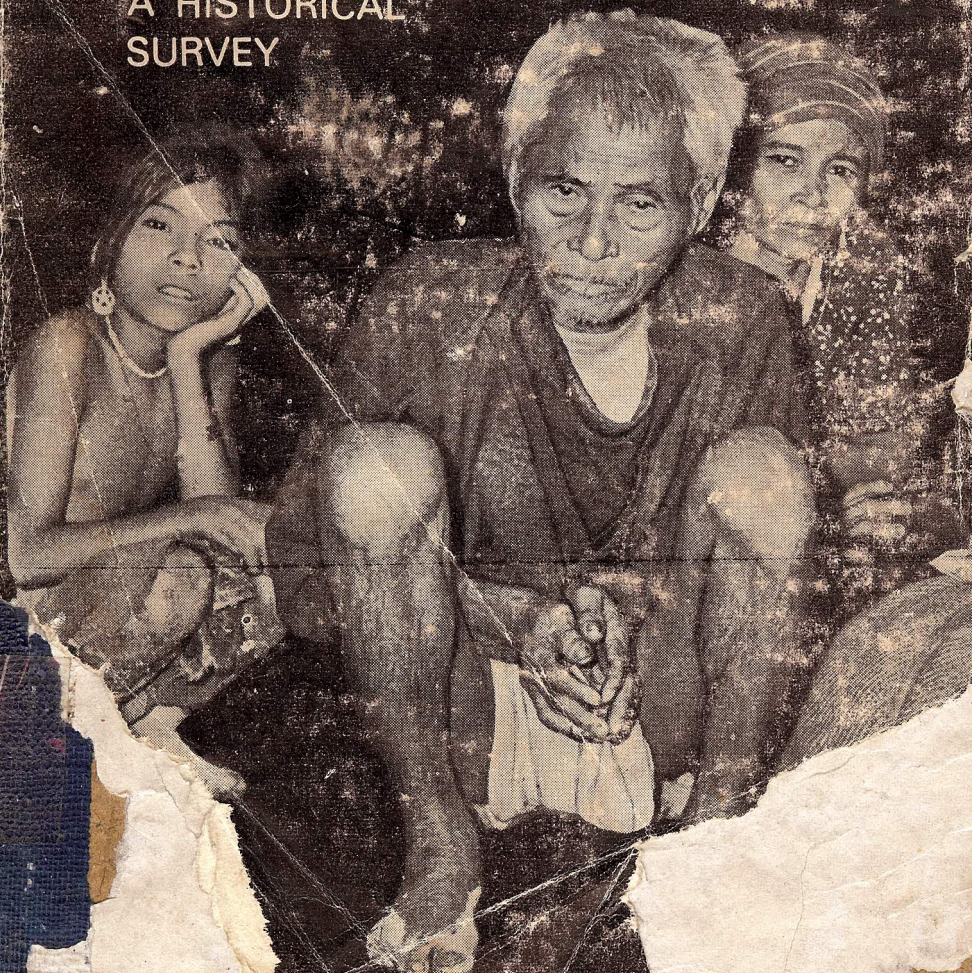


Dr. SUDHANSHU BIKASH SAHA

TRIBES OF TRIPURA

A HISTORICAL
SURVEY



4
5

F234
395

Tribes of Tripura

A Historical Survey

Edited by :

Dr. Sudhanshu Bikash Saha

With a Foreword by Dr. J. B. Ganguly
Director, Calcutta University Post Graduate Centre,
Agartala, Tripura.

RUPALI BOOK STORE

Pyaribabur Bagan

Agartala, Tripura

Pin. 799001



First Edition, February, 1986

Second Edition, April, 1986

Published by

Siddhartha Saha
Pyaribabur Bagan
Agartala, Tripura

Cover designed by

Swapan Nandy

Block Maker

Standard Photo Ingraving Company
1, Ramanath Majumdar Street
Calcutta—9

Rs. 50.00

Printed by

Bibhuti Bhusan Saha Roy
Secretary,
Janashiksha Co-operative Printing Works Ltd.
67 Vivekananda Sarani (Central Road)
Agartala, Tripura.
Pin No : 799001

154984
Date 26/9/86
Class by
Sub. Heading by
Date
Transferred by

NE
301.45095
SAH, IJ

Table of Contents

Foreword	A
Preface to the Second Edition	I
List of illustrations	IV
Preface to the First Edition	V
1. Geographical Account	
—Dr. Sudhanshu Bikash Saha	1
2. Social Background	
—Dr. Sudhanshu Bikash Saha	7
3. Village Road : Whether towards Development or Exploitation ?	
—Nripen Chakraborti	13
4. Evolution and Activities of the GanaMukti Parishad	
—Dasaratha Deb	19
5. State Congress and Participation of Tribal People	
—Taritmohan Dasgupta	25
6. Communist Movement and its influence among the tribals	
—Biren Datta	31
7. Influence of Sanskrit on the People of Princely Tripura	
—Dr. Rabindranath Das Shastri	39
8. Dawn of History	
—Dr. Sudhanshu Bikash Saha	55
9. Our thoughts on tribals in Tripura	
—Dr. Brajagopal Roy	61
10. Rehabilitation of Jhumias—A new Horizon	
—P. K. Kar	69

11. Wreaths out of Wild Flowers
—Anil Sarkar 77
12. Tribal Chief and his People—A case study
—Dr. Mahadeb Chakraborty 81
13. The Tribals of Tripura and the R. S. P.
—Jogesh Chakraborty 89
14. The Jhumias of Tripura in the Past
and at Present
—Dr. Malabika Dasgupta 93
15. Kak Barak : Problems and Prospects
—Prabhash Chandra Dhar 115
16. Uprising of Tribal Women
—Ila Bhattacharjee 128
17. Breaking Eggs to make Omlette
—Jagatjyoti Roy 133
18. Gharchukti Kar (House tax) :
A study in the Land system of Tripura in the hills
—Dr. Jyotish Chandra Datta 139
19. Praja Mandal : Its activities among the Tribals
—Aghore Deb Barma 153
20. Traditional tribal system of Social
Education in Tripura
—Dr. Kanailal Bhowmick 159
21. Coins of Tripura : A Historical Survey
—Jahar Acharjee 165

Foreword

Two recent developments in historical studies deserve special notice. Till recently, writing of history of the non-literate tribal societies was dependent on very scanty data-base. The present trend is to fill this gap 'by marrying history and anthropology'. The second development represents the growing interest in research on Indian social history. Dr. Sudhanshu Bikash Saha's edited monograph, 'Tribes of Tripura : A Historical Survey' is a historiographical account of changing tribal society in Tripura.

The starting point for such an account might suitably be the tracing of the state formation process in Tripura which dates back to the 15th century when some Tripura Chiefs successfully mobilized his kinsmen to subjugate other tribes living in the hills of Tripura at that time. In that period the tribals practised slash and-burn cultivation which did not yield any surplus that was needed for the maintenance of the ruling class which did not directly take part in producing food. Adoption of surplus-yielding wet-rice cultivation and building up of the administrative structure including the armed forces for the appropriation of the surplus were needed for carrying through the state formation process. And for manning the administration and raising revenue collections through expansion of wet rice cultivation the rulers invited and helped the Bengalis to settle in their Kingdom. Such settlement in the plains of Tripura led not only to increased agricultural production but also to monetization of transactions and the emergence of the system of usury. Through the imposition of different commodity taxes as well as land revenue and house tax in kind from the Jhumias the Kings mobilized the surplus and built up the administrative and military structure for consolidation of their power and rule over the state.

The Rajas propagated that the Tripuris, Jamatiyas, Riangs

and Noatias belonged to "Tripur Kshatriya" supra-tribal group. This was expected to foster among these tribal people a sense of kinship with, and allegiance to, the Rajas. Even then, the Rajas depended so overwhelmingly on the Bengalis, besides their close relations known as 'Kartas' and 'Thakurs' who lived in the capital close to the kings, that the state formation process almost by-passed the tribal peoples. Therefore, the tribal formations continued to exist with very little structural change until the early 20th century.

Since the 15th century immigration of Bengalis into Tripura has been continuing. This resulted in the Sanskritization of the tribal Culture to some extent. Many tribals under the direct patronage of the Rajas, became Hindus, learnt Bengali and adopted much of Bengali culture. The Rajas adopted Bengali as the State language and did much for the development of this language rather than Kak Barak, the Tripura dialect.

During the thirties of the present century the Tripuris in considerable number took to settled wet-rice cultivation. This meant that many tribal families left behind the nomadic and primitive culture associated with shifting cultivation and started adopting the culture associated with a settled and stable method of cultivation yielding surplus and leading to accumulation. This period witnessed the expression of the tribals' urge for getting education and assertion of their ethnic and cultural identity. They, accordingly, launched the movement actively supported by the progressive for people's education, development of their own language Kak Barak and social reforms.

The Riangs, the second largest tribe, asserted their ethnic identity by revolting against the Raja and his feudal agents, the Chowdhuries, in the forties. Though the uprising was ruthlessly crushed by the royal armed force, it gave a shake up of the socio-religious and political system of the Riangs.

One strikingly distinguishable feature of the history of the

tribes of Tripura is that ethnicism has not been the sole motive force propelling their socio-political movements, a strong awareness against the evils of internal differentiation of the society resulting from the continuing process of peasantization has also influenced their socio political outlook and collective behaviour. This seem to be the reason why a large section of the tribal population has turned to Marxist thinking and method of action for social change. Some of these developments have been narrated and explained by the contributors to this volume some of whom have been active participants in such . movements since 1930s. Therefore this book will be an important source for further research on the social history of Tripura.

Calcutta University
Post Graduate Centre,
Agartala, Tripura
25 February, 1986

J. B. Ganguly

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is a great pleasure for the editor of 'Tribes of Tripura : A Historical Survey' to note that the book has been appreciated by those for whom it is intended. The first edition has already been exhausted so hurriedly that a second edition has become necessary in so short a time. It is an ample evidence of its utility and popularity. The editor is highly pleased to add five more articles from erudite scholars in order to present it again to the interested persons and the research scholars,

In the seventeenth article on 'Breaking Eggs to make Omlette', Sri Jagatgyoti Roy, a Free-lance Journalist states that the Tripura tribals like other in North Eastern Region are also facing two types of problems. One is detribalisation and the other is to keep the tribals as 'Museum Specimens.' Sri Roy has made an attempt to show how the tribal people of Tripura could overcome these two problems.

Dr. Jyotish Chandra Datta, the guest Lecturer of Modern History, Calcutta University, Post Graduate Centre, Agartala in his paper, 'Gharchukti Kar (House Tax) : A Study in Land system of Tripura in the hills' attempts to reconstruct the history of the land system of Tripura in the hills as a part of her economic history and reforge some of the missing links in the long chain of the economic annals of the country. (B. H. Baden—Powel in his monumental Volumes, 'Land systems of British India' refers principally to the plains and very casually to the hills in the treatment of the subjects. Dr. Datta feels that unless the further treatment of the other half is made through regional studies, the history of our land system shall a ever be complete. Gharchukti Kar (House tax), Primarily relates to a Jhum tax, associated with the land system

of Tripura in the hills. Dr. Datta seeks to draw in true colour, the Draconian Acts of ex-rulers of Tripura, seriously affecting the jhumias. He analyses how the drives of the Rajas to bring the Jhumias to settled cultivation proved abortive. He also refers to the progressive efforts of State Government in recent years for ensuring satisfactory protection to the tribal interests. The increase in Tribal population underlines the urgent need for a long term perspective planning to settle Jhumias to the land Jhumed under multiple cropping on the one hand, and to alternative occupation on the other. As Jhum land area constitutes an important part of the land tenure system, Dt. Datta feels, there must be some jhum regulation in Tripura as there is in Arunachal, Nagaland and Meghalaya, in the best interest of her hill people.

Sri Aghore Deb Barma, one of the founding leaders of the Tribal Movement of Tripura and at present an active member of the Communist Party of India, Tripura has written in his article under the title, 'Praja Mandal : its Activities among the Tribals' about the birth and development of the Praja Mandal Organisation of the tribal people of Tripura. Sri Deb Barma, in his approach has described how the motive force of the tribals has been influenced by the 'Left Wing Struggle'.

Dr. Kanailal Bhowmick, a professor of Ramthakur College, has contributed an article on 'Traditional Tribal system of Social Education in Tripura.' According to him, Tribal Folklores, Folktales, Folk songs etc. contribute a great deal to their social education. Dr. Bhowmick has described the importance of social education and its system among the tribes. He states that their occasional social gatherings in dormitories or other places are to a great extent serving the real purpose of modern social education.

The article on 'Coins of Tripura : A Historical survey' has been written by Sri Jahar Acharjee, owner of 'Rajendra

Kirtishala' a full fledged museum on Coins, Sculpture, Terra-cotta etc. Sri Acharjee has collected some valuable princely coins of Tripura. This article would reflect the system of coinage prevalent in those days of history. Shri Acharjee has shown how the coins, so far available, records the historical sources for further studies. He has also given a chronology of the historical period of the kings of Tripura in comparison with Kailash Chandra Singh and Kali Prasanna Sens's genealogy of Tripura Kings.

The Editor acknowledges gratitude to those friends whose kind suggestions have helped him in this arduous task. His intellectual debts extend to all the authors of this volume who have kindly contributed their articles to compile this valuable book, He sincerely hopes that this book will be able to shed light on the tribes of Tripura. He will consider his labour to be amply rewarded if this book proves useful to the persons who are striving for the development of the tribal people of Tripura and to the research scholars at large.

The Editor

List Of Illustrations

1. To her den after day's toil
2. Husking Paddy— A Riang demosel
3. A dying Old with her native pipe
4. Their loving abode
5. A tribal beauty in her den
6. Reapers in glee
7. A dancing Riang beauty
8. Lord Siva (Unakoti)
9. The temple goddess Tripureswari
10. Lushai Folk dance
11. Tribal group dance
12. Coin of Iswar Manikya (Obverse)
13. Coin of Iswar Manikya (Reverse)
14. Coin of Yaso Manikya (Obverse)
15. Coin of Yaso Manikya (Reverse)
16. A Village Commune

PREFACE

[1st print]

The tribal population of Tripura has an extremely interesting human saga to offer. Their life and their society, their habits and their customs constitute a true facet of the character of the history of Tripura and can be studied in depth in order to understand the colourful cross section of the age old traditions carried by these lovely people from the time of yore with utmost delight. Those sylvan people present an amazing variety and heterogeneity.

This is the first ever book attempting a historical survey of the tribal people of Tripura. The sixteen articles included in this volume represent a modest attempt to present to the readers a true perspective of the tribes of this tiny State. These articles present a cogent and readable account.

Since the attainment of statehood of Tripura in 1972, this small and backward State having 28.95 percent of the tribes against the total population has drawn a keen attention of the inquisitive Indians for the variety of the tribal character and their socio-economic life.

Experts and Sociologists very often justify the cause of the secessionist struggle in view of the plight. Isolation started because they were isolated from the rest of the country and no sincere attempt has ever been made to bring them to the mainstream.

Tribal people deserve serious study. Scientific studies and research were seldom undertaken in respect of various tribal clans.

In this volume, some of the articles collected from the experts and erudite research scholars are no doubt an attempt to pave the way for further studies in the broader perspective. The Editor's attempt of this compilation, though feeble, would be a successful one if some people get some usefulness in their

works for the cause of the tribal development.

In the opening article on 'Geographical Account, Dr. Sudhanshu Bikash Saha, the editor narrates the details of environments and geographical features of Tripura which include, Hill Ranges, Hillocks, Valleys, Lungus, Flat Lands, Rivers and Lakes etc. He also describes her rich flora and fauna along with climatic condition of the State.

In the second article under the caption, 'Social Background', the same author has tried to explain the background of the nineteen tribes, who dwell in the picturesque land of Tripura, According to Dr. Saha, among them, eleven tribes have been living here from the remotest past and the other eight tribes came from different states as tea garden workers and daily labourers.

The Chief Minister of Tripura, Sri Nripen Chakravorti in his article, 'A Village Road-Whether towards Development or Exploitation?' nicely narrates as to how the tribals once worn down by the relentless struggle in the past came under modern exploitation. The so called bourgeois development is also a means of subtle exploitation. Honourable Sri Chakravorti made a candid indication that the exploitation of the tribals would end soon with the end of class rule.

The Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Education of Tripura, Sri Dasaratha Deb, in his article, 'Education and Activities of the Gana Mukti Parishad' extends a detailed history of the continuous struggle against feudal system under Monarchical administration. According to honourable Sri Deb, the Gana Mukti Parishad was the first effective attempt to develop the level of political consciousness among the tribals for liberation struggle. It was Parishad that advanced the movement of the tribals to achieve democratic right. Sri Deb says that the same organisation conducted its movement in each and every sphere from a new angle spurning their superstitious beliefs that the Tripura King was a God to the tribals.

Sri Tarit Mohan Das Gupta, an Ex-Minister of the Congress Government of Tripura and at present Vice President, T.P.C.C., in his article entitled, 'State Congress and Participation of the Tribal People', has reviewed the position of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) of Tripura State and has discussed how they established deeprooted organisational infrastructure in the sylvan surrounding of the State. Sri Das Gupta also narrates in his article, how their Party fought against the Monarchs of the princely State to safeguard rights and interests of the tribals and the non-tribals.

Sri Biren Datta, a Minister in the Left Front Government till 1985, a pioneer of Communist Movement in Tripura and the Secretary of CITU, in his article on 'Communist Movement and its Influence among the Tribals', has described the different historical phases of which the mass organisation like 'the Jana Siksha Samiti', 'the Gana Mukti Parishad' conducted movements against the Maharajas of Tripura. The role of the Jana Siksha Samiti and the sincere strivings of some Communist elements culminated in the birth of the Communist Party in this princely State. Sri Datta has also described how the tribals through their sustained struggle against feudal onslaught were gradually inspired to march forward with the glorious 'Red Flag'.

In the article entitled, 'Influence of Sanskrit on the people of princely Tripura' by an erudite scholar on Pali and Sanskrit, Dr. Rabindranath Das Shastri, Principal, Government Sanskrit College, Agartala has given an exhaustive and authentic note of all the materials out of the scantily [and scattered sources on the influence of Sanskrit on the Prince and Pauper. Dr. Das Shastri has also showed that the Kak-Barak language is well influenced by Sanskrit in respect of its vocabulary and some grammatical rules.

Controversies over the genesis of the ruling dynasty in Tripura do exist. Dr. Sudhanshu Bikash Saha, formerly Professor of M. B. B. College, Agartala and Post Graduate Wing,

a devout worker in history, has tried to establish with historical evidences and various inscriptions available in different places, chronology of earliest phases of Tripura's dynastic rule. In his article, 'Dawn of History', Dr. Saha has given the historical anecdotes for further inquires in this matter.

Dr. Brajagopal Roy, the Secretary, Forward Bloc, Tripura, in his article on 'Our thoughts on Tribals in Tripura' has expressed the outlook of All India Forward Bloc on the tribal problems. In his article, Dr. Roy gives a short history of the tribal rulers to show their activities towards the tribes and the non-tribes. He has also pointed out the tribal rulers did very little for the development of tribal language and their life. After independence, the Congress Government took some measures for the improvement of the tribes but they utterly failed as they could not understand the real problem. According to Dr. Roy, the Left Front Government has taken a realistic approach to grasp the magnitude of the tribal problems and accordingly has taken certain measures to eradicate some of these problems.

Sri P. K. Kar, Manager of Tripura Rehabilitation Plantation Corporation Ltd., a Government of Tripura Undertaking Agartala, in his article, 'Rehabilitation of Jhumias—A new Horizon' has given an idea about the general condition of the tribes of Tripura with reference to shifting cultivators and their settlement on sound economic footings. According to Sri Kar, the present Left Front Government has thought out a new strategy for the rehabilitation of the jhumias on Rubber Plantations. In his article, Sri Kar has shown how the jhumias are being rehabilitated in Rubber plantations and also refers to the future programmes to rehabilitate the shifting cultivators.

Sri Anil Sarkar, Minister for Industries, Scheduled Caste Welfare, I. C. A. & T and Parliamentary Affairs, in his article under the caption, 'Wreaths out of Wild Flowers' says that the tribes of Tripura have a rich cultural heritage. Different communities among the tribes have different cultural

characteristics. Sri Sarkar further states that the traditional culture is being drowned in mal-culture. Their ideals and the social values are getting lost. According to him many reactionary organisations are active to destroy the tribals' culture. So Sri Sarkar opines that it is necessary to develop an alternative culture for safeguarding the people's culture.

Dr. Mahadeb Chakraborty, the Reader and Incharge, Department of History, Calcutta University Post Graduate Centre, Agartala, in his article, 'Tribal Chief and his People-A Case Study', points out that although 'a thick curtain of mistry hangs over the antiquities' of many tribes of the country, still from some interesting unpublished documents the position and pattern of chieftainship in the Lushai Society can be ascertained. Dr. Chakraborty has shown how the Tripura Darbar stood for the cause of the Lushai chiefs and how the Lushai people fought against the institution of the chieftainship. Dr. Chakraborty in the above article has pointed out some peculiar customary taxes as prevalent in the Lushai society and the impact of those taxes on the common people of the Lushai society and the Movement of the Lushais against those taxes which ultimately led to the abolition of both chieftainship and these peculiar taxes.

Sri Jogesh Chakraborty, Minister for Jail, Relief and Rehabilitation Government, of Tripura and the Secretary, R. S. P. Tripura State Committee in his article, "The tribals of Tripura and the R. S. P." has decribed that the political stand of the R. S. P. on the tribal question in Tripura is one on consistent struggles for the defence and extension of the legitimate democratic, economic, political and cultural rights of tribals and for securing to them all facilities and special privileges guaranteed statutorily by which they can overcome their backwardness. Sri Chakraborty, in his article further states how to give real protection to the backward and economically weak and helpless tribes of Tripura in a better way.

Dr. Malabika Dasgupta, the Reader, Department of Analytical and Applied Economics, Calcutta University Post Graduate Centre, Agartala, in her paper on 'The Jhumias of Tripura in the Past and at Present' attempts to understand the problems faced by the Jhumias of Tripura in the context of their socio-economic position and evaluates the schemes adopted so far to resettle them on the basis of the secondary data sources. Dr. Dasgupta has vividly discussed the conditions of the shifting cultivators of Tripura and presented comparative statistical data procured from available sources.

Sri Prabhash Chandra Dhar, Professor, M. B. B. College, Agartala, in his article under the caption, 'Kak Barak : Problems and Prospects' narrates vividly the problems of the language in its present developing state and how to solve these problems. A scientific approach is urged. No emotional stand will help to develop the language, he says. A pioneer in formalising the grammar of the language, Prof. Dhar's discussion will help research scholars immensely.

Mrs. Ila Bhattacharjee, a member of the Parliament has kindly contributed an article on 'Uprising of the tribal Women.' Mrs. Bhattacharjee narrates some of the historical incidents of the uprising of the tribal women in different times for emancipation. She has shown in her article how, the 'Gana Mukti Nari Samiti' was born through the impetuous struggle of tribal women.

The Editor is grateful to the contributors who, in spite of their various engagements, found time to write these rich articles. They all are zealous volunteers for the development of Tripura as a whole and of the tribals in particular. No amount of thanks will be enough for the debt that the editor owe to them.

Special mention has to be made for Sri Bibhuti Bhusan Saha Roy, Secretary, Janashiksha Co-operative Printing Works Ltd., Vivekananda Sarani, Agartala. This book could not see the light of the day but for Sri Saha Roy's sincere efforts. It is pleasant

privilege to express the editor's acknowledgements to all who directly or indirectly have helped the editor this way or that in preparation of this book.

The editor will get his reward when this book will serve its purpose in helping future researchers and workers for the development of the tribes of Tripura.

Agartala
26th February, 1986

The Editor