

The Kolois of Tripura (A Socio-Economic Study)

Sudhanshu Bikash Saha

The present writer has studied four sample villages namely Darkhai, Bahattarpara, Bairagipara and Kalikantapara on the border between Sadar Sub-division and Udaipur Sub-division of Tripura where the Kolois are mostly concentrated. This paper is based on the writer's general field investigation and experiences of those villages.

Most of the Kolois of Tripura live in the villages. Some of the villages have a mixed population in which other communities also live, while a few villages are entirely inhabited by the Kolois. Though the Kolois are small in number, if we consider them from the point of education, culture, economy, they are not less advanced than other communities of scheduled tribes of Tripura State.

These villages have been selected at random and have 99 Kolois families in all consisting of a population of 476 of which 231 are male and 245 are female members. It is estimated that these families represent a fairly cross section of the Kolois of Tripura and constitute about 10% of the total Kolois population.

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Social Life

The word 'Kolois' is derived from the word 'Kului' which means soft in KOK BOROK language. Some opine that Kului means soft minded or mild in nature. The Kolois are very gentle in nature in comparison with other tribal population of Tripura. For their mildness, they are known as Kolois.

In ancient times the whole of Tripura was under control of the Kiratas. 'Rajamala', a history of Tripura Kings has supported this view. In the remote past, after defeating the Kiratas, the Kings of Tripura had founded the kingdom in Tribeg, a part of Tripura. The Kuki chiefs who were defeated by the Kings of Tripura in a battle and became loyal to them, had been called 'Halam' so as to identify them from others and those of the Kuki chiefs who remained undefeated and did not become loyal to the Kings, had

been called Kukis.

The Census Book of Tripura (1931) described the Halams as offshoots of the Kukis. The Kukis who first came under the control of the Tripura Kings were called Halam. They are also called Mila Kukis.

Kailash Chandra Singha, a profound chronicler of Rajmala has placed the Koloï in serial number six out of thirteen sub-groups of the Halam. There is a tale found in Koloï community entitled 'Throwing away Money'. In that tale, it is described that the Kolois were a powerful nomadic tribe. The Kings of Tripura could not bring them under their control. One King took the help of an intelligent Sardar. He scattered money around the hillocks where the Kolois lived. The Kolois assembled there to collect the money in a body and they gradually became obedient to the Kings of Tripura. They were named as Koloï by the Kings. At present the Koloï society is a mixed community of the Tripuris, Riangs, Halams and Kukis. The language they usually talk is called Kok-Borok. This language belongs to Bodo group of Tibeto Burman Family. It is recognised by the Government of Tripura as State language.

Clan organisation is an important feature of the Koloï society. All individuals belong to one clan or another. The Koloï clan is a patrilineal unit. The following clans are found dominant among them. These are (1) Waptom (2) Wakbur (3) Rujgui (4) Bukang (5) Abel (6) Kuchhu (7) Chorai.

The population of Waptom clan is the largest. The people of the first five groups are great in number but the people of the last two groups are only a few.

It is learnt that many of the Kolois use the title 'Singha'. Though the Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya (1923-47 A.D) issued order to use Singha by all the Sub-tribes of the Halams but only Koloï community started using that title.

Economic Life

Attempts have been made to give an account of the economic life of the Kolois on the basis of data collected by sample survey of 99 families covering the four villages, namely, Darkhai, Bahattarpara, Bairagipara and Kalikantapara under Sadar and Udaipur Sub-divisions.

Though the number covered is meagre in comparison with the total population of the Kolois, yet it will reveal the general patterns and trends of the economic life. The family budgets and

day to day income and expenditure have been estimated from the statements made by the informants at the time of survey.

Table 1 Shows village-wise occupation of the Kolois.

TABLE 1
Occupation

Village	No. of families	Total members	Persons actually working	Cultivation in their own land	Pay labour	Service
Darkhai	43	207	118	70	41	7
Bahattarpara	39	183	98	41	36	5
Bairagipara	9	47	31	19	10	2
Kalikantapara	8	39	27	16	9	2

Economically the village Darkhai is very strong. Almost all the families possess about two to three kanis of paddy land. They also practise jhum cultivation along with plough cultivation. Other villages of the Kolois depend on agriculture. They also live on jhum and wet cultivation. Some families possess handloom. They weave clothes for their own use. Pisciculture is a part of the income of some families. They earn money by selling potato, brinjal, plantain, gourd, lemon and pine-apple etc. from both jhum and plain lands. There is no businessman in any of the villages in the truest sense of the term. But two families of Kolois sell small quantity of grocery commodities. A few Kolois are employed by the Government and private enterprise.

Table 2 Shows in a general way, the nature of economic activities of the Kolois in different villages.

It will be seen from the table 2 that the males play an important part in all major economic activities. On rare occasions, some male members also cook or undertake minor domestic works. Men and Women folk work in road construction, digging of pond etc. during lean season under government relief schemes. The daily wage of a labourer is Rs. 10/- per day for both male and female persons. In private sector, the rate of a labour is much less where a female worker gets Rs. 8/- per day.

Table 3 furnishes the agricultural expenditure incurred during the tilling season per acre of land.

TABLE 3
Agricultural Expenditure of Plough Cultivation

Human labour	Animal labour	Seed	Repair of implements	Manure	Approximate cost of food
Ploughing 20 labours @ 15/- 300/-		50 Kg. of paddy @ 3/- per Kg. = 150/-	Rs. 10/-	20 Kg. @ 1.80 per Kg. = 36/-	20 days @ 3/- per meal = 60/-
Transplanting 10 labours @ 8/- 80/-	Nil				
Weeding operations 20 labours @ 8/- 160/-					
Harvesting & stacking 15 labours @ 8/- 120/-					
Threshing of corn 8 labours @ 8/- 64/-					
Miscellaneous 2 labours @ 8/- 16/-					
75 days	..	150/-	10/-	36/-	60/-
		740/-			

TABLE 2
Economic Activities

Occupation	Male	Female	Children
Domestic work	Taking care of the children, grazing the cattle, collection of fire wood, husking & pounding of rice and in rare cases cooking.	Sweeping and cleaning the house, bringing water for domestic use, preparing and serving food to the members of the family, husking and pounding of rice.	Taking care of the small boys and girls when mother is engaged in domestic work.
Field work	Ploughing, hoeing, digging, manuring, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, carrying, threshing, stacking, cutting of the forest, burning of jhum, watching the crops, jhum cleaning.	Hoeing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, sowing of seeds, threshing when required.	Help in threshing.
Other pursuits	Day labourer	Day labourer	Grazing the cattle when required

Table 4 shows the agricultural expenditure incurred during jhum cultivation per acre of land.

TABLE 4

**Agricultural Expenditure
Jhum Cultivation**

Human labour		Seed
Cutting of the forest		
30 labours @ 8/-	240/-	30 Kg. of paddy @ 3/- 90/-
Burning of the jhum		3 Kg. of chilly @ 8/- 24/-
2 labours @ 8/-	16/-	3 Kg. of Sesame @ 8/- 24/-
Jhum cleaning to set fire again		Other seeds of vegetables approximately 5/-
10 labours @ 8/-	80/-	
Sowing of seeds		
10 labours @ 8/-	80/-	
Weeding of the jhum		
25 labours @ 8/-	200/-	
Watching of the crops		
10 labours @ 8/-	80/-	
Harvesting of the crops		
4 labours @ 8/-	32/-	
Threshing of corn		
2 labours @ 8/-	16/-	
Miscellaneous work		
2 labours @ 8/-	16/-	
95 labours	Rs. 760/-	Rs. 143/-

Table 5 shows the normal output of an acre of land under plough and jhum cultivation if weather is favourable.

TABLE 5
Plough Cultivation

Paddy 10 quintals	175/-	Rs. 1,750/-
Jhum Cultivation		
Paddy 5 quintals	175/-	Rs. 875/-
Sesame 1 quintal	250/-	Rs. 250/-
Chilly 1 quintal	270/-	Rs. 270/-
Vegetable approximately		Rs. 200/-
		Rs. 1,595/-

It is important to note here that the average turn out varies from village to village due to different circumstances. The person who has his own land and bullocks and put in his own labour assisted by other members of the family and spends nothing in cash on this account generally have an yield as stated in the Table 5. It may be said that in many agricultural areas labourers are given less wages than what has been shown in the Table 4 and the cost of food they consume during this period has not been taken into account. The supervision of the operations is done by the head of the family who plans the different phases of cultivation and allocates responsibilities for a certain work to an individual member.

Table 6 furnishes the stock of cattle and domestic animals of the Kolois of the surveyed villages.

TABLE 6
Cattle & Domestic Animals

Village	Bullock	Buffalo	Cow	Calf	Pig	Goat	Fowl
Darkhai	89	-	35	34	27	176	124
Bahattarpara	117	8	56	56	45	83	156
Bairagipara	24	-	17	16	16	18	37
Kalikantapara	21	-	14	10	27	21	39

On enquiry it was learnt that some Koloï families had got bullocks from the government on subsidy for cultivation. Goats, pigs and fowls are preferred by them and they keep these in fairly large numbers. Goats and pigs are sometimes sold to outsiders who trade with these families. A few Koloï families keep these animals for ceremonial functions. Fowls are mainly consumed in the household. Sometimes these are kept for sacrifice to their deities and spirits in fulfilment of the vow made in times of difficulties and dangers. Eggs are mostly sold in the market to buy oil and salt etc.

For economic co-operation in day to day life, the Kolois maintain a high degree of social solidarity. The status of an individual does not stand in the way of such co-operation.

Table 7 shows the percentage of expenditure incurred on different items.

TABLE 7

Items and percentage of expenditure

Items	Percentage
1. Food	84.20
2. Dresses & Ornaments	3.60
3. Religious rites & social Organisation	3.05
4. Liquor & tabacco etc.	3.15
5. Education	3.10
6. Medicine	0.55
7. Contingency	2.06
8. Savings	0.09

It is seen from the table 7 that 84.20% of the total expenditure is incurred on food. The average family size is 4.3 persons. The standard of living and the nature of food consumed by the Kolois vary in accordance with the income of individual families.

In the old days, the Kolois wore garland of coins and beads, silver bangle, garland of plantain seeds etc. Due to influence of modernity they have given up wearing those age old ornaments. At present they use ear-ring, necklace, glass bangles purchased from the market imitating the Bengalees. They still use their self-made traditional dress like Pachras, risha, chaddar etc. Now-a-days the dresses of the manfolk are mostly changed. 3.60% of the total expenditure is incurred for this purpose.

The traditional pujas and festivals of the Kolois are closely related to their social organisation. They think that the traditional worship and social ceremonies maintain their social integrity and solidarity. Their religious rites are same as those of the Bengalees. 3.05% of the total expenditure is incurred on this item.

Liquor is used in abundance in times of occasional ceremonies and religious rites. Most of the male and female members of the Kolois smoke. 3.05% of the total expenditure is incurred for this purpose.

The importance of education is increasing by fell by the Kolois. At present at least one Junior Basic School is found in every village. 3.10% of the total expenditure is incurred in this respect.

For treatment of diseases, some Kolois consult the local quack. Locally available herbs etc. are used by some tribes as those cost very little. Sacrificing of fowl and goat to the deities are found among them which often increases their expenditure. 0.55% of the total expenditure is incurred on this item.

Contingency expenditure includes repair, purchase of utensils from time to time. Some Kolois families have a very few household implements. 2.06% of the total expenditure is incurred in this connection.

Generally the Kolois are not prone to savings. A few persons try to save something as a precaution against lean days. Saving consists only 0.09% of their total budget.

Conclusion

The cultural life of the Kolois is changing by degrees. The changes of their culture, economy, religion and social life have occurred due to internal tribal acculturation. Beside these, modern education, urban life, cinema and governmental development efforts have paved the way for an overall changes in their life pattern.

In old days the Kolois used to produce their own clothes by weaving in their traditional looms after spinning jhum cotton. But at present, they purchase coloured clothes from the market. Their political ideas have also changed. They are now familiar with regional and national politics. The Kolois are now directly influenced by C.P.I. (M), Congress and Upajati Juba Samity etc. They are having the current political information of the country through radio, newspaper and meetings of the political parties.

There is a conflict between the conservative old people and the modern youths. The youths are willing to shake off the old superstitions, traditional ideas and beliefs and to welcome the modern thoughts.

The influence of christian Missionaries has moulded the opinions and ideas of a section of the youths. Some Kolois families have embraced christianity and observe different ceremonies with proper solemnity. A section of christian youths prefer English medium education. These youths are of the opinion that they would get proper education in the missionary run schools of Shillong, Mizoram and Nagaland.

The economic life of the Kolois is mainly based on agriculture. They cultivate land in the hills by jhum method and by ploughing in the plains. During survey, it is found that three families are acquainted with fertilizer, insecticides high yield variety crop etc. Even they have their own pumpsets for irrigation.

Due to extension of Insurance programme adopted by the government, they do not go now to the village Mahajans to have loans against sudden loss of livestock owing to accident or death. At present they do not borrow from the village money lenders on high rate of interest. The co-operative societies are purchasing Jute at fair price and so they are now benefitted. They are also getting help from the Gramin Banks and the co-operative Societies. The low rate of interest and the process of taking loans are well known to them. Therefore, it is obvious that some remarkable changes have taken place in the economic life of the Kolois.