

PROCEEDINGS OF
**NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**



**TWENTYTHIRD SESSION
TRIPURA UNIVERSITY
TRIPURA**

Hgt

9

NEHU LIBRARY

Acc No... 240535 ✓

Act By... 47

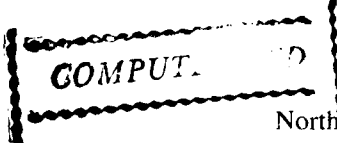
Date... 5/3/08

Class by... [Signature]

Sub.Heading by... [Signature]

Enter by... [Signature]

Transcribed by



Edited & Published by

**Manorama Sharma
&**

D. R. Syiemlieh

on behalf of

North East India History Association

Department of History

North-Eastern Hill University

Shillong-793 022

NE

954.16006

PRO.23;1

Editorial Board

Prof. J. B. Bhattacharjee

Prof. Mignonette Momin

Dr. F. A. Qadri

The publication of the Proceedings volume was financially supported by the Indian Council of Historical Research and the responsibility of the facts stated, opinions expressed or conclusions reached is entirely that of the authors of the articles and the Indian Council of Historical Research or the North East India History Association accepts no responsibility for them.

F240
1396

Preface

The Twenty-Third Session of the NEIHA was hosted by the Tripura University, and was held at Agartala, Tripura from 26-28 September 2002. The Session was inaugurated by His Excellency the Governor of Tripura. The three days of the Annual Conference was very well attended by historians and other social scientists from different parts of the region and also from other parts of the country and the academic sessions, the most important part of the Annual Conferences of NEIHA, saw the active participation of all NEIHA members present. We place on record our thanks to the Vice-Chancellor of Tripura University for hosting the XXIIIrd Session of NEIHA and also our very sincere thanks to Prof. Mahadev Chakravarti the Local Secretary, and his colleagues in the Department of History and other departments in the University and Colleges who worked untiringly to make the session a success.

This volume is a collection of the papers presented in the various academic panels of the XXIIIrd session and also the proceedings of the business meetings of the session. We regret that the Audit Report and the Treasurer's report could not be printed because these were not received on time. The Association is grateful to the Indian Council of Historical Research for the financial support advanced towards the publication of the Proceedings volume.

May we reiterate a point for the information of members that if the papers presented do not follow the **NEIHA style sheet** for referencing and if the revised drafts do not come to us within the last date announced in the business session it becomes very difficult for the editors and the Editorial Board to function. It was mainly for these reasons and also of course for the considered opinion of the Panel Chairpersons, whose comments on every paper were clearly recorded and the deliberations of the Editorial Board, that a number of papers had to be abstracted or listed. We request all NEIHA members to kindly follow the NEIHA style sheet of reference published in **Appendix F of the NEIHA Proceedings Volume of the XVIIIth Session (Agartala)** and also to send in their revised papers within the last date

decided upon in the business session of every Annual Conference. The task of editing, proof reading etc. of such a large number of papers within a very limited period is very time consuming and we can do the work to the satisfaction of all NEIHA members only with the co-operation of all the paper presenters.

Finally we would like to say a very special word of thanks to the members of the Editorial Board, Prof. J. B. Bhattacharjee, Prof. Mignonette Momin and Prof. F. A. Qadri who made our work much lighter by giving much of their time to sit through the Editorial Board meetings to decide on the status of the papers and also editing and doing the proof reading of the papers. We thank Mr. Pradeep Shaha and his staff of *Modern Offset* for their interest in the work and getting the volume ready in time for release in the 24th session.

Shillong
11th July, 2003



(Manorama Sharma)



(D.R. Syiemlieh)

Contents

	Page No.
1. Presidential Address — <i>Lal Dena</i> ...	1 - 17
2. Saga of the Assamese Middle Class : 1826-1921 ... — a review article — — <i>Amalendu Guha</i>	18 - 25
3. Interrogating Traditions : Towards A Conceptual Framework — <i>Manorama Sharma</i> ...	26 - 32
✓ 4. Witnessing History : The <i>Kalika Purana</i> Examined ... — <i>Mignonette Momin</i>	33 - 40
5. <i>Rajmala</i> and the Historical Writings in Tripura ... — <i>J B Bhattacharjee</i>	41 - 47
6. The Coinage of North-East India ... A Historical Perspective — <i>Nicholas Rhodes</i>	48 - 55
7. Tea Garden Tokens – New Finds ... — <i>S.K. Bose</i>	56 - 58
8. A New Coin of Ratna Manikya - I ... — <i>Jahar Acharjee</i>	59 - 61
9. A few Coins of Muslim Rulers Preserved in ... Tezpur District Museum — <i>Sarharuddin Ahmed</i>	62 - 67
10. A Note on the Biswanath Pillar Inscription ... — <i>Madhab Ch. Das</i>	68 - 70
11. Pottery in Assam : Historical Analysis ... — <i>Krishnajyoti Handique</i>	71 - 75
12. The Worship of Surya in Ancient Guwahati ... — <i>Paromita Das</i>	76 - 81
13. Bhaskaravarman and the Downfall of the Varman ... Dynasty A.D. 1380 to 650 — <i>Bharati Barua</i>	82 - 87
14. Horse Sacrifice by Kamarupa Kings ... — <i>Karabi Bharali</i>	88 - 91
15. Dr. Moidul Islam Bora : Contribution to the ... Writing of History with Special Reference to the History of Medieval Assam — <i>Anowar Hussain</i>	92 - 98

16. The Ahomisation Process in Early Mediaeval Assam ... 99-104
— *Romesh Buragohain*
17. Some Thoughts on Continuity and Change in Ahom Society ... 105-109
— *Kasturi Prava Devi*
18. Peasants' Revolt At Sarukhetri : The Rajimel ... 110-118
— *Moushumi Pathak*
19. Opening Up of Nambor Forest for Settlement : A Missed Opportunity ... 119-127
— *Priyam Goswami*
20. Railroads and Equalisation of Trade in Assam ... 128-132
— *Sarah Hilaly*
21. Sibsagar Town : Spread of English Education in the Colonial Period ... 133-140
— *Punyadhar Gogoi*
22. The Growth of Colleges in Assam and its Impact on the Development of Higher Education ... 141-150
— *Rajib Handique*
23. The Gana-Natya (Ipta) Movement in Assam: A Retrospect (1943-55) ... 151-156
— *Susnata Das.*
24. Labour Migration in an Earlier Phase of Global Restructuring : The Nepali Dairy Farmers in Assam ... 157-173
— *Lopita Nath*
25. Collective Memory of Violence : Ethnicity and Opinion Formation in the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley, 1979-1985 ... 174-180
— *Makiko Kimura*
26. Introduction of the Assam Act IX, 1961 ... 181-186
— *Gajendra Adhikary*
27. Historical Perspective in the Assamese Oral Literature ... 187-193
— *Tua Katak & M.Minal Bora*
28. Early Nyingmapa Monasteries of Tawang ... 194-201
— *S.Dutta*
— *B. Tripathy*
29. Origin and Migration of the Tagins of Arunachal Pradesh ... 202-207
— *Ashan Riddi*
30. The Havi Tangsas of Tirap Valley : A Historical Study of their Origin and Migration ... 208-216
— *Narayan Singh Rao*

31. Factors Leading to the Acceptance of Christianity : ... 217-230
A Case Study of the Bokars of Arunachal Pradesh
— *Marto Etie*
32. Women's Market and State: Experiences of ... 231-239
the Manipur Valley — *Sudhir Haorongbam*
33. Some Aspects of Social Development of the ... 240-246
Phom Nagas during the Post-Independence Period
— *Abdur Rahman*
34. On the Funerary Customs among the ... 247-250
Chakhesang Nagas — *Zokho Venuh*
35. Origin, Growth and Nomenclature of the ... 251-270
Localities of Shillong — *Zahid Husain and*
— *Jenita Mary Nongkynrih*
36. The Kheroni Seal of King Ratnapala ... 271-274
— *Satish Chandra Bhattacharyya*
37. The Religious History of Unakoti on the Background ... 275-279
of Rites and Myths — *Priyabrata Bhattacharjee*
38. The Patron Sultan of King Ratan Manikya ... 280-285
— *F.A. Qadri*
39. Christianity and Social change - A case study ... 286-296
of Kokborok Speaking People
— *Sukhendu Debbarma*
40. The Cropping Pattern in Tripura - A Retrospection ... 297-306
— *Sanjoy Ray*
41. Health Care in Princely Tripura ... 307-313
— *Satyadeo Poddar*
42. A Critique of Hunter's views on the reasons ... 314-327
prompting the shifting cultivators of Tripura
not to change their own system of cultivation
and take up settled cultivation by 1876
— *Malabika Das Gupta*
43. Gumti Hydel Project & the Displaced ... 328-334
Persons of the Area — *Malaya Banerjee*

Abstracts of papers - I

1. Socio Political Participation and Tribal Development ... 335-336
in Tripura Since Independence — *Suchintiya Bhattacharya*

Abstracts of papers - II

1. Origin of Clans Amongst Vishnupriya Manipuris ... 336-336
— *Braja Gopal Sinha*
2. Amaibi : The Spirit Medium of Manipur ... 337-337
— *Rangitabali Waikhom*

Abstracts of papers - III ... 337-337

Appendix

- A. Minutes of the Executive Committee held at ... 338-340
Agartala, on 26th Sept. 2002
- B. Minutes of the Annual Business Meeting ... 341-345
- C. General Secretary's Report ... 346-348
- D. Life Members of the XXIII Session ... 349-382
- E. Life Members who are longer with us ... 383-383
- F. Annual Members ... 384-392

A Critique of Hunter's Views on the reasons Prompting the Shifting Cultivators of Tripura not to change their Own System of Cultivation and take up settled Cultivation by 1876

Malabika Das Gupta

Introduction

Tripura is a tiny state situated in the high rainfall, Tropical region of northeast India. Most of the landmass of the state is hilly and undulating. The tribals of the state were swiddeners by long tradition and shifting cultivation, known as jhuming in the local parlance of Tripura, was their conventional, time-honoured and habitual method of farming. The tribals of the state practised shifting cultivation on the hill slopes of the state that were thickly covered with bamboo jungles at the time when Hunter wrote *A Statistical Account of Bengal* in 1876.¹

The problem to be studied and the objective of the paper

Although by 1876 plough agriculture was being practiced in the plains of Tripura by Bengali and Manipuri immigrants, the tribals of the state had not taken to this mode of cultivation. Hunter noted in 1876 "all the hill tribes (of the state) cultivate the soil in the same way, by the method known as jum cultivation".² So rare was it for a tribal of Tripura to take up settled cultivation when Hunter was writing, that he regarded it as deserving of report "that a hill-man in easy circumstances had taken up some waste land in the plains near his village, and was cultivating it through Bengali Mussalmans, whom he employed as servants".³

Yet, plough cultivation, a non-traditional form of agriculture for the tribals, had been in vogue for some time in Tripura by 1876 so that in theory at least, the tribals of the state could have adopted it by then. The Lushai raids in the hills of Tripura and the fear of their recurrence posed a constant threat to jhuming and the jhumias of Tripura during this period. The hill men also had to bear the burden of a heavy house tax that was levied on the tribal households of the state living in the

hills. These factors could have made the shifting cultivators of the state abandon their traditional occupation in the hills where they were at risk or were being exploited and take up settled cultivation in the plains but this did not happen. All the hill tribes of the state continued to practise jhum cultivation as before and did not take up plough agriculture in the plains when Hunter wrote *A Statistical Account of Bengal* in 1876.

Why, in spite of the existence of the possibility of adopting an alternative mode of cultivation in the plains of Tripura and the presence of factors deterring the tribals of the state from practicing their traditional system of farming in the hills did all the tribals of Tripura continue with their age-old system of farming in the hills and not take up settled cultivation in the plains by 1876? In Hunter's opinion, this was so because the hill tribes had a strong "prejudice against any change from their own system" of farming and "objected to cultivation by the plough as being contrary to their tradition".⁴

However, on rereading Hunter (1873) and on going through contemporary records like the relevant sections of the Administration Reports of the Political Agents of Tripura⁵, reasons other than those cited by Hunter can be found for the reluctance of the tribals of Tripura to change their own system of farming in the hills and take up plough cultivation in the plains around 1876 when settled agriculture had already been introduced in the state by the immigrants and the Lushai raids and the house tax on the hill men were making jhumming unviable in the hills.

A careful reading of these contemporary source materials seems to indicate that Hunter's statement regarding the factors prompting the shifting cultivators of the state to keep their own system of cultivation unchanged and not take up settled farming in the plains of the state is simplistic and one-sided. Going through the relevant portions of these texts reveals unequivocally that this phenomenon could not have occurred solely due to the strong prejudice of the hill-men against any change from their own system of cultivation or their objection to plough cultivation because it was contrary to their tradition. There were other factors at work behind their decision to stick to their age-old system of farming and not take up plough agriculture in the plains that indicate that rational economic considerations and not merely the strong prejudice of the hill-men against any change from their own system of cultivation or their objection to plough cultivation on the ground that it was contrary to their traditions prevented the tribals of Tripura from changing their conventional

system of cultivation and taking up settled cultivation in the state around 1876.

The present paper establishes this proposition by taking another look at the section of Hunter's *A Statistical Account of Bengal* that deals with Hill Tipperah and the relevant portions of the Administration Reports of Hills Tipperah prepared by the Political Agents pertaining to this period. It shows that on the basis of the reports of the Political Agents and Hunter's observations on the economy of Tripura c. 1876 reasons other than those cited by Hunter can be found for the unwillingness of the tribals of Tripura to change their traditional mode of cultivation and take to plough agriculture in the plains.

The agrarian scenario of Tripura c. 1876 according to these sources

As a prelude to this, the agrarian scenario of Tripura around 1876 as described by Hunter in the text mentioned above and also in the reports of the Political Agents is summarized in this section of the paper.⁶ It appears from these two contemporary sources that two totally different systems of agriculture prevailed in Tripura around 1876, one in the hills and another in the plains.

All the hill men of Tripura practiced shifting cultivation in the hills of the state around this period. Under this form of agriculture, each family belonging to a jhumia village selected a hill slope clothed in bamboo jungle, felled the jungle, cleared it and set fire to it when it was dry. This wood ash was the only manure used in jhum cultivation by the tribals of Tripura. After the first fall of rain the whole family turned out and joined in sowing the jhum or the clearing. Seeds of cotton, paddy and chillies were mixed together and dropped into holes made with the point of a dao or a hill knife. Pumpkins and other vegetables were also grown in the jhum. The paddy was reaped first, then the cotton was picked and finally, the chillies were gathered.

As three or four crops were grown at the same time on the same plot of land under this form of agriculture, the second crop on the same jhum would not be a full one. So, a jhum was never worked two years in succession in Tripura. A fresh tract of jungle was selected as soon as the soil in one spot was exhausted by one year's jhuming. The state had "practically an unlimited amount of land for *jum* cultivation".⁷ during

this period. As the jhumia households had an ample supply of land fit for jhuming, a clearing on which shifting cultivation had been done for one year was allowed to lie fallow for ten years before the jungle that had grown up on it in the meantime was felled and burnt, the ash serving as manure for another round of cultivation on it.⁸ When no fresh jungle land was found at a convenient distance from the village, the settlement was abandoned and a new village was built close to the new jhum. Traditionally, this generally happened about once every third or fourth year.⁹

The jhumia families of Tripura displayed a "rooted disinclination... to produce crops in excess of their immediate wants".¹⁰ If by chance there was a bumper crop, the jhumias left a great portion of the produce on their jhums, carrying home only the quantity they required for their immediate consumption. Whenever there was surplus production over and above their consumption needs, it was therefore always lost, being eaten up by wild beasts.¹¹ In normal times, the tribals produced enough to meet their requirements from their jhums. Even if the rains failed one year as they did in 1866-67, the shifting cultivators of the state scarcely ever found it necessary to purchase food, the small amount of rainfall "being sufficient to produce the amount of rice to support them during the year".¹²

However, the times were far from normal for the shifting cultivators of Tripura during this period. They were constantly exposed to Lushai raids and the ever-present threat of a repetition of attacks by the Lushai raiders cast dark shadow on the economic life of the jhumias of the state during this period. "Cultivation was diminished" so drastically as a result of the Lushai raid of 1870-71 on the jhumia villages of Tripura that "no tax could be levied from the villages affected".¹³ The Lushai raids led to large scale out migration of jhumias from Tripura.¹⁴ Another noticeable affect of the Lushai raids that could be observed around 1876 was that the eastern part of the state was left uninhabited. The hills there, which were well-adapted for jhuming were left to the occupation of wild elephants and beasts of prey and the greater part of the population of that area was crowded in the north-west and south of the state.¹⁵ As a result of this migration, the want of fresh jhum lands was felt very keenly in the jhumia villages situated between Agartala and Udaipur. The fear of Lushai raids prevented the shifting cultivations living in these villages from moving eastward, the only direction in which fresh jhum lands were available. Consequently, the hills near these villages had to be jhumed every

three years or so, leading to low yield from the jhums and forcing the shifting cultivators living in them to take recourse to the moneylender to meet their requirements.¹⁶

Again, though no rent had to be paid on land used for jhuming, a heavy house tax was levied on each tribal family living in the hills and compulsory and customary service had to be rendered to the king and the tax collectors. However, despite these problems faced by the tribals of the state in pursuing their traditional mode of cultivation during this period, they remained wedded to their age-old system of cultivation and were averse to any changes from their own system of farming.

The agrarian scenario in the plains of the state abutting British India was totally different from that of the hills in the period under consideration. Though Hunter had reported in 1876 that according to the Political Agent, there was little or no plough cultivation in the state within the last thirty to thirty-five years, by slow degrees, plain lands were taken up for plough cultivation in the state by immigrants under *jangalabadi* leases. Under this system of leases, the land was rent-free for a period ranging from four to ten years, according to the nature of the jungle and after that it was subject to rent at the rate of 2 or 3 annas per bigha. The rent increased gradually till it reached a moderate amount, though it was lower than the rate paid for adjoining lands in the British Indian territory.¹⁷ During the period in question, with the exception of a few patches of land in the interior of the state, plough cultivation in Tripura was restricted to the narrow strip of plain land lying along the boundary that separated the state from the British Indian Districts of Sylhet, Tipperah, Noakhali and Chittagong.¹⁸ Rice was the only crop grown in any considerable quantity under plough cultivation in Tripura¹⁹ and the people who practiced this form of agriculture in the state were, with few exceptions, Bengalis and Manipuris.²⁰ In the plains, cultivation was carried on in the same manner as in Bengal. Oxen and buffaloes were used for ploughing the land and manure was used in the same way as in the neighbouring British Indian Districts.²¹

A farm in the plains of about 12 bighas or 4 acres could be regarded as a fair-sized and comfortable holding as "a husbandman cultivating a farm of this size, would not be in such good circumstances as a respectable shopkeeper; but he would probably be as well off as a man earning Rs.8 or 16s. in wages".²² During this period, the plough cultivators of the state were not generally in debt although they did not hesitate to borrow money,

especially for any domestic ceremony, such as a marriage.²³ So, a new and a viable system of agriculture had been introduced in Tripura but even in 1876, more than thirty to thirty five years after plough agriculture had been introduced in the state, there were practically no tribal takers for this new mode of cultivation. Yet, as settled cultivators in the plains, the tribals would have probably been less exposed to depredations by the Lushais and would have been exempted from paying the house tax that constituted a burden for the hill-men. Why then were the tribals of Tripura averse to any change from their traditional mode of cultivation and taking up plough agriculture during this period?

There are two interrelated issues involved in this question—the unwillingness of the hill-men of Tripura to change their own mode of production and their unwillingness and inability to take up plough cultivation in the plains during this period. Basing ourselves mainly on Hunter and the Administration Reports of the Political Agents, we turn next to the probable reasons other than those cited by Hunter for the aversion of the jhumias of Tripura to changing their traditional mode of cultivation and taking up plough agriculture. We shall deal with the additional reasons that can be cited mainly from a reading of these source materials for their unwillingness to change their own mode of cultivation first and then take the reasons other than those provided by Hunter for their unwillingness and inability to take up plough cultivation during this period, basing ourselves mainly on the same texts.

(a) Unwillingness to change their own mode of cultivation

It is our view that it was not merely the prejudice of the tribals of the state that made them averse to changing their own system of farming. It appears that the tribals of Tripura continued to practise jhuming, their traditional form of agriculture, were unwilling to change it and saw no reasons to do so because shifting agriculture as it was practiced in the state till about 1876 suited the ecology of their habitat, met their requirements for a wide variety of crops, was appropriate for their factor endowments and in normal years, was capable of producing enough to meet their fixed consumption requirements in a sustainable manner over time. Even in abnormal years marked by natural calamities, jhuming could sustain the tribals. Shocks generated by abnormal events like the Lushai raids in the hills of Tripura could be absorbed by their age-old system of agriculture and no change from their traditional mode of cultivation was required. The tax structure was flexible and escape

routes were available to the jhumias when the burden of taxation became too heavy. So, it was not mere prejudice that prevented the tribals of Tripura from changing their traditional mode of cultivation. There were ample logical reasons for their behaviour pattern during the period under review. They did not show any willingness to change their traditional mode of production because it suited them perfectly and did not give them any reason to seek an alternative to it.

Jhum cultivation was appropriate for the ecology of their habitat. The tribals of Tripura lived in the hills and jhum cultivation was suitable for the areas inhabited by them. Since the hills of Tripura do not have very fertile soil, nomadic agriculture with a short cultivation and a long fallow period was an eminently suitable form of agriculture for the hills. Jhum cultivation did not require the thin topsoil of the hill slopes to be disturbed and exposed to the forces of erosion, as the land was not ploughed under this form of cultivation. Therefore, it was a suitable form of agriculture in the hills and the hill men saw no reason to change their method of cultivation.

Jhuming provided the jhumias with a wide variety of crops. The jhumias of Tripura were unwilling to change their traditional form of agriculture because it was able to meet their requirements for a wide variety of crops as a number of crops could be grown on the jhums at the same time. Practically all their consumption needs could be met from jhuming, making them averse to any changes in their age-old method of cultivation.

Then again, the jhumias of Tripura had no reason to change their traditional method of cultivation because jhuming was appropriate for their factor endowments. Jhuming required very little labour and capital per unit of output. As the jhumias were leisure lovers displaying an "utter aversion for work of any kind"²⁴ and had access to very little capital, jhuming as a system of agriculture was suitable for them. Jhum cultivation is a form of rain fed agriculture and could be carried on by the jhumias who did not have to make any capital outlays on irrigation. Jhum cultivation did not require any animal power and suited the tribals of Tripura, as they did not rear any large cattle.²⁵ Jhuming was suitable for their factor endowments because it required the ash from burnt bamboos and jungle as manure. As the hill people did not rear cattle, no other kind of manure was available to them.²⁶ Their mode of agriculture required them to abandon a jhum and take up a fresh plot of land for farming after each

bout of cultivation. Land suitable for jhuming was available in plenty in Tripura during the period in question, making shifting cultivation suitable for the factor endowments of the jhumias of Tripura.

The jhumias were interested in producing only enough to meet their limited and fixed requirement of jhum products every year. Jhuming suited the tribals of the state during this period as during normal years, it was capable of yielding enough output to meet their limited requirements that remained fixed because of their "unexpanding numbers" and "their rooted disinclination.. to produce crops in excess of their immediated wants"²⁷ in a sustainable manner year after year. The availability of plenty of land suitable for jhuming in the state meant that the limited and fixed requirements of the jhumias could be met while ensuring that the fallow period on a plot of land where jhuming and been done once could be long enough for it to regain its fertility before it was jhumed again. So, when it was jhumed for the second time, it was capable of producing the same amount of output as before and made jhuming an appropriate method of cultivation for the tribals of Tripura that did not need to be changed to meet their fixed requirements over time.

Not only that, the jhumias of the state had no reason to change their age-old method of cultivation during this period because the jhum economy of the tribals of Tripura had sufficient flexibility to provide enough jhum products to them to meet their limited requirements even in times of stress during this period. It has been said before that even during droughts, the scanty rainfall was capable of ensuring that enough could be produced by the jhumias of Tripura to meet their limited requirements. The crisis emanating from the Lushai raids and the fear of their recurrence could also be tided over under the traditional method of cultivation of the tribals of Tripura. They did not have to change their mode of cultivation when the Lushais struck as they could easily migrate to British India and carry on shifting cultivation there. Alternately, they could stay on in their villages and cultivate the jhum plots with a lower fallow period as the virgin forests that lay in the eastern part of the state were exposed to attacks by the Lushais. Though this reduced their jhum output and made them fall back on moneylenders, it did not make them change their traditional mode of cultivation because it was hoped that the threat of Lushai raids was a temporary phenomenon and would disappear in time. Since under normal circumstances, jhum cultivation was viable and sustainable over time during this period, a temporary aberration caused by the Lushai raids did not make the jhumias of Tripura

change their traditional mode of cultivation. Indeed, in 1872, when conditions normalized somewhat and Lushai depredations were checked temporarily following the Lushai Expedition of 1871, about 400 Chakma immigrants from the Chittagong Hill Tracts region of British India settled on the upper waters of the Gumti and were considered at that time to be a great gain to Hill Tipperah as that part of the country, consisting of land admirably suited for jhuming, had for years been deserted, owing to the occurrence of Lushai raids and the fear of their repetition.²⁸

A further question that can arise in this context is why did the shifting cultivators of the state not show a willingness to change their traditional mode of cultivation during this period to avoid the heavy tax burden imposed on them? Unlike the low rent paid for rice lands in the plains of the state, no rent was paid for land used for jhuming; but in lieu of rent, a tax was levied on each tribal family living in the hills. These households were assessed according to the tribes they belonged to. An element of compulsory or customary service entered largely into the conditions that determined the amount of this tax.²⁹ The tax levied on tribals was in the nature of a head tax and though the tax burden was heavy, it was in no way related to jhum cultivation. They had to pay the tax irrespective of whether they did jhum cultivation or not. However, they had to do jhuming to pay the tax. The tax had to be paid in cash and they raised the money for paying it by selling the cotton that they produced on their jhums. As a matter of fact, doing shifting cultivation offered them an easy escape route from a heavy tax burden because if the tax burden became too heavy on them, since changing their domicile was a normal feature of their system of cultivation, they could easily change their place of residence and take up shifting cultivation in British India and avoid the tax burden.³⁰ Besides, they were exempted from paying the tax when the times were difficult as during the Lushai raids and the Lushai expedition of 1871. Even otherwise, many households were normally exempted from paying the tax on grounds of poverty and other reasons.³¹

(b) Unwillingness and inability to take up plough cultivation in the plains

Again, the jhumias of Tripura did not take to plough cultivation during this period but this was not only because plough agriculture was alien to their tradition. It is our conjecture that the tribals of the state did not take up plough agriculture, an alternative or a supplement to jhum

cultivation, in this period not only because it went against the tradition of the jhumias but also because of other reasons which were mostly economic in nature. These economic reasons for their aversion to taking up plough agriculture are highlighted to show why the jhumias of Tripura had neither the willingness nor the ability to adopt this new mode of agriculture in 1876.

The jhumias of the state were unwilling to take up settled cultivation during this period because they could not practise settled agriculture in their native habitat. The valleys in between the hills in the interior where the jhumias lived were swampy and unhealthy. So, the tribals were not willing to take up settled cultivation there. Besides, reeds and canes were procurable in such abundance from these swamps that it would not pay to utilize these marshy lands for settled cultivation.³² They were also unwilling to consider taking up settled cultivation in the low lying marshy tracts in the hill ranges "as they would require double the labour and many hundred times the capital necessary for cultivating a *jum*".³³ Therefore, taking up plough agriculture would have required the tribals to relocate themselves in the plains abutting British India, which were far away from their habitat in the hills in the interior of the state. The availability of enough plain lands where settled cultivation could be done did not exert a strong enough pull for the tribal jhumias to take up plain land cultivation because though land fit for settled cultivation was available in plenty in the state, the plains were thickly wooded with trees of various kinds, cane brakes and swamps³⁴ and inhospitable. It would have required a great deal of effort to make them fit for cultivation. The tribals of Tripura did not take up settled cultivation in the plains following the example of the immigrants because a blight caused by insects frequently resulted in serious damage to the crops in the plains.

Settled cultivation would not have suited the factor endowments of the tribals of Tripura. Whereas family labour and occasional supplementary labour provided by the entire village on a reciprocal basis was adequate for producing enough jhum output to meet the requirements of a jhumia families, settled agriculture was labour intensive. The jhumias were averse to work of any kind and were leisure lovers and did not value a greater output per *še*. Therefore, they were unwilling to put in extra effort to take up plough cultivation. Agricultural labourers were difficult to procure for settled cultivation in Tripura during this period.³⁵

Even if the tribals had been motivated by the urge to maximize their output by adopting plough agriculture, it is doubtful if they would

have been willing to adopt plough cultivation following the example of the immigrant settled cultivators because the output produced under settled cultivation in the state did not seem to be much higher than that of slash and burn cultivation during this period. In normal times, the tribals produced enough to meet their requirements from their jhums and the shifting cultivators of the state scarcely ever found it necessary to purchase food. During this period, the plough cultivators of the state were also not generally in debt although they had to borrow money, especially for any domestic ceremony, such as a marriage.³⁶ A farmer cultivating a holding of about 12 bighas in the plains "would not be in such good circumstances as a respectable shopkeeper; but he would probably be as well off as a man earning Rs.8 or 16s. in wages"³⁷ so in terms of the level of living promised by the new mode of agriculture, it was probably on an equal footing with shifting cultivation, the traditional method of cultivation of the tribals of the state. This explains in part why the tribals of the state were not willing to take up settled cultivation in Tripura till 1876.

Settled cultivation did not have much to recommend itself to the tribals of the state and the reluctance of the jhumias to take up plough cultivation in the state during this period can be traced to the fact that Jhuming yielded a wide variety of crops to meet their requirements while they could only grow rice under settled agriculture.

Again, jhuming in the perception of the tribals yielded a certain level of output every year. The yield from settled agriculture was perceived by the tribals to be uncertain and the method of production risky to adopt as the plains were prone to floods and droughts. The hills on the other hand never experienced these natural calamities.³⁸ While in some years, abundant crops were obtained from settled agriculture, in other years, the reverse was true; while jhum crops flourished, the plains were waterlogged by floods.

So, the unwillingness of the tribals of Tripura to take up plough cultivation during this period was based on many sound economic reasons. They were not averse to taking it up merely because it was contrary to their tradition.

Not only were tribals of Tripura unwilling to take up plough cultivation during this period; they were also unable to do so for a number of reasons. Some of these are discussed in the contemporary literature that has been cited. They did not take up settled cultivation during this

period because even though settled cultivation had started in the state, it was confined to the plains of Tripura abutting British India, which were far away from the hills in the interior where the tribals lived and carried on shifting cultivation. Though there were many vast valleys in the interior of the state, they were remote and separated from the valleys near the British Indian borders where the settled cultivators of Tripura were concentrated, by hills and forests and were unhealthy as they were covered with swamps and jungles and did not attract the immigrants.³⁹ So, the tribals of the state were not exposed to the new method of cultivating the plains with the help of the plough and could not adopt it easily. Besides, the number of non-tribals in the state was still smaller than the number of tribals. Even if we assume that all the non-tribals in the state practiced settled cultivation, their number was not large enough to ensure that the demonstration effect exerted by them would be large enough to make the tribals of the state who were swiddeners by tradition take up settled cultivation in the state. Hunter, compiling a table from the annual Report of the Political Agent for 1874-75 showed that the estimated tribal population of the state was 47, 523 while the population of the plains, consisting mainly of Bengalis and Manipuris, was a mere 26,719.⁴⁰

No efforts were made by the government till 1876 to make the tribal jhumias of the state conversant with the new method of agriculture. In the Administration Report of Hill Tipperah of 1875-76 it was reported that the Udaipur Deputy Magistrate would "make efforts to introduce plough cultivation in some parts of his jurisdiction".⁴¹ Under these circumstances, it is not at all surprising that the tribals of the state were unable to take up plough cultivation in the state.

Apart from these reasons that are cited in the contemporary literature, it is possible that there were other reasons for the observed behaviour pattern of the tribals of Tripura. It is obvious that they did not possess the knowledge, skills and capital necessary for switching over to a new system of cultivation that required a totally different type of skill, plough cattle, cattle dung to be used as manure, ploughs and investment in cash. Their receptivity to the new technique must also have been limited because of their lack of education and training and the fact that they lived in remote areas. It must have been difficult for the jhumias to amass the capital needed for settled cultivation, as they did not believe in producing a surplus over their current needs.

Last but not the least, time is required to bring about a change in the method of cultivation, especially if it requires a change of locale

of the agricultural activity from the hills to the plains. The exposure to settled cultivation was not of long enough duration by 1876 to enable the jhumias of the state to take up plough agriculture.

References

1. W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Volume VI, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chittagong, Noakhali, Tipperah, Hill Tipperah, (Delhi: D.K. Publishing House, 1973).P. 472.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 501.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 502
4. *Loc. cit.*
5. D.K. Chaudhuri (ed.), *Administration Report of the Political Agency, Hill Tipperah*, Volumes I and II, Agartala: Government of Tripura, (Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute & Museum, 1996).
6. Hunter, *op. cit.*, D.K. Chaudhuri (ed.) *op. cit.*
7. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 494.
8. D.K. Chaudhuri (ed.) *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 36, para 7.
9. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 502.
10. D.K. Chaudhuri (ed.) *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 120, para 19.
11. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 37, para 24
12. Hunter *op. cit.*, p. 507.
13. Chaudhuri (ed.) *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 24, para 11.
14. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 494.
15. Chaudhuri (ed.) *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 39, para 22.
16. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 501.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 505.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 500.
19. *Loc. cit.*
20. *Ibid.*, p. 501.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 507.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 503.
23. *Loc. cit.*

24. *Ibid.*, p. 405.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 504.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 506.
27. Chaudhuri (ed.) *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 120, para 19.
28. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 493.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 506.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 493.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 510.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 476.
33. *Loc. cit.*
34. *Ibid.*, p. 472.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 505.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 503.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 503.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 507.
39. Chaudhuri (ed.) *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 120, para 19.
40. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 481.
41. Chaudhuri (ed.) *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 79, para 11.