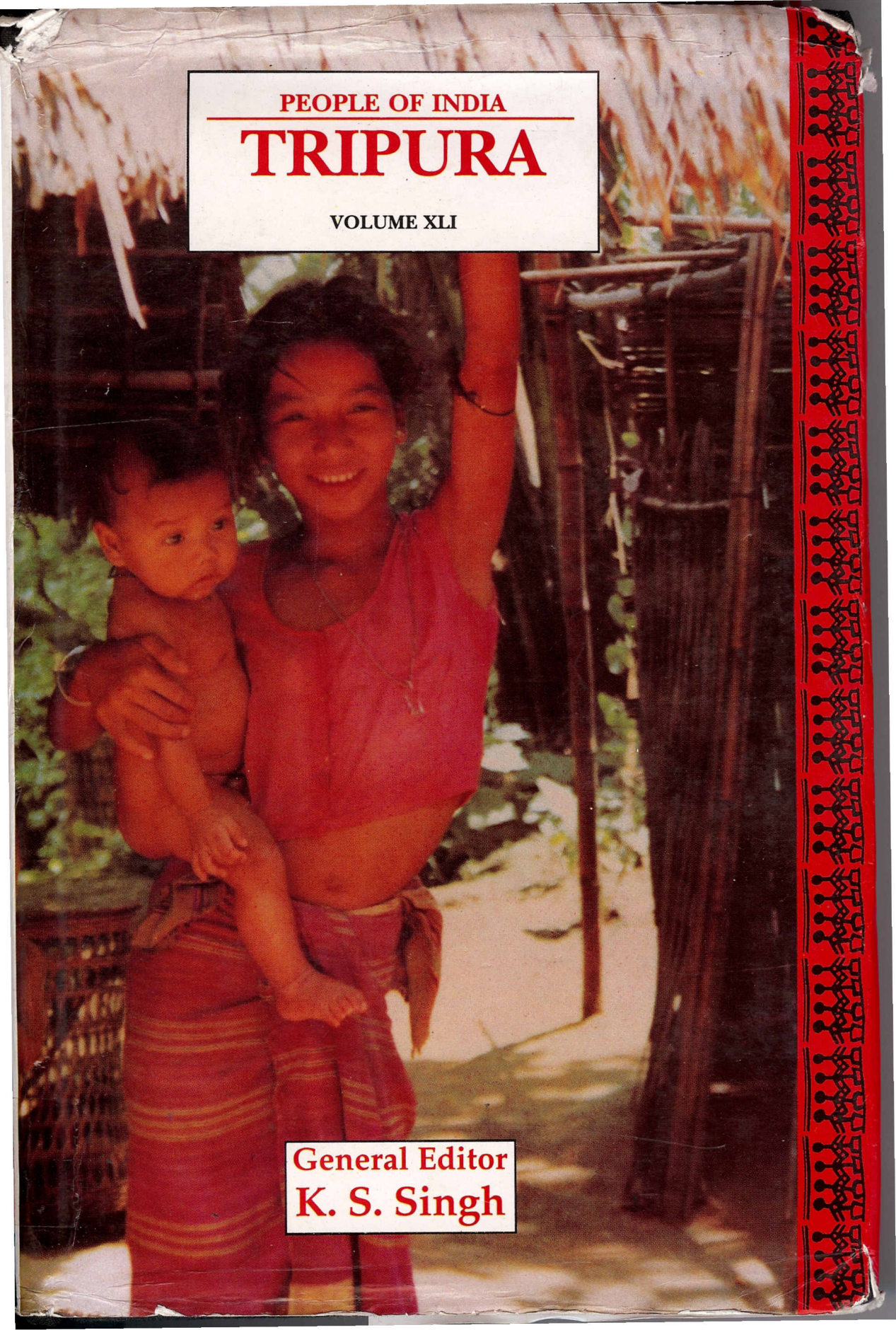


PEOPLE OF INDIA

TRIPURA

VOLUME XLI

General Editor
K. S. Singh



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PEOPLE OF INDIA

TRIPURA

Volume XLI

General Editor
K. S. SINGH

Editors
JAGADISH GANCHAUDHURI
S. SAILO
M. S. DATTA



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A NOTE ON THE SERIES

There exists an information gap on a very large number of communities in India, and whatever information exists on them is scanty or needs to be updated. The Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) launched a project on the People of India on October 2, 1985. The objective of the project was to generate a brief, descriptive anthropological profile of all the communities of India, the impact on them of change and development processes and the links that bring them together. This was in accordance with the objectives of the ASI., established forty-five years ago in December 1945. The ASI has been pursuing bio-cultural research among different population groups from its eight regional centres. Its objectives have been redefined in the policy resolution, adopted in 1985, which commits this organization to a survey of the human surface of India.

The identification of the communities and their listing began at an early period of our history, with Manu. Regional lists of communities figured in Sanskrit works. Medieval chronicles contained a description of communities located in various parts of the country. Listings in the colonial period were undertaken on an extensive scale, after 1806. The process gathered momentum in course of the Censuses from 1881 to 1941. In our compilation of the lists of the communities of India under the People of India project, we drew upon ethnographic surveys, the lists of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes drawn up by the Government of India, the lists of backward classes prepared by Backward Classes Commissions set up by various state governments, and the list that exists in the Mandal Commission Report. We were able to put together about 6,748 communities at the start. This list was taken to the field, tested and checked, and finally 4,635 communities were identified and studied.

Unlike surveys in the colonial period, which covered British India and a few princely states, our project covers the whole country, bringing within its ambit also those parts that had not been ethnographically surveyed earlier or where the survey had been done in a perfunctory way. Each state and union territory was treated as a unit of study. It was decided to start with the investigation of the least-

known communities, and then move on to a field study of the lesser-known and better-known ones. Investigators for the survey were identified for each area on the basis of their experience and expertise. Teams of investigators of the Survey, as well as local scholars, were set up for each state and union territory to plan the surveys, seek the co-operation of local scholars, generate and evaluate findings, etc., etc. Later, editorial boards consisting of local scholars — one or more of these were nominated as co-editor/s for each local volume — were set up for each state and union territory. We sought the co-operation of the state governments in implementing the project, and this we received in ample measure, particularly from the welfare and backward classes departments of the state governments, local officers of the Census of India, tribal research institutes, university departments of anthropology, other departments of local universities, etc. Local scholars participated enthusiastically in our project as well as in the seminars held by us.

The progress in the investigation and coverage of communities from October 2, 1985 to March 31, 1992 was steady and impressive. We were able to identify, locate and study 4,635 communities in all the states and union territories of India, out of the 6,748 listed initially. As many as 600 scholars participated in this project, including 197 from 26 institutions. About 100 workshops and rounds of discussions were held in all the states and union territories, and in these about 3,000 scholars participated. The investigators spent 26,510 days in the field, which works out to 5.5 days per community studied in the various states and union territories of India. Our scholars interviewed a large number of people, out of whom we have recorded only the key informants, i.e. 24,951. This works out to about five 'informed' informants per community. Of the informants, 4,981 were women. Our instruction to the investigators was to study a community at two or three places, and in at least two or three cultural regions into which the larger states of India are divided. Interviews were conducted in connection with the study of the communities in 3,581 villages, mostly multi-community villages, and in 1,011 towns and cities spread over almost all the districts of India, that is, 421 districts and 91 cultural regions. We were able, thus, to study on an average a community at about two places. It should be noted that most of the smaller communities could be studied at only one place since they are not located in more than one area.

A major achievement of this project was the preparation of carto-

graphic maps showing the distribution of the communities and the location where they were studied. About 4,000 maps were prepared. Yet another achievement was the visual documentation of the people of India as part of the field operations. About 21,362 photographs were generated, most of them in black and white, and a substantial number in colour, by amateur photographers.

At an early stage of our project in March 1985 we decided to transfer the data to a computer. We were subsequently able to develop probably the first software in the country — and one of the first in the world — in ethnography, in close collaboration with the National Informatics Centre. From May 28, 1988 we started transferring the quantitative data collected in computer format to floppies. Simultaneously, the transfer of descriptive data (abstracts, etc.) on to the computer also started at almost all the regional centres. We succeeded in computerizing an enormous mass of data, and also in producing the first results of univariate analysis, by March 1990.

The descriptive material, running into 120 manuscript volumes, and the quantitative data contained in 257 diskettes, were released on October 1, 1990 by Sri Chimantbhai Mehta, Minister of State for Human Resource Development, in the presence of a distinguished audience in Delhi, for use by scholars at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, and at eight regional centres of the ASI.

The phase of more elaborate analysis started in July 1991, in collaboration with the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. This resulted in a voluminous output of analysed data, which have been presented in a comprehensive matrix consisting of the four categories of populations, the constitutional, religious, occupational and locational. These sets of data, together with a map, were released by Shri Arjun Singh, Minister of Human Resource Development, on December 24, 1991. The last workshop on the People of India project was held at the Indian Institute of Social and Economic Change in Bangalore, where the preliminary results of the analysis presented by the ASI were discussed by distinguished scholars.

It should be noted that the study of the communities has been conducted in 3,581 villages and 1,011 towns situated in 421 districts of the states and union territories of India. The information was collected from about 25,000 of the 'learned' informants by our scholars, 500 of them, over the period 1985 to 1992. Therefore, the observations relate to this limited time frame and to the universe of the

ethnographic project titled People of India. The percentages relate strictly to the responses made by the informants to the questionnaire contained in the schedule guideline and computer format, and to the queries made by the investigators at the places of investigation. The responses have been supplemented with the observations of the investigators, the secondary material from the census, ethnographic records etc. The material has been checked and cross-checked by scholars, particularly local scholars, at many levels with other sources of information.

We are presenting the material assembled under the People of India project in two parts which are interrelated. The first consists of the ten-volume national series, five of which contain an abstract on all communities across the length and breadth of the country. The data generated in this respect has been supported with the addition of information from Census and other secondary sources. These volumes include two on the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, prepared as part of the celebration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's birth centenary; three on all the communities of India, and two containing data on the languages and biological structures of Indian population. The remaining volumes contain description of the quantitative profile, an annotated list of communities and their segments, community-specific languages and the biological structure of Indian populations.

The second part comprises the state/union territory volumes, with detailed descriptive accounts of each community of India. The contributors to the national volumes on the scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and all communities are listed in the last volume, Volume 6. The Glossary given in Volume 6 is common to all the national volumes. At the end of each account we have given references to the texts from which we have quoted, or references for further reading. This is only illustrative. An exhaustive bibliography appears at the end of the national volumes, in Volume 6.

A consortium of publishers has been set up to publish the material on states and union territories. Seven volumes each for the northern states, southern states and the islands, the central and western states will be published respectively by M/s Manohar Publishers and Distributors (New Delhi), M/s Affiliated East-West Press Private Limited (Madras) and M/s Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. (Bombay). The eleven volumes on the north-eastern and eastern states will be published by M/s Seagull Books Private Limited (Calcutta), which has already published the introductory national volume, which in its turn will be

followed by the other national volumes to be published by the Oxford University Press.

I trust this series on the People of India, which is based on a comprehensive anthropological survey of the country, will be found useful by all sections of our people, including students, researchers, teachers, social activists, administrators and political leaders. I hope we have laid the groundwork for a comprehensive ethnography of the people of India which needs to be continually updated and built upon by successive generations of researchers and scholars.

K S SINGH

FOREWORD

Tripura became a full-fledged state on July 17, 1972. It derives its identity from the Tipera community, or Tripuri in its Sanskritised form, which belongs to the Kirata or the Indo-Mongoloid stream. The community speaks the Kakbarak language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group. In the pre-colonial period Tripura received immigrants from many parts of the country. The Brahmans were invited by the Tripuri rulers from Mithila, described as Bangadvar, and from further up-country Kanyakubja. In the colonial period immigrants came from eastern India and adjacent provinces in search of land and work in the tea gardens. The Dhanuks from Bihar became scavengers in their new milieu. However, it was only after Independence that the largest wave of migration occurred. Bordered by Bangladesh on three sides, Tripura witnessed an influx of refugees which trebled the population and reduced the proportion of the tribal population. This makes Tripura a unique case of demographic metamorphosis. The recent years have seen an influx of the Chakmas from Bangladesh.

Ecologically, Tripura is divided into two zones. The northern and southern parts of the state have a hilly terrain, home to 32 communities, including the Chakmas, Jamatias, Maghs, Noatias and Riangs. The plains in the western region are dotted with multi-ethnic non-tribal settlements. Most of the communities experience a warm and temperate climate, with a relatively high humidity in summer.

The 1981 Census of India recorded the population of Tripura as 20,53,058 which consists of tribals and other communities, including immigrants from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Among the scheduled tribes, the Tripuris are the most numerous, followed by the Riangs, Jamatias, Chakmas, Halams, Maghs, Noatias and Kukis. The smaller groups include the Garos, Mundas, Lushais/Mizos, Oraons/Orangs and Santhals. Among the scheduled castes, the Namasudras are the most numerous, followed by the Jalia Kaibartas, Mahisyadases, Malis, Dhobas and Chamars.

The communities studied under the People of India project number 78, including the Tripuri-Thakurs. Of these communities, 17 are

scheduled castes and 19 are scheduled tribes. There are non-tribal immigrants like the Manipuris/Meiteis, Marwaris, Nepalis and Biharis.

The All-India Anthropometric Survey, extended to Tripura, revealed that the people are short to below medium in stature, have a round head, a medium nose and a broad to round face. The incidence of the Hb.E gene has not been reported. The M gene (89 per cent) is very common. The incidence of R1 haplotype is high (82.30 per cent), while that of the 'r' haplotype has not been reported.

As many as 23 languages are spoken in the state. Bengali is spoken by the largest number of communities (36), followed by Hindi (nine), Kakbarak/Tripuri (eight) and Oriya (four). Eight of the languages — Bengali, Bhili, Bishnupuriya, Chakma, Chhattisgarhi, Hindi, Nepali and Oriya — belong to the Indo-Aryan family. These are spoken by 54 communities. Another nine, including the Garo, Halam, Kakbarak, Kuki, Lushai/Mizo, Magh and Manipuri/Meitei, belong to the Tibeto-Burman family and are spoken by 18 communities. While Kharia, Khasi, Mundari and Santhali are Austro-Asiatic languages, Kurukh is a Dravidian language. Brijlal, spoken by the Binjoa/Brijlal community, is unclassified.

According to the 1981 Census, Bengali is spoken by the largest number of persons (1,418,920), followed by Kakbarak (472,071), Hindi (33,332) and Oriya (15,442). The numbers for some other languages are: Halam (18,725), Manipuri (17,355), Magh (17,083), Garo (7,203), Munda (4,481), Lushai (4,114), Santhali (3,508), Gorkhali/Nepali (2,752) and Kurukh/Oraon (1,976).

The Bengali speakers are bilingual in English (134,291), Hindi (9,205), Sanskrit (1,503) and Kakbarak (1,354). The Hindi speakers are bilingual in Assamese (11,853) and English (1,883), while the Oriya speakers are bilingual in Bengali (7,057), Hindi (233) and Kakbarak (128). The tribal communities, such as the Garos (3,264 persons), Maghs (5,218), Mundas (2,047) and Santhals (1,484) are mostly bilingual in Bengali. Many tribal groups speak three languages. The Halams are bilingual in Bengali (6,916) and Kakbarak (452); the Lushais in Bengali (904), English (360) and Kakbarak (196). The Manipuri speakers are bilingual in Bengali (9,577) and English (522); the Gorkhali/Nepali speakers are bilingual in Bengali (912) and Hindi (747).

Three scripts are used in Tripura — Bengali, Burmese and Devanagiri.

Tripura shares the ethnographic characteristics of eastern India

through its Bengali population, and those of the north-east through its unique tribal heritage. We will discuss only such ethnographic features of the state which stand out in relation to the rest of India.

A majority of the communities in Tripura identify themselves at the local level (94.87 per cent) and with their kin group at the regional level (82 per cent). There is also a very large proportion of communities who identify themselves at the national level (24.36 per cent) and even at the transnational level (34.62 per cent). Only tribal communities have identification marks in the form of male dress (6.41 per cent) and female dress (7.69 per cent). The tribal people wear clothes made by themselves. The men wear a turban and a narrow piece of cloth as the lower garment. The women wear a long piece of cloth called *pachchra* as the lower garment. They cover their breasts with a small piece of cloth (*risha*) which is embroidered with various designs. The Riang and Molsom women bedeck themselves with ornaments.

With regard to food habits, most of the communities (74) have a non-vegetarian diet (94.87 per cent against the national average of 49.77 per cent). Pig rearing is a major mode of occupation. The percentage of communities that eat pork is almost double the national average of 29.62 per cent. The intake of beef (both cow and buffalo) is less than the national average.

Tripura being a rice-producing state, the cereal is consumed by all the communities. A smaller number of communities (24.36 per cent) consume wheat and maize. Among pulses, moong (97.44 per cent), gram (89.74 per cent), masur (93.59 per cent) and kesari (52.56 per cent) are consumed at a level higher than the national average. Roots and tubers are consumed by 75.30 per cent of the communities. All communities use mustard oil as the cooking medium, followed by rapeseed oil (23.08 per cent of the communities) and animal fat (6.41 per cent). The consumption of rapeseed oil and animal fat is at a level higher than the national averages of 6.49 and 4.77 per cent, respectively. The consumption of alcohol is marginally higher than the national average. Occasional consumption has been reported among 64.10 per cent of the men and 30.77 per cent of the women as against the national averages of 53.27 per cent and 22.37 per cent, respectively. While the intake of milk is lower than the national average (80.77 per cent against 86.47 per cent), that of milk products is higher (96.15 per cent against 87.42 per cent). The smoking of bidis (91.03 per cent), cigarettes (82.05 per cent) and loose tobacco (37.18 per cent) has been reported on a larger scale than the national average of

85.67 per cent, 75.32 per cent, 23.45 per cent and 15.84 per cent, respectively. The same is the case with regard to betel chewing which is part of the north-eastern tradition.

Social divisions exist among most of the communities (94.87 per cent) in the form of clans (71.79 per cent), lineages (55.13 per cent), sub-castes (26.92 per cent), sub-tribes (5.13 per cent) and sects (3.86 per cent).

Endogamy is practised by 76 communities. Various levels of endogamy exist — community level in almost all the communities (97.44 per cent) and clan level in 15.38 per cent of the communities. There are also endogamous religious sects, like the Buddhist Baruas. A unique feature of Tripura is its institution of clan endogamy. According to some scholars, clan endogamy existed before the advent of Christianity, and cross-cousin marriages were allowed by Christianity among the Kukis, Lushais and Halams. Marriage with a parallel cousin (father's brother's daughter) is present in four communities, including the Bajandars and Halams. Marriage with the mother's sister's daughter is allowed in five communities, including the Halams and its sub-groups. It is interesting to note that parallel cousin marriages (those with the father's brother's daughter) are permitted particularly among the Riangs. This form of marriage is, of course, generally avoided, but the Riangs offer a unique instance of its acceptance. The occurrence of consanguineous marriages is lower than the national average.

While no hypogamy has been reported, the incidence of hypergamy is less than the national average (2.56 per cent against 4.44 per cent). Junior sororate is practised by 16 communities.

The most common way of acquiring a mate is by negotiation (in 77 communities), followed by mutual consent (73). Though most of them are monogamous, a few communities practise polygyny (five per cent). Sororal (3.85 per cent) and non-sororal (6.41 per cent) polygyny is on a lesser scale than the national average of 14.67 per cent and 24.70 per cent, respectively. Adult marriage is extensively practised; it is in vogue in as many as 98.72 per cent of the communities (national average 89.06 per cent). Child marriage is allowed in only 6.41 per cent of the communities (national average 7.10 per cent). Marriage by negotiation (in 98.72 per cent of the communities) or mutual consent (93.59 per cent) is the norm. About 17.95 per cent of the communities allow marriage by elopement, the national average being 13.57 per cent.

Marriage symbols in the preponderantly Bengali population, and in a few other communities as well, include putting on vermilion (74.36 per cent) and wearing bangles (73.08 per cent). Bride price in cash is widely prevalent in 24.36 per cent of the communities (against the national average of 13.64 per cent). The incidence of divorce (71.59 per cent) is less than the national average of 81.86 per cent. Changes in marriage rules have been reported in 71.79 per cent of the communities (national average 32.88 per cent). Increase in marriageable age has been observed in 84.62 per cent of the communities (national average 83.26 per cent). The change from bride price to dowry has been almost twice in scale (53.59 per cent against the national average of 20.69 per cent).

The communities living in Tripura are patrilineal by descent, except the Garos and Khasis which are matrilineal. A majority of the communities follow the rule of patrilocal residence (96.15 per cent), but 2.56 per cent of the communities (Garos and Khasis) also have matrilocal residence (the national average being 0.91 per cent). In spite of the nuclearisation of the family, the state has a higher incidence of the extended family system than the national average.

In terms of self-perception vis a vis local ranking, most communities place themselves in the middle (65.38 per cent against 47.53 per cent nationally), or on the lower rungs of the social ladder (25.64 per cent against 28.85 per cent). Most of them (70.51 per cent) are aware of and recognise (61.54 per cent) the Varna system. The tribals generally place themselves outside the Varna system. Fewer communities claim to be Brahman (3.85 per cent) and Kshatriya (1.82 per cent) than the number at the national level — 7.81 per cent and 15.90 per cent, respectively. A larger proportion rank themselves as Vaisya (10.26 per cent against the national average of 9.36 per cent) and Sudra (38.46 per cent against 29.08 per cent). The others' perception of the ranking of communities is generally low in as many as 73.08 per cent of the communities. This is understandable in a frontier situation, with only a few tribals living in relative isolation.

The status of women is considered lower in 68 communities, equal in six and higher in two communities, the last two being mostly tribal communities. The women have an active role to play in the economy, and substantially contribute to the family income. A higher level of participation of women has been reported in agriculture (62.82 per cent), animal husbandry (84.62 per cent) and fishing (29.49 per cent) than the national average. Their participation is on the higher side in

the collection of fuel (92.32 per cent against 69.81 per cent), fetching potable water (98.72 per cent) and social and religious rituals also.

Land is the main economic resource for most of the communities (59), and is controlled by individual proprietors in 60 communities. Forty communities are land holders. The shift from *jhum* to settled cultivation started in the 18th century, when the rulers introduced plough cultivation by bringing in Bengali peasants. The same happened in some other parts of the north-east as well. Today 53 communities pursue settled cultivation as the traditional occupation, while 17 communities have shifting cultivation as their traditional occupation. Shifting cultivation is practised on a larger scale in 21.79 per cent of the communities against only 3.69 per cent at the national level. A larger number of communities (25.64 per cent) are also dependent on forest resources (national average being 13.57 per cent). There is also a higher degree of landlessness. Labour as a source of subsistence is returned by 76.92 per cent of the communities against the national figure of 53.57 per cent. Among other traditional occupations still pursued by the communities alongside cultivation are hunting and gathering (four communities), fishing (three) and horticulture (five). The weekly market system is far more extensive; it connects 97.44 per cent of the communities against the national average of 45.50 per cent.

Most communities (82.05 per cent) follow Hinduism. Christianity is next, with a following in 15.38 per cent of the communities. Tribal religion is professed by 23.08 per cent of the communities. The figures for the last two are higher than the national averages of 7.31 per cent and 8.51 per cent, respectively. A fascinating feature of Tripura is the preponderance of tribal religion with a thin veneer of Sanskritisation. The shrines of Tripura are not strictly Brahmanical. The deities are more tribalised than Sanskritised, and the modes of their propitiation involve the participation of tribal and other communities. The Maghs and Chakmas are Buddhists, while the Garos and Khasis are Christians. Vaishnavism is followed by the Murasings and Manipuris. Change in religion (to Christianity) has also been reported on the higher side in the state (20.51 per cent against 15.08 per cent nationally).

The tribals have retained their customary laws. They have two institutions, one at the village level and the other at the inter-village level. The traditional caste/tribal council exercises social control in 37 communities. The statutory Panchayats implement the welfare and development activities.

Oral traditions are more vibrant than elsewhere. Floor painting as an art form exists in 33.33 per cent of the communities (against 7.64 per cent nationally). The practice of model-making (7.69 per cent) and drawing (10.26 per cent) as art forms is on the higher side in the state as compared to the all-India incidence of 2.98 per cent and 3.80 per cent, respectively. Likewise, there is a larger scale of weaving (in 30.77 per cent of the communities), basketry (56.41 per cent) and embroidery (38.46 per cent) as in any other north-eastern state. The national averages are 12.15 per cent, 12.45 per cent and 9.25 per cent, respectively.

In a typical frontier situation like Tripura, with its tribal autochthones and "refugees", the notion of pollution is either relatively weak or almost non-existent. The tribes like the Tripuris do not subscribe to the notion of purity and pollution. Inter-community linkages are very strong. This is evident from a higher incidence of exchange of water and food than at the national level. Inter-community marriages take place on a larger scale, reported in 58.97 per cent of the communities against the national average of 23.80 per cent. Putative kinship is observed on a more extensive scale, in 93.59 per cent of the communities (the national average being 34.43 per cent).

The development process has made an impact. More communities favour education for the girl child in Tripura than elsewhere. The percentage of communities which support that the girls study up to the college or post-graduate level is higher than the national average. However, family planning does not seem to have found much favour. Only 57.69 per cent of the communities favour family planning against the national average of 76.35 per cent.

Ring wells (76.92 per cent) and tube wells are the main sources of drinking water. Access to radio (98.72 per cent) and television (52.56 per cent) is more extensive than at the national level. Communication facilities like roads, railways and post offices are not adequate. About 82.05 per cent of the communities avail of the midday meal scheme (the all-India figure is 50.03 per cent), but the ICDS is availed of by only 5.13 per cent of the communities (against 50.03 per cent nationally). A higher percentage of communities are still dependent on money-lenders — 85.90 per cent against 48.41 per cent nationally.

As mentioned earlier, the influx of refugees from across the international borders has upset the demographic balance, and reduced the tribal people to a minority in their homeland. This has caused an enormous pressure to build up on the tribal resources, and

has led to an identity crisis among the tribals. Consequently, tribal resistance has been sparked off in many forms. This resistance has passed through many phases. Remedial action was initiated by the government, including the extension of the Sixth Schedule to include the development functions within the framework of tribal autonomy.

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INTRODUCTION

Tripura is a small hilly state situated in the north-eastern part of India. During British rule the whole geographical area of Tripura was known as Hill Tipperah. It covers an area of 10,477 sq. km., and is situated between 22°56" and 24°32" north latitudes and 91°10" and 92°21" east longitudes. It is bound by the Cachar district of Assam and the Mizo Hills of Mizoram on the east, Comilla and a part of the Noakhali district of Bangladesh on the west and south, the Chittagong district of Bangladesh and a part of Noakhali on the south-east, and the Sylhet district of Bangladesh on the north-west.

The landmass of Tripura emerged from the sea in the Tertiary period. Topographically, the state is characterised by hill slopes, *tillas* (hillocks), *lungas* (land areas between the *tillas*), flat lands, rivers and lakes. The terrain is mostly undulating, and more than one-third of the total area is covered by forests. There are many hill ranges running north to south, almost parallel to each other, dividing the state into broad valleys. The principal hill ranges are Jampui, Sakhan, Longthrai, Atharamura, Baramura, Devatamura and Sardeng. The Jampui is the highest in Tripura, its height being about 1,000 metres above sea level. The principal rivers rise mostly from the hills in the state and run through the valleys. They are fed by innumerable tributaries in their respective catchment areas. The rivers are Longai, Juri, Deo, Manu, Dhalai, Khowai, Haora, Gomati, Mahuri and Feni.

The soil of Tripura varies from alluvium and sandy loam to clay loam. The upland soil is deficient in potash, phosphorus and nitrates, besides organic matter and minerals. The lowland soils are mostly alluvial. This soil contains a fair amount of nitrogen and phosphorus, and is medium to fine in texture.

The state enjoys a tropical climate with three main seasons, summer, rainy and winter. The temperature generally varies between 10°C and 35°C. The highest temperature is usually reached in April-May and the lowest during January. The mean relative humidity varies between 70 per cent and 85 per cent. The maximum humidity is usually in the month of July and the minimum during March.

Tripura lies in the south-west monsoon belt, and hence receives heavy

rainfall. The maximum rainfall takes place during June-July. Cold weather usually extends from the beginning of November to the end of February.

According to the Forest Department of the state, about 58 per cent, that is, about 6,000 sq. km. of the geographical area of the state is under forest cover. Of this, about 4,000 sq. km. is covered by reserved forests, while the rest is under proposed reserved forests. The common plants found in the state include *gamar* (*Gomelina arboria*), *sal* (*Shorea robusta*), bamboo (*Bambusa indica*) and *garjan* (*Dipterocarpus turbinatus*). The fauna includes elephants, deer, and spectacled monkeys. Often the elephants in this territory migrate to other regions. Herds of elephants move between Bangladesh and Tripura. Among the domestic animals, cows, goats and pigs are common.

The mineral resources of Tripura are meagre. There is, however, a possibility of there being natural oil and gas deposits. In fact, some gas plants have already been set up. A gas-fed thermal power plant is going to generate electricity soon.

HISTORY

This erstwhile princely state possibly derived its name from one of the kings known as Tripur. However, according to Hunter, the name Tripura was probably given to the land in honour of the temple at Udaipur. It was dedicated either to *Tripuradhana*, the sun god, or to *Tripureswari* (Hunter: 357-358). This does not seem to be correct, for the temple is believed to have been built around 1501 by Dhanya Manikya who ruled Tripura from 1490 to 1515, whereas the land had this name long before 1501. Instead of the land taking the name of the deity, it was probably the other way round.

According to Singha (1896: 2), Tripura is a corrupt form of the words *tui* (water) and *pra* (near). Thus the word means 'the land adjoining water'. It is likely that the land bears the name Tripura because of its proximity to water, for "It is a fact that in days of yore the boundaries of Tripura extended up to the Bay of Bengal." (Tripura District Gazetteer, 1976). However, scholars opine that Tripura is a Sanskritised form of Tipera, the name of a tribe to which the ruling family belonged (Majumdar: 1973).

The early history of Tripura, particularly prior to the 15th century, is shrouded in mists of legend and tradition. Thus the state's history relates to two distinct periods — the traditional period as recorded in

Rajmala (chronicles of the Tripura Rajas), and the historical period as recorded in the writings of the historians as well as in *Rajmala*.

According to *Rajmala*, the rulers of Tripura were the descendants of Druhya, the third son of Yayati of the Lunar Dynasty. *Rajmala* gives a long list of rulers since Druhya. Tripur was the 40th descendant of Druhya. Tripur was a patron of the Kirata culture, and became unpopular. He was killed by Lord Shiv. The people who fled the Heremba (Cachar) country returned as votaries of Lord Shiv. He promised them a ruler to be borne by the widow of Tripur. The promised prince, named Trilochan or 'the three-eyed', was born in due course. The legends and traditions claim that he was the contemporary of Yudhishtir. In the *Mahabharat* Trilochan is mentioned as the ruler of Tripura (Hunter, 1973: 463-64).

Scholars who believe in the historicity of *Rajmala* believe that Tripura was a very ancient state, and the ruling house of Tripura was one of the oldest dynasties in India. They said that the name Tripura was mentioned in the *Sabha Parva* and *Bhishma Parva* of the *Mahabharat*. They also stated that Tripura was mentioned in the *Allahabad Prasasti* of Samudragupta. However, others say that the Tripur mentioned in the *Mahabharat* cannot be identified with the present state of Tripura. According to them the Tripur of the *Mahabharat* was situated in Uttar Pradesh.

Singha (1896: 8) gives a different history of the origin of the Tripura dynasty. According to him, one branch of the Shan dynasty of upper Burma set up an independent kingdom in Kamrup. The descendants of this dynasty were driven away by another tribe of the hill area of Kamrup. The eldest son of the ruler of Kamrup set up an independent kingdom in the Naga Hills which later came to be known as Heremba or the Cachar kingdom, with the capital at Dimapur. The youngest son of the ruler of Kamrup migrated to the northern side of Cachar where the ancient kingdom of Tripura was formed.

Several rulers reigned over Tripura. Shamser Gazi, who was once a revenue clerk, also ruled Tripura for some time. However, Krishnamoni, brother of Indra Manikya, recovered his throne after the death of Shamser Gazi. Krishnamoni was recognised as the ruler of Tripura by the Nawab of Bengal. Krishnamoni, who assumed the title of Krishna Manikya, ruled Tripura from 1760 to 1783. In 1757 the Muslim rule came to an end, and led to the start of the British rule in eastern India. The Nawab of Bengal became a virtual stooge in the hands of the British who took advantage of the quarrel between Krishna Manikya and the Nawab's Faujdar over revenue collection. The British, posing

as guardians of the Nawab's interests, took steps to bring Tripura under their rule (Saigal, 1978: 41).

Revolutionary activities and ideas in India in the first half of this century had their impact on Tripura, and the result was the growth of political consciousness. In Tripura the political movement had two aspects. On one hand it gave full support to the national struggle for freedom, while on the other it launched a struggle against the oppressive measures of the princely administration.

The proposed partition of Bengal in 1905 led to the Swadeshi movement and Tripura was affected by it. The Harijan movement took place in Tripura during 1938-39. This movement was against the Agartala Municipality to secure higher wages. In 1942-43 the Riangs, led by Ratanmuni, started a movement against the the feudal system. However, this movement was suppressed by the royal force. Besides these movements, the Jamatia revolt in 1863 and the Kuki revolt in 1871 are worth mentioning.

Political consciousness in Tripura is far deeper than in any other rural area in the country. Religious beliefs, cultural heritage and socio-economic problems go hand in hand with political party allegiances.

Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya (1923-47) was the last ruling prince of Tripura. He succeeded his father Birendra Kishore in 1923 when he was only 14 years old. A versatile person and an able administrator, he was very popular with his people. Bir Bikram passed away a few months before India's Independence, on May 17, 1947. But before his death he foresaw that Tripura's fate must be tagged to the rest of India. A formal integration took place on October 19, 1949, and Tripura attained full statehood on February 21, 1972.

DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

According to the Census of India reports, the growth of population in the state was as follows:

Year	No. of total persons.	Percentage of increase during the decade
1901	1,73,325	—
1911	2,29,613	34.59
1921	3,04,437	32.59
1931	3,82,450	25.63

1941	5,13,010	34.14
1951	6,45,707	28.25
1961	11,42,005	78.71
1971	15,56,342	36.28
1981	20,53,058	31.92

Between 1951 and 1971 the demographic features of Tripura underwent a radical change which was due to the partition of India. There was a heavy influx of refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan. The native tribal population was vastly out-numbered by the non-tribal refugees who sought shelter in the state. In 1981 the rural population in the state was 89.01 per cent of the total population, as against 90.98 per cent in 1961 and 89.57 per cent in 1971.

Among the scheduled castes, the highest percentage of population is claimed by the Namasudras (38.88 per cent), followed by the Jalia Kaibartas (15.50 per cent), Mahisyadases (14.90 per cent), Malis (10.9 per cent), Dhobas (10.35 per cent), Chamars (2.19 per cent). The other scheduled castes constitute only a negligible percentage. The majority of the scheduled caste population consists of cultivators and agricultural workers.

Among the scheduled tribes, the Tripuris form the highest percentage (55.61 per cent), followed by the Riangs (14.37 per cent), Jamatias (7.59 per cent), Chakmas (6.36 per cent), Halams (4.23 per cent), Maghs (2.95 per cent), Noatias (2.29 per cent) and Kukis (1.73 per cent). The other scheduled tribes constitute a small percentage, the more important among them being the Garos, Mundas, Lushais, Santhals and Oraons. Most of the scheduled tribe population consists of agriculturists who depend mainly on shifting cultivation. These days a gradual shift to wet cultivation is taking place.

According to the 1981 Census, 29.64 per cent of the population of the state belonged to the working class, up from 27.79 per cent reported by the 1971 Census. The 1981 Census recorded 67.29 per cent of the working population as engaged in agriculture, down from 74.37 per cent recorded by the 1971 Census.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

From the state Report of Agricultural Census, 1970-71, it is seen that in 1961 the average net sown area per agriculturist, cultivator and

agricultural labourer together was 0.670 hectare, while the per capita average was 0.185 hectare. In 1971 and 1977 the net sown area per operational holding was 0.871 and 0.998 hectare, respectively, while the per capita net sown area was 0.140 and 0.133 hectare, respectively. In 1981 the net sown area per operational holding had come down to 0.883 hectare and the per capita net sown area to 0.132 hectare.

Agriculture is the mainstay of Tripura's economy. It is one of the main sources of revenue. According to the 1981 Census, 67.29 per cent of the working population of the state was engaged in agriculture. Going by the data provided by the Statistical Department of the state, the agricultural sector, including animal husbandry, contributed 56.40 per cent of the state's income in 1980-81 at current prices.

Rice is the major crop in the state. In the highlands a variety of rice and a fibre crop, locally known as *mesta*, are produced. A fine variety of rice, jute and vegetables are grown in the low-lying areas and the plains. There is little prospect of a major irrigation project in the state as the terrain is mostly undulating. The rubber plantations in the state have proved to be quite successful and have a promising future. The Rubber Board has provided wide-ranging assistance to the private as well as corporate sectors for the development of rubber plantations in the state. The Rubber Research Institute of India, apart from its research activities, has extended technical aid to the rubber growers. Tripura Forest Development and Plantation Corporation had raised 3,694 hectares of rubber plantation under government schemes for the resettlement of tribals, *jhumias* and scheduled caste families till 1982.

Shifting or *jhum* cultivation is still resorted to by the tribals of the state. Their only implement is the *takkal*, a kind of iron chopper. The land allocated for *jhum* in the state has become restricted due to various reasons. The government of Tripura has launched a number of schemes for the settlement of the *jhumias*, encouraging them to take up plough cultivation without upsetting their (tribal) way of life in the process.

Right from the First Five Year Plan, demonstrations have been carried out by the Department of Agriculture to impress upon the cultivators the importance of modern mechanical devices and improved implements. Some improved implements like seed drills which are cheap and suited to local conditions have been distributed at subsidised rates. Many of the farmers have already been settled as permanent cultivators. Those yet to be settled are given assistance in kind, and against work involved in the reclamation of land, construction or renovation of houses, purchase of bullocks, seeds and manure.

The government is thus taking effective steps to wean away the tribal families from *jhuming* to terrace cultivation by providing them with alternative land and other necessary inputs, such as, high yielding seeds, fertilisers and insecticides.

A significant achievement has been the launch of wheat cultivation. In 1968-69 barely 130 hectares were under this crop. By 1975-76 the area had increased to about 2,000 hectares. A large number of cultivators have been motivated to take up wheat cultivation as an additional crop, mainly on land which otherwise would have remained fallow.

Industries were conspicuous by their absence in Tripura till about 1950. There was little urbanisation before 1951. However, some progress has been made since then, especially in the plains. The handicraft products of the state have already earned a distinction. Weaving, which is the oldest and most developed cottage industry of the state, is still practised by the local people, including the tribals, as well as the Manipuris settled in Tripura. The government is providing help and support for further development of the handicraft industry. The tea industry also occupies an important place in the state's economy. Almost the whole of the state's income from the industrial sector comes from the tea industry which directly employs about 6,600 persons.

LANGUAGES

Most of the scholars believe that the Tripura royal family originally belonged to the Tipera tribe. The Tipera tribe, like the Cachari and other tribes of eastern India, is Mongolian in origin. The Tipera or Tripuri tribe is classified under the Indo-Mongoloids or Kiratas. Linguistically, the Tiperas are Bodos (Chatterjee, 1974: 45-46). The language of the Tripuris is known as Kakbarak. It belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages, and its roots can be traced to the Sino-Tibetan family of speeches. It strongly resembles other dialects, such as Cachari and Garo (Banerjee, 1966).

We have seen that for historical reasons Bengali has been the most important and dominant language in the state. The erstwhile rulers of the state accepted Bengali as the state language and as the language of administration 500 years ago. It has established itself in every walk of life. About 80 per cent of the people use Bengali in their day-to-day activities. The influence of Bengali over the Chakma language is quite prominent, although the two differ in many respects.

The people belonging to the broad group Halam claim that they speak Halam. The Magh community speaks the language of Burma. There are some other tribes like the Mundas and Bhils who do not seem to have a dialect of their own, and speak their neighbour's dialect for their daily business.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Barring the Garos and Khasis, all the Tripura communities are patriarchal by authority and patrilineal by descent. The father is the head of the family. Families of the same community living in a village constitute a *para* or *bari*, and are very often named after the village chief. Sometimes they are named after the *chharas*. Most of the communities are strongly united through village organisations, cooperation and fellow feeling among their members, collective worship of gods and goddesses, shifting cultivation in a band, etc.

Love mariages, marriages by elopement with previous understanding and negotiated marriages are prevalent. *Jamaikhata* (marriage by service) is also in vogue among the tribals. Both bride price and dowry are prevalent. Child marriage is on the wane. Bonded labour has not been reported. The communities either cremate their dead or bury them. The disposal of bones in water and ancestor worship are practised by most of the communities.

There are four predominant religions — Hinduism, Islam; Buddhism and Christianity. Most of the tribals have their own tribal customs and beliefs, but in the broader sense of religion it is better to say that the tribal religion in Tripura is a curious mixture of Hinduism and folk religion. There are Buddhist tribes like the Maghs and Chakmas, and Christian ones like the Garos and Kukis. Vaishnavism is practised by the Murasings.

Of the many festivals, the one that occupies the pride of place is the worship of *Choddo Devota* or *Chaudda Devata* (Fourteen Gods). Next in importance are *Ker* and *Garia Puja*, both traditional tribal festivals. Another remarkable tribal festival is *Ganga Puja*. A mention may be made of two other important and popular festivals of Tripura — *Durga Puja* and *Diwali*. The fairs of Tripura are mainly socio-religious in nature. Noteworthy among them are *Baisakhi Mela*, *Pous Sankranti Mela* at Trithamukh and *Mahamanipara Mela* at Belonia. The fairs at Unakoti (in the North Tripura district) and the temple of *Tripura Sundari* are also important.

There was a time when a dual system of administration prevailed in Tripura. There was the royal authority at the capital, while the chieftains wielded power at the village level. The ruler ruled the people from a distance through a very simple administrative structure. He enjoyed certain customary powers and privileges. However, he had little means of enforcing his orders. There was neither an army nor a large standing police force. And this was well in keeping with the times, for the crime rate was very low. The few crimes that were committed, were adequately dealt with with the help of a primitive set of laws. The judiciary was a small establishment. Life in the villages was peaceful, and there were few problems and demands.

Modern Tripura has been divided into three districts, 11 sub-divisions and 17 development blocks for administrative convenience. The statutory Village Panchayat was first implemented in May 1962. The Panchayat has the power to control village paths, watersheds and other public places. It disposes of *khas* lands and imposes certain taxes. Often it even seems to function as a body to settle inter-community disputes.

However, both tribals and non-tribals of Tripura have their own ways of running their societies. In case of non-tribals like the Brahmans and Kumbhakars, the customary principles are not followed strictly. This is mainly because of their scattered distribution. In fact, their involvement with codified laws has blurred their traditional customary laws. The Musalmans, however, differ from other non-tribals to some extent. Disputes over issues like marriage and divorce are still resolved by religious heads according to the religious beliefs and practices.

The tribals have retained their customary laws relatively well. They generally have two sets of mechanisms to maintain law and order. One is at the village level, while the other is at the inter-village level. At both levels the authority structure is formed by voice vote. The tribals rarely approach the court to resolve disputes. Disputes of any kind are generally resolved on the basis of their age-old beliefs, ideas and ideals.

VILLAGE SETTLEMENT

Most of the non-tribal communities of Tripura settled in the plains have a farming background. Their settlement pattern is compact and multi-ethnic in composition. The Musalmans, however, have uni-ethnic settlements. The houses of non-tribal communities have more than one room. They are rectangular with mud walls, a thatched roof

and a small courtyard. The kitchens are generally far away from the living room.

The settlement pattern of the tribals differs from that of the non-tribals in many ways. The tribal settlements are distributed on hill slopes or on hillocks, and are often surrounded by trees or forests. They are unitary with regard to their secular, ritual and cultural matters. Besides, they are uni-ethnic and generally consist of 40 to 60 families.

The settlements of the Chakmas, Maghs and Jamatias consist of a large number of families, living in a compact, linear arrangement. These settlements are on the flat slopes adjacent to the hillocks on one side and cultivable plain lands on the other. On the contrary, the settlements of the Noatias and Riangs are dispersed on the hillocks. The extent of a settlement located on a *tilla* is very often restricted by the break in the slopes. Thus it is common to see a single family occupying a hillock.

The lack of level ground cuts down on the space available for houses, especially among the tribals. The absence of courtyards is also due to want of level ground. The houses are constructed with local materials, like wood, bamboo and sun grass. Instead of using mud walls which get soaked during rains, the tribals build their walls with wattle. Sometimes the houses are raised on platforms of varying heights from the ground. Such houses are known as *tong-ghar*. These houses have only one door and no windows. The domestic animals are generally housed under the *tong-ghar*.

The tribal men are expert in basket-making and the women in weaving clothes. Every tribal house has a weaving set commonly called *komar-tant*.

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

The tribals prefer to wear clothes made by themselves. The texture of such clothes is thick. The men wear turbans and a narrow piece of cloth as the lower garment. Most of the time the upper part of the body remains uncovered. However, they wear shirts when they go out. The women wear a long piece of cloth as the lower garment which is known as *pachchra*. They cover their breasts with a small piece of cloth called *risha* which is embroidered with various designs. Some of the tribals occasionally wear shoes. The tribal men and women are casual in the matter of hair dressing. Generally the women tie their hair into a bun. Sometimes they wear it loose.

Young boys and girls present quite a different picture as far as the dress is concerned. The boys prefer to wear shirts and pants. The girls feel shy of wearing the *risha*, and prefer to wear blouses which they purchase from the market. However, wearing the *risha* on weddings is still customary among many of the tribals.

The use of ornaments among men, both tribal and non-tribal, is rare. The non-tribal women wear gold and silver ornaments. The tribal women also wear various ornaments to adorn themselves. The ornaments worn by the Riang and Molsom women are worth a mention. The necklace of the Riang women is called *rangbatang*. The Molsom women wear a bead necklace (*mala*) wound several times around the neck. The tribal women have their ears pierced at various places. They wear a thick round ring of brass or silver to keep the hole in the ear lobe open when no ornament is worn. The common ear ornaments used are known as *wasum*, *surang*, *dhedi* and *taiya*. The wrist ornaments are called *kasar* and *chudi*. Their nose ornaments are called *kali* and *bali*.

FOOD HABITS

The people of the state, irrespective of their ethnicity, are rice-eaters and non-vegetarian. Pulses, local vegetables, roots and tubers are other items consumed by them. They also eat egg, mutton, pork and fish, including dried fish. Milk and milk products are part of their diet as well. The tribals are fond of bamboo shoots. Earlier the tribals used to raise milch animals, but were not in the habit of using milk and milk products as food items.

HOUSEHOLD FEATURES

The tribals have few household belongings. In every house food is cooked in earthen pots. While many of the tribals sleep on the floor, others use cots. A few of the tribals have tin trunks for keeping their clothes. Generally the clothes are hung on the rafters in the house. In the case of non-tribals, the use of bamboo-made receptacles is less than in tribal dwellings. Their household belongings consist of furniture like wooden or steel almirahs, brass pots, suitcases and other such things.


One of the most important agricultural implements used by the

tribals is known as *takkal*. They also use a hoe with an iron blade and wooden shaft. The tribals who practise settled cultivation use a plough like the non-tribals.

PLACE NAMES

Most of the place names in Tripura have a prefix or a suffix, while some have both. The commonly used suffixes include *bari*, *chhara*, and *bit*. The prefixes mainly indicate the direction of the place, like *purba* (east), *paschim* (west), *dakshin* (south) and *uttar* (north). Sometimes prefixes like *bara* (large) and *chooto* (small) are also used.

Some place names with prefixes are Madhya Kalyanpur, Uttar Ramnagar and Uttar Champamura. Some of the names with suffixes are Mudibari, Asharambari, Behalabari, Fatikchhara, Kalachhara and Mohorchhara. And examples with both a prefix and a suffix would include Paschimbachai bari, Purba Lakshmichhara and Paschim Lakshmichhara.



According to the myths recorded by Risley (1891), the Jugis are the offspring of the eight sidhas (passionless ascetics) who offended the feelings of Lord Mahadeo with their arrogance, and could not pass the test of maya (illusion). Another legend states that after the universe had been created, all the people went to meet God. He grouped them into various jatis (castes) judging them by their qualities, and assigned them separate brittis (occupations).

However, a group which had already taken up weaving as an occupation failed to meet him. This was because its members felt that their jo (warp) would have been damaged while they were away. God summoned them and asked them to explain their absence. He was pleased to know the reason for their failure to see him. Since they were so concerned about their jo, they were named Jogi or Jugi.