

COLOURFUL TRIPURA

N. E. Affairs Vol 3 no 43 By Radha Binode Roy
5 Jul - Dec. 1974

Tripura, one of the most colourful, small North-Eastern States within the Indian Union, of the sub-continent extends from Latitude N 22°50' to N 24°32' and Longitude E 91°12' to E 92°28'.

The high lands and the contiguous and intervening valleys within the slanting and roughly diamond-shaped political Tripura, as it is constituted to-day, being the index finger of the Himalayan palm, measures about 6585 square kilometres in area.

This picturesque State of Tripura is surrounded by the Sovereign Republic of Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) in all directions, except in the East. It is bounded on the North by the Sylhet District, on the West by the Tipperah (Comilla) District and a part of Noakhali District; on the South by the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chittagong and Noakhali Districts—all in Bangladesh. On the East lie Cachar and Mizoram. It is traversed by beautiful hills and the dales. It had been a princely State since a very distant date and is probably the most ancient of all the princely States in India. It was referred to in the Mahabharata the Puranas and Ashoka's pillars as the Frontier Kingdom. It

had been ruled by its own kings for an unbroken period of thirteen hundred years before it acceded to the Indian Union in October 1949 A. C.

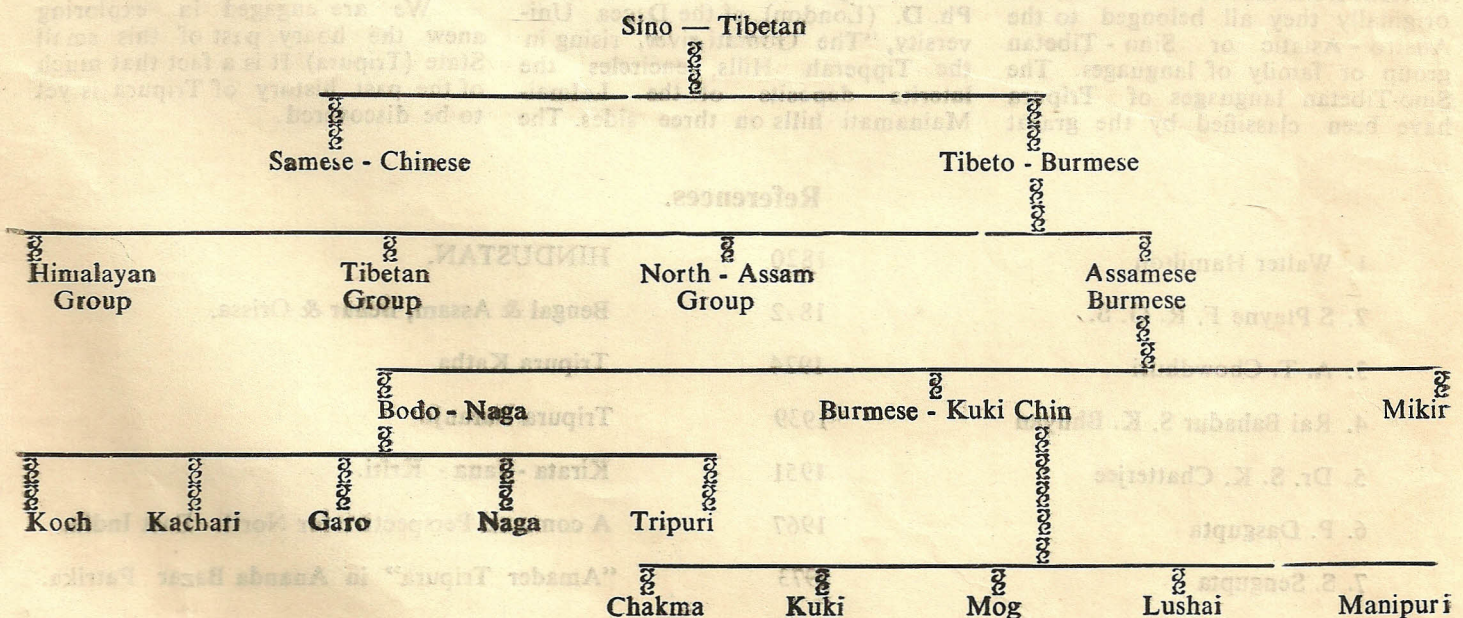
Ancient Tripura: The kingdom of Tripura of by-gone days, also known as Hill Tipperah, was much larger in area. According to Sir Walter Hamilton, "Tiperah, also named Roushenabad, is the Chief Eastern boundary of Bengal, and is of very large dimensions. In 1784, it was estimated to contain 6618 square miles, (10,588 sq. Kms), but various lands have since been added to it, and its eastern limits are not yet accurately defined". According to the Chronicles, the flat lands east of the Meghna river were within the kingdom of Tripura. The present-day site of Comilla was earlier known as "Kamalanika" and has been referred to by Hu-en-Tsang as such, in 630 Anno Christ. According to him Kamalanika was on the sea coast. The sea has obviously receded to further south by riverine silts, throughout the centuries there after.

It has been seen, in fact, from other historical chronicles that the Kingdoms of Tripura and of Manipur had a common border somewhere

near present-day Mizoram's eastern border, between the Barak and the Sonai rivers.

Physiography: The land of this modern State of Tripura "comprises picturesque hills and dales, green valleys with symphony of splashing water and dense forests". The Tripura hills rise in succession, running mainly north and south, each successive ridge to the east running higher as the spur approaches the main mountain mass in the east. The major ranges are Jampui, Sakkangtang, Longtarai, Atharamura and Deotamura. The highest peak is the Betalang Shiv (3200 feet) in the Jampui Range. The rock foundation specially of the hills is upper tertiary, while the plains are covered by alluvial deposits.

The river Feni which demarcate the boundary line between Bangladesh's Chittagong Division and Tripura State's Sabrum sub-division for some distance, and its tributary, the Mohuri, are the southernmost rivers of Tripura. Further north, the river Gomati, the Vijoy and the Habra flow towards the west and enter into Bangladesh's Comilla (or Tippera) District. The northward flowing rivers of



Tripura are, from west to east, the *Khowai*, the *Dholai* (tributary of the Manu), the *Manu* and its another tributary the *Deo* and the *Juri*,— all of which enter into the Sylhet District of Bangladesh.

Economy: The weakest point in Tripura's economy lie in insufficient development of its economic infrastructure, e.g. the transport and communication system. There is virtually no large scale industry within Tripura. All her surplus products are exported out of Tripura by a circuitous route or are allowed to waste, as Tripura is surrounded by a foreign country in three directions. The natural and age-old out-lets of Tripura towards Bangladesh through the border towns are yet to be re-opened and re-established for gainful commerce and trade and for cultural interchanges.

Tribal Tripura, — Ethnology: Ethnologically, Tripura's major tribal people are grouped under the Indo-Mongoloid family. According to the Census of 1971, the population of Tripura is 15,56,342. Out of this population about 28.95 percent only are tribals.

Among the various tribes are the Tripuris, the Kukis, the Chakmas, the Halams, the Mogs, the Jamatias, the Noatias, the Lushais, the Reangs and others. Each tribal language as well as each tribal culture is quite different from that of the others, but originally they all belonged to the Austro-Asiatic or Sino-Tibetan group or family of languages. The Sino-Tibetan languages of Tripura have been classified by the great

Linguist Dr. S.K. Chatterjee, as shown in the diagram on preceding page :

Tribal Tripura : Socio-Cultural Aspects: The major socio-cultural change of Tripura came about with the spread of Hinduism through royal patronage. The time was about the 14th century when Ratna Manikya was the king. His reign has been described as the Golden Age of Tripura. Their remarkable present-day yearly festivals termed as "Ker" and "Kherchi" in their respective tongues are noteworthy. Buddhism, Christianity and Mohomedanism have also been adopted by a few tribes; but their numbers are very limited. Along with the Hindu gods and goddesses, the Tripuris worship a number of Tribal gods of which the Chaudha-Devata or fourteen gods are most important. According to Dr. H. Becher, Chief Indologists of West Germany's Gnetingen University who came and saw Tripura, said that besides others, lot of Buddhist relics are available there in Tripura and these are nothing but the overflow from Mainamati (Bangladesh) complex. The old gold-coins found in Cnamamura point at more useful facts of history yet to be deciphered.

Glimpses of Tripura's Pre-history: It is delightful to note, what present-day Tripura's immediate western neighbour has in store to throw a very interesting light on Tripura's hoary past. According to the veteran Archaeologist, Dr. A. H. Dani, M. A. Ph. D. (London), of the Dacca University, "The Gomati river, rising in the Tipperah Hills, encircles the laterite deposits of the Lalmai-Mainamati hills on three sides. The

most striking feature here is the abundant occurrence of fossil wood. These fossils are completely silicified and lie in the horizontal beds. The fragments apparently lie parallel to one another and may well have been transported by a strong current."

The present author was fortunate enough to be able to pick up two pre-historic stone artefacts without much effort, from within the Deotamura range some fifteen kilometres to the west of the sub-divisional town of Khowai. One of these is a scraper about 3 cms. in length and the other is a pointed knife about 6 cms. in length. These are made from wood fossils belonging probably to the old stone age. One may but reasonably hope, that many more of these nature-preserved wherewithals for a peep in to ancient Tripura, are awaiting there to reward adequately the archaeologist's skilful spade.

While concluding this brief introduction to the legendary, enchanting, pretty, little State of Tripura and its ancient heritage I can do no better than to quote here what Chief Minister, Mr. Sukhmoy Sengupta has stated and I quote, (Bengali)

".....Amarah amader ksudra rajyer suprachin atest natun korey anusandhaney bratee hoyechhi. Ekatha satya jey Tripurar pracheen itihasekha bahulangsey ajata... .."

(English version of above) :

We are engaged in exploring anew the hoary past of this small State (Tripura). It is a fact that much of the past history of Tripura is yet to be discovered.

References.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|------|---|
| 1. Walter Hamilton | 1820 | HINDUSTAN. |
| 2. S Playne F. R. G. S. | 18.2 | Bengal & Assam, Behar & Orissa. |
| 3. A. T. Chowdhuri | 1924 | Tripura Katha |
| 4. Rai Bahadur S. K. Bhuyan | 1939 | Tripura Buranji. |
| 5. Dr. S. K. Chatterjee | 1951 | Kirata - Jana - Kriti. |
| 6. P. Dasgupta | 1967 | A common Perspective for North - East India. |
| 7. S. Sengupta | 1973 | "Amader Tripura" in Ananda Bazar Patrika.
Jan. 21, 1973. |