CHAPTER II

TRIBAL POPULATION
INTRODUCTION

The tribal population of Tripura has an extremely interesting human saga to offer. They claim that they have been resident in the state from very ancient times and have loved and cherished the land as their home with utmost devotion. Their life and their society, their habits and their customs constitute a true 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 people with utmost delight from times of Yore.

The official records claim to have taken note of as many as nineteen tribes who have retained their independent ethnic characteristics and living traditions throughout the ages. Of these some seventeen tribes as enumerated below can still be traced as residing in different parts of the state and are enjoying a state of growth in number while two of these tribes, the Chaimals and the Bhutias have now become almost extinct. In this work, attempt has been made to offer a detailed study of the following seventeen tribes namely (1) the Tripuris (2) the Jamatias (3) the Noatias (4) the Udchais (5) the Riangs (6) the Halams (7) the kukis. (8) the Lushais (9) the Chakmas (10) the Mags (11) the Garos (12) the Santals (13) the Oraons (14) the Mundas (15) the
Khasis (16) the Lepchas and (17) the Bhils.

This study will include an account of formation of their societies, principal events of their life such as birth, marriage, festivals, death, funeral etc. and effort has been made to work out a possible indication on the future of these tribes under social, political and economic stresses contributing to gradual change.

THE TRIPURIS

Genesis and Settlement

The word 'Tripuri' bears close affinity with Tripura the name of the State. But some authors believe that the word originated from the name of Tripura, the fortieth ruler in direct descent of the line from Druhyu. This King had named his empire as Tripura after his own name which it still bears. According to tradition King Tripura ruled over the Kirata country. This Kirata desa was a place situated somewhere towards the east of the sub-continent. Ancient Sanskrit works such as the Vishnu Purana, have mention of the country of the Kiratas.

Some other historians have noticed that in the Kok-Borok language 'Tui' means water and 'pra' means dominance. In the remote past the mountainous area of Hill Tripura was surrounded by water and the people who ruled over
the area were called Tuipra or ruler of water. This very word 'Tuipra' was gradually changed into Tripura or Tinra or Tripuri.

Like other tribal peoples of Tripura, the Tripuris too are not held as autochthones or natives of the soil. Anthropologists like Herbert Risley, J.H. Hutton, A. Playfair and E.T. Dalton hold that all the primitive inhabitants of Tripura have been immigrants from without. Some other scholars however hold their doubt about the Tripuris having migrated from outside the State. According to such authorities the Tripuris have been original inhabitants of the region.

The origin of the Tripuris may therefore be considered to be still embedded in mystery. In determining the origin of a tribe, a thorough knowledge of its past history is an inevitable and invaluable requirement. But when no such history can be traced, one has to rely upon the physical features, dress, food, language, social norms and religious beliefs of the same. An intimate acquaintance with their age long environment can also reveal some essential elements about a particular group of people by which its ethnoogy, social rites, rituals and customs can be determined. These always have some important bearing for the study of a tribe.
Further, due to vigorous missionary activities many people belonging to these tribes are being converted to Christianity. Hence religion as a basis for determining the origin of a people can often be deceptive. Further it is very difficult to determine any dividing line between the Hindu religion and the tribal religion. Owing to close contact with the Hindus, the traditional belief and culture of the tribals have changed or have resulted in an admixture of many beliefs. On the other hand, the tribals living in Hindu dominated areas have preferred to identify themselves with the Hindus for having a better status.

Rajmohan Nath writing in respect of the original home of Tripuris states thus: "The Tippraahs or the Tipperahs came originally from the Bodo home in Central Asia and are said to have first settled in India in a place near about present Allahabad. They preferred to call themselves the Children of water-goddess and were therefore known as the Tiphraahs or the Tippraahs, and later on they became known as the Tipperahs.

The Tipperahs have a tradition that Druhyu, one of the sons of Yajati, the renowned king of the lunar dynasty of Delhi married a Bodo princess against his father's will and was disinherited. He preferred to live with his beloved in her hilly home amongst her relatives and his progeny
became a ruling race. The ruling class of the Tipperas claim lineage from the lunar dynasty from this traditional episode.¹

On the other hand, Kailash Chandra Sinha, an eminent compiler of the Rājamālā, placed a fully different and rather more acceptable tradition regarding the origin of the Tripuri. According to this, one branch of the Shan people had established an independent kingdom on the eastern part of Kamrup, and had driven away the so-called descendants of the local dynasty. The youngest son of the king of Kamrup, defeated by the Shan people was compelled to migrate to the northern side of Cachar, known in the ancient times as Tripura kingdom. The name of Tripuri tribe originated from this word.²

According to Kali Prasanna Sen, another editor of the Rājamālā, Yayāti was the fifth king in the line of lunar dynasty from Chandra i.e. the moon. Owing to the curse of Śukrāchārya, Yayāti in his youth became old and weak. At this calamity Yayāti had become overwhelmed with grief and prayed to Śukrāchārya to take back his curse. The latter, having listened to his prayer stated that if any one of his sons would exchange his youth with the old age (Jara) of

¹ Nath, Rajmohan: The Background of Assamese Culture, p. 77.
² Sinha, Kailash Ch.: Rājamālā, Part II, Chapter 1, p. 8.
his father, this prayer might be granted. None of the sons, however, was ready to accept the old age (jara) of the father except Puru. As a consequence to this gesture of his son Puru, Yayati invested Puru with the royal authority in preference to his other sons and sent his other sons to banishment towards different directions. Of these sons, Druhyu, the third son of Yayati was exiled to the east. He came to the east along the bank of the Gangā and arrived in the Sagar Island and took refuge in the hermitage of the great sage Kapila. Kapila was highly impressed by the humble and dignified behaviour of Druhyu and helped him to get rid of the curse of Yayati. In course of time, Druhyu succeeded in establishing a kingdom named Tribega with the help of the Great sage Kapila. Conquering the Kirāta land, Pratardhana the twenty fifth ruler in direct descending line from Druhyu, set up his capital named Tribega on the bank of Brahmaputra. In the long run, this Tribega was transformed into Tripura. In course of time, the ruler of Tripura designated his descendants as Tripuri or Tipra from the name of Tripura.

Whatever, might have been the source of their origin, in facial features and physical structures, they bear strong traces of people of the Mongoloid race. Though apparently Hindus, the Tripuris demonstrate some major differences with caste Hindus regarding worship and
other customs. Risley upheld the views of Friedrich Muller and other German ethnologists in respect of the origin of the tribes of Tripura who grouped all the tribals of Chittagong and Tripura under the head "Lohitic". This very word Lohitic signifies connexion with the river Brahmaputra also known as Lauhitya river and states generally that they have ethnic relations with the Burmese. They bear some relationship to the Tibetans as well.  

According to W. W. Hunter, the word Karbari has been identified with the Kukis and he states that the Tripuris had originated from the Kukis. Hutchinson also supported this view. But the Tripuris have never accepted Kuki ancestry.

We do not get any information from the Rajamala, the official history of Tripura in respect of the origin of the Tripuris. The Rajamala, however, states that the royal family of the kingdom belonged to the Sākya branch of the Kshatriya race.

Considering their physical features, Risley thought that the Tripuris have Mongoloid blood in their veins. Lewin also holds the same view. Hence it can be said that the Tripuris are of Indo-Mongoloid origin and they fall under

the well known Bodo-group of people. They have been residing in Hill Tripura from a very remote past. S.K. Chatterjee holds that they belong to the Indo-Mongoloid group of people called the Kiratas. From the linguistic point of view, the Tripuris are Bodos. S.K. Chatterjee opines that "Some traditions of the origin of the Tripura House, which were of Bodo origin unquestionably, are preserved in the most valuable Assamese Tripura Buranji ....... The traditions regarding these kings with Bodo names appear to have a historical basis. Among the Tipras, the names of kings generally ended with the word 'Pha' which meant 'father' and those of the queens with 'ma', i.e. 'mother'."

According to Kailash Chandra Sinha, the rulers of Tripura had originated from the Tripuri tribe. Other authors like Dalman, Lewin, Hunter are also known to have entertained the same opinion. Analysing the facial features of the Tripuris, Reynold came to the conclusion that they bear physiononical kinship with the Khasia tribe.

From the above discussions it may not be unreasonable to conclude that the Royal family of Tripura had indeed

---

sprung up from the Tripuri tribe. The Royal house of Tripura and as such the Tripuris it may thus be held, did belong to the Shan tribe, a branch of Tibet-Burman race of the Mongolian stock.

Regarding the Mongoloid trait, S.K. Chatterjee states, "the term Kirata indicated the wild non-Aryan tribes living in the mountains, particularly the Himalayas and in the north-eastern areas of India, who were Mongoloid in origin."  

**Deshi Tripuris**

According to Tripura state table No.2 of 1931, the communities of Puran Tripuri, Deshi Tripuri, Jamatia, Riang and Noatia were known, under the generic name of Tripur-Khatriya.

The Deshi Tripuris had originated as a result of admixture between the Bengali Hindus and the Tripuris. The Deshi Tripuris have evolved into a new Sect or Community as distinguished from the other Tripuris.

The Deshi Tripuris began to settle, in the remote past, around the fort at Kailargad and formed a new society. Among them, some took the surname of Laskar, some Chowdhury

---

and, others Das, Sarkar etc. They gave up the culture of the Tripuris. Socially they are akin to the Bengalees. In course of time, many of those had formed matrimonial relationship with the Bengalees and began to develop their allegiance to the deities worshipped by the Bengalee Hindus and had abandoned the rites and beliefs of the tribal Tripuris.

There is a legend about the origin of the Deshi Tripuris. This traditional story runs as follows: An incident occurred in the early part of the fifteenth century during the reign of Dhanya Manikya, a ruler of Tripura. In the wake of this incident a Community grew up. Quite in keeping with the custom or tradition of Tripura dynasty a Community dinner had to be served on the eve of any war, rather on the eve of marching towards the battle field. On such occasions the soldiers of all the communities belonging to the army battalions were required to dine together under the leadership of their Commanders or Generals. This system was intended to facilitate the counting of the soldiers participated in the war, both before and on their return from the war after the battle. The loss of man-power in the war would thus be easily detected. The dinner was known as 'Hasam-feast'. The word Hasam happens to be an equivalent term for the army.
During the reign of Dhany Manikya, such a feast was held on the bank of 'Dhanyā Sagar' at Udaipur while the army was returning home from a battle field.

It is gathered from the Rājamālā, that the Generals counted the soldiers by touching them with sticks used at the time of cooking rice. At that time, a section of the people lodged a protest against this. Those who were counted in this manner, came to form a new community.

This new community became known as "Kāthi Choano Tripuris or Tipras" touched by the stick rendered unclean due to its association with cooking of rice. Thus a new community had emerged from among the larger community of the Tripuris.

Regarding the migration and settlement of the Tripuris, S.K. Chatterjee states thus: "The Kirata or Early Mongoloid ...... entered the country probably through Assam, and their advent in the east might have been as old as that of the Aryans in the West, at some period before 1000 B.C." 9

Risley states, "whether this (Tripura) was their (Tripuri) original habitat or not is uncertain and some

have supposed that they came from Manipur." Webster states, "The Tipperas are a Tibeto-Burman race akin to the shans." From 'A collection of treaties, Engagements and Sanads' written by Aitchison, it is learnt that, "The Rajas of Tipperah (Tripura) are, like the Rajas of Manipur, of Indo-Chinese stock, with an admixture of Aryan blood."

From the above opinions of different scholars, it may be concluded that the Tripuris had came to this territory in the remote past.

The concentrations of the Tripuris are to be found in the Sub-divisions of Sadar (106514), Khowai (50701), Sonamura (8350), Kamalpur (14729), Kailasahar (19644), Dharmanagar (1786), Udaipur (3960), Amarpur (10445), Belonia (17160) and Sabroom (27093) according to the census of 1971.

General Characteristics

According to 1971 census, the Tripuris are numerically the foremost among the nineteen recognised tribes of

11 Webster, J.E.: Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers, p.11.
the state of Tripura. Their population is 250382, consisting of 128128 males and 122254 females, and this shows an increase of about 31.92% over the population of 1961 and the educational break up of this number may be of interest. The census of 1971 shows the Tripuris to be distributed as 44543 literates and 205839 illiterates.

The Tripuris are divided into two classes, the Puratan Tripuris and the Deshi Tripuris. Both of these hold themselves to be under the generic name of Tripur Kṣatriyas. The Puratan Tripuris claim to be the original inhabitants of the territory and the ruling family belonged to this tribe. The traditions and the history of the Tripuris are found in the Rājamālā or the chronicles of the kings of Tripura but as historiography was not practised in its true sense in the past and the data found in the Rājamālā before twelfth century are lost in legends, mythological stories and folklore. So it is difficult to recount the tradition of the tribe with any precision.

The Tripuris had a feudalistic pattern of society where the burden of feudal privileges weighed heavily on the tribes. Although the royal family lived in the towns, the rest lived in interior villages under their respective chiefs.
During the days in the past, the Tripuris lived a life keeping themselves restricted to their old habits and customs, their old beliefs and attitudes. They worshipped no idols but held such objects of nature as trees, stones, mountains, rivers and animals in reverence. Different rulers of Tripura had settled Bengali families in the State at different times in order to improve the modes of living of the local people as well as to improve the administration of the State. The most abiding effect of such steps had been manifest in a slow but steady process through which the Tripuris gradually came under the influence of the Bengali culture. Mention may be made in this respect about a significant event which took place in later part of the fifteenth century A.D. The famous ruler Dhanya Manikya (c. 1463-1515 AD) took a very momentous step towards cultural assimilation when he had made Bengali the state language of Tripura. He had also shown a profound devotion and adherence to Hinduism.

As a result, many of the Tripuris following their illustrious ruler, had also embraced Hinduism. As a consequence, traditional tribal pursuits of the people came to be adjusted with the behaviour of the Hindus and this had developed into the life pattern of those inhabitants of Tripura. Many social behaviours of Brahmanical Hinduism came to coexist side by side with numerous pre-Hindu rituals and customs surviving from much early age. In this connection S. K. Chatterjee states, "Tripura State is now the only area where
the Bodo people still retain a good deal of their medieval political and cultural milieu, although Hinduisation has made rapid strides among them.  

The Tripuris are generally found to be a sturdy people. With the exception that the male Tripuris are taller, there is but little difference in their general appearance from the rest of the people belonging to the Kuki group. The Tripuris can be regarded as belonging to Tibeto-Burman stock, having marked Mongolian features. Their complexion varies from yellow-brown to light brown. Most of them have fair complexions. The Tripuris have broad head, flat nose depressed at the base, and scanty hair. They have got flat faces and thick lips. Male Tripuris, endowed with beard and whiskers are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number of tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Tripuris</th>
<th>Percentage of the Tripuris to total tribal population.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2,37,958</td>
<td>1,08,757</td>
<td>45.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>3,60,070</td>
<td>1,89,799</td>
<td>52.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>4,50,544</td>
<td>2,50,382</td>
<td>55.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

less numerous than those without. The female Tripuris are comely and a little shorter in stature.

The staple food of the Tripuri is rice. Pork, dry fish and chicken are the most favourite articles of food for the Tripuris. They grow vegetables in their fields for consumption and also for sale.

Food & Drink

During the rains, bamboo shoot is widely used as an article of subsidiary food, and it is abundantly available here. The local Hindu environment has influenced them to treat the cow as a sacred animal. Consequently they never eat beef.

The Tripuris are very fond of alcoholic drink. Liquor is usually prepared and brewed from rice. A good quantity of rice is kept for the preparation of the rice-beer. They brew their drinks both as distilled Arak as well as fermented Pachchuas. This drink is offered at the time of worship and is freely taken in merriment and festivals.

The Dress of the Tripuris is scanty and is generally made of home-spun fabrics. The male wears a thick turban and a narrow piece of loin cloth which is seven and half feet in length, and a guernsey or shirt when he goes out. But when he is
at home, he puts on a small loin cloth around the waist and this is not more than three feet in length. He rarely puts on shoes. The females wear a skirt of black and grey colour with brown and black edges which is wrapped round the hip below the naval. This garment is known as Pachhra and Dubra etc. The female Tripuri usually covers her breasts with a narrow strip of cloth with cowries at the corners. This dress is locally known as 'Risha' or 'Riah'.

Home spun clothes which were in vogue in the past are now being replaced by mill-made clothes to a great extent owing to shortage of cotton.

The Tripuri dialect which is known as Tipra or Murang, belongs to the Austo-Asiatic group. A Tripuri calls his language 'Kok-Borok' or the language of men belonged to the Bodo branch of Tibeto-Burmese group of language. Some Bengali, Sanskrit and Assamese words are found to have crept into their language. It is now-a-days written both in Bengali and Roman scripts. According to Hutchinson, "this (Tripuri) tribe belongs to the Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman family, the dialect is Tipara, written in the Bengali characters." 14

Reproduced below are some words from Tripuri dialect:

14 Hutchinson, R.H. Sneyd: An account of Chittagong Hill Tracts, p.18.
Forest - Balang  Father - Pha
Water - Tui  Voice - Kharang
Village - Kami, pārā  Wind - Nakbar
Leg - Yakung  Gold - Rāngcāk

What is your name? - Nini Mung Tamā?
How do you do? - Nung tamā khālāi?

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The Tripuris are found sub-divided into twelve Hadas or Huddas. Each of these had been entrusted with certain duties by the rulers of the State. These groups are not clans like those of other tribes. The Hadas or Huddas are as follows:

(1) Bachhal (2) Siuk (3) Koatiā (4) Daitya Singha or Dui Singha (5) Rujuriā (6) Chilatiā (7) Apaiya (8) Chhatratuiya or Chhakkatuiya (9) Ghālim or Deorāi (10) Subenārān (11) Senā (12) Julāi. The Julais were again sub-divided into eleven sub-groups in accordance with the duties allotted to them. The duties of serial numbers 9 to 11 are unknown. The different groups of the Julais may be enumerated as follows:

(1) Dās Pāiyā (2) Manārāy (3) Totārāy (4) Māmī
During my visit to different hilly areas in Tripura it has been found that, at present, only 'Ghalim' or Deorai group is in existence. They are the tribal priests who perform the daily puja of fourteen gods or the Chaturdas Devatas. They are also required to perform Kharchi and Ker puja. There are certain restrictions in respect of marital relationship between one Hada or Hudda and another among the Puratan Tripuris.

According to Lewin, 'There are four clans of the Tipperah tribe ....... The Pooran, the Nowuttea, the Osuie and the Reeang', according to Kailash Chandra Sinha also, the Tripuris stand divided into four clans namely the Tripuris, the Jamatias, the Noatias, and the Riangs.

But in actual practice the Tripuris are found to be mainly divided into five clans, viz. the Tripuri, the Jamatia, the Noatia, the Uchai and the Riang.

The Tripuri Society is patriarchal and the lineage is always traced through the father. The laws that govern succession are different from those of the other tribes. If the eldest son

16 Sinha, Kailash Chandra: Rājamālā, Introduction p.16.
separates himself from the family and starts to live outside his father's family, he forfeits all claims to inherit any of the property, which then descends to the younger sons. If, however, he lives in the father's house and works for the betterment of the family, he inherits the whole of the property and the younger sons do not get any share of the father's property at all. Any outsider can be admitted into the tribe, there is no bar. Only a feast has to be given by the new-comer to his fellow tribesmen on this occasion. The Tripuris have adjusted themselves to the local environment and have adopted the methods, customs and practices of the region which in many respects differ from the traditional customs and rules of their original abodes.

As regards marriage, this tribe may intermarry freely and there is no restrictions against matrimony outside the tribe. Two types of marriage are prevalent among the Tripuris. These are Kajagnami i.e. marriage by mutual consent and Hikmani i.e. marriage by negotiation. The former type of marriage is settled by mutual consent where the bridegroom has to take up his abode in the bride's house and becomes a member of the family for a prescribed period. It is also called 'Jamaikhata'. This system demands of a prospective groom to remain a probationer for a period of two years in his
would-be father-in-law's house. During this tenure of Jamaikhata, the young man undergoes a very rigorous and practical training to become a good and successful man in every walk of life. His suitability as a groom is carefully judged by the parents of the bride. This is also the right period for the young lady to learn her household chores through training from her parents. The latter type of marriage i.e. marriage by negotiation is settled by the parents of both the parties when a suitable girl has been selected. Two friends of the family are despatched to the bride's house carrying two bottles of country liquor with them and all details including the date of marriage are finalised in the house of the bride. In recent times, demand for dowry from the groom's side is gradually gaining ground among them. Divorce can be initiated among the Tripuris on the adjudication of elderly members of the village organisation. Widow remarriage among them is also prevalent. Child marriage is however rare.

The Tripuris dispose of their dead by cremation. The body of a dead person is at first washed and dressed in new cloth and kept in the house in open air from one to three days with the aid of different processes. This is done in order to enable distant relations to come and pay a last visit to the deceased.
After the relatives from distant places have assembled, the dead body is taken to the funeral ground, if possible on the bank of some river or the side of a tank and cremated with the head kept to the west. A man gets six layers and a woman seven layers of wood upon the pyre. The ash after cremation is thrown into water. Wherever possible, a small hut is built at the place of cremation and the place is considered to be sacred. A full meal consisting of rice, meat, curry and country liquor is offered for seven days after the cremation to the place. The Tripuris later perform their obsequies according to the Hindu rite. This ceremony takes place within a year of death but till such time as this obsequies has been duly performed, a meal must be offered once every month at the site where the cremation was performed.

VILLAGE ORGANISATION

Many of the disputes of the Tripuris are settled by their village councils and Panchayets. The Village Council consists of five or more elderly members of the village. There is a headman in every village known as the Sardar, who is selected by the elderly persons of the village. He is the chief of the Village Council and is an important person. His post may be hereditary or he may be
selected by the villagers.* When a resident of a village has any complaint against another in respect of land, marriage, divorce or objectionable cases of love, he has to report the matter to the Sardar or the Village headman. The sardar, in a meeting of a few elderly persons of the village, tries his level best to compromise the dispute. If he fails, he reports the matter to the Village Panchayet, which in a meeting of different Sardars, decides the matter. Besides the above mentioned Panchayets the disputes are sometimes dragged to law courts for adjudication.

In order to get a vivid picture of the present day profile of the Tripuri society, the system of social relationship, terms of relationship, functions and prohibitions can prove quite helpful, and I have tried my level best to discuss these with the local people and have tried to compare the old rituals and customs with those of the modern age.

**RELIGIOUS LIFE**

The religion professed by the Tripuris by and large is Hinduism. They were once animists. In the religious beliefs and other characteristics of the Tripuris now-a-days one can find much of animism surviving side by side with Hinduism. They believe in one
supreme God and several minor deities, male and female. They observe certain religious practices which are not quite in conformity with Orthodox Hinduism. Though they are quite proud to be known as Hindus, the Tripuris demonstrate some major differences with caste Hindus in respect of Pujas and forms of worships. The Tripuris claim themselves to be Kshatriyas by caste. In the recent past a few of the Tripuris have also embraced Christianity.

The ideas of the Tripuris about the creation of the Universe is in tune with that of the Hindus. They believe that in the beginning there was water all around. An impenetrable darkness prevailed everywhere. The creator however existed amid this situation and by Him. Gradually the universe was created.

The Tripuris have two types of priests namely the Brahmins and the Ojhais. The Ojhai is called Achai in the Tripuri dialect. The Tripuri's high priest is called 'chantai'. The Achai enjoys considerable eminence in the Tripuri society. He is a priest and physician who presides over religious rites and dispenses herbs and drugs to the sick.

The Tripuris are very superstitious. When a Tripuri goes out on some important business, he carefully
observes certain things which are treated as omens, because the Tripuri cherishes a firm belief that the outcome of a mission would depend on the happenings confronted on the way. For an instance, he thinks that to see a water-filled pitcher is a good omen and to come across an empty pitcher happens to be a bad sign. When a Tripuri is about to take a journey, if he sees a dead body of any sort, he will be advised to put off his departure. Another common superstition concerns sneezing at the time of any action, say for instance the commencement of a journey. This is considered to be a bad omen and the journey is to be deferred.

The Tripuris usually perform the following puja rites:

1) The worship of the Chaturdaś Devatās (the fourteen gods): The temple of the Chaturdaś Devatās is situated at old Agartala, about five miles away from the Agartala town. Images of fourteen gods are worshipped here. On the ninth day of the full moon, in the month of June or July in every year a week long celebration known as 'Kharchī Puja' is held at this place. The high priest of the Tripuris called the Chantāī presides over the ceremony. The Tripuris and other tribals pay their homage to these deities on this
occasion and this ceremony occupy the foremost place of all celebrations among the Tripuri tribe. The puja stands as an interesting mixture of tribal and Hindu traditions. Incantations of the chantai and hymns from the Hindu scripture are chanted simultaneously at the time of the Puja of the Chaturdas Devatās.

(2) The Ker Puja : This Ker Puja is the name of a traditional tribal festival held at Agartala, the capital of the State, after fifteen days of Kharchī Puja. This Puja is held within a boundary marked by a notification in the local newspaper well ahead of time and also in the Government Gazette. The significant aspect of Ker Puja is that during this puja nobody is permitted to enter or come out of the marked area.

Besides this 'Ker Puja' held in the capital, all the tribals perform this puja again during the months of Falgūn or Chaitra in their own respective villages.

(3) Matāi Katar Puja : Matāi Katar is held to be the supreme deity according to the Tripuri tradition. According to the Tripuri language Matāi means a deity and Katar means supreme. This deity is taken to be the same as the god Mahādeva of the Brahmanical Hindu faith. This Puja is believed to have the power of bringing welfare and prosperity to the village and its inhabitants.
(4) **Tuima Puja**: Tuima Puja stands for the worship of the goddess of water. The tradition of this Tuima Puja is quite old and is supposed to have existed among the Tripuris from even before the time of their embracing Hinduism. The celebration is held in the month of March or April. This worship is based upon the belief that all lives are derived from pure water—a widely shared primitive belief which in all probability has led to the sacred usage of sprinkling of water on the occasion of religious and festive occasions. From the remote past the tribals are known to have established their habitation by the side of water which is indispensable for the very sustenance of their lives. Usually the inhabitants of a few villages get united in order to celebrate this puja. Every tribal family of such villages pay subscriptions to meet the expenditure to be incurred in this connection. To celebrate the Puja they build a temple with bamboos just at the middle of a nearby river. They sacrifice goats and ganders before the altar. During earlier days, the tribals would also sacrifice buffaloes but this is no longer in vogue. The devotees pray to the deity so that the deity would save them from all sorts of epidemic diseases.

(5) **Lampra Puja**: This puja is held in order to propitiate the presiding deity of the sea and the sky before all
auspicious occasion such as marriage, formal entry into a newly built house, construction of a new house and purification of natal. The worship is performed with offerings of egg, goat, cock, goose and pigeon etc.

(6) Sangrama Puja: The worship of the deity of hills is called Sangrama Puja. This Puja is offered in order to propitiate the deity of the hills so that the Tripuris may not face any danger at the time of hunting, journey or collecting woods from the hills.

(7) Ker Puja: This puja is celebrated during the months of Falgun and Chaitra. It is held within a boundary marked around the village. The significant aspect of this Puja is that when it is in progress no person or even a beast is allowed to enter or move out of the specified boundary. Should a violation take place, the Puja will be void and it has to be arranged all over again. The trespassers are fined. No birth or death is allowed within the limits during the Puja. Every family in the village has to pay a subscription towards a common purse for holding of the same. This puja is performed for the welfare of the village and its people.

(8) Malluma Puja: This Puja is performed to propitiate the goddess of crops and enhancing the productivity of paddy and other crops.
(9) Khuluma Puja: This Puja is celebrated to propitiate the goddess of cotton and secure abundant supply of cotton in jhum cultivation.

(10) Burachha Puja: This Puja is offered to propitiate the jungle god so that Jhum cultivation in the forest can be saved from the depredations of wild beasts and insects.

(11) Banirao & Manirao: These two deities are considered to be two brothers. They are sons of Burachha. These deities are also worshipped in order to secure safety from wild animals.

Besides the above pujas, the Tripuris also perform various other worships. They worship their deceased kings—a variation of ancestor-worship. They also worship some particular trees. The most important of these is the Kalai puja. This puja is performed in a very solemn manner. The devotees have to shave their heads and place country liquor and other ingredients before the altar. Then, after some preliminary rituals an image of the god Kalai is installed and the Puja starts. The priest has to remain on fast throughout the puja.

Another important ritual is found among the Tripuris associated with the child birth. The birth of a child is
followed by a puja which is performed after fifteen days of the advent of the new child. This ceremony is called Gangsala. An altar is erected by the side of a river and oblations consisting of fruits along with flowers are offered. Fowls and goats according to the means of the family are also sacrificed in water near the altar and their heads are placed near the offerings. The mother of the child comes and takes a bath and wears new clothes. Then she makes obeisance before the deity. Thus the mother of the child is purified and allowed to go back to her household works.

There is a widespread belief among the Tripuris about the existence of evil spirits and ghosts. This has given rise to the belief in magic having powers to eradicate all sorts of evil. The purpose of magic is to deal with such malafide forces so that they cannot cause any harm to the people. Magic is also believed to replenish the life essence. The priest or magician who can perform such beneficial deed is called in the Tripuri society as "Ojhāi". He is known by the name called Achāi in Tripuri dialect. He prescribes herbs and drugs for the sick and the diseased.

Evil spirits are believed to remain hidden even in the personalities of even fathers, mothers, wives, sons, daughters and sisters. The Achāi finds out the evil genii
who is responsible for creating disturbances in the village. They also trace evil spirits among males or females. It is he who can foretell if the household deity is angry with somebody and needs propitiation. Whenever a man comes to a Achāi to complain of some disturbances in his household, the Achāi performs some worship and then he proclaims the name of the evil deity who is responsible for the trouble and prescribes the offerings suitable for its propitiation. When a Tripuri is attacked by any disease and when he is not cured with ordinary medicines, the Achāi is called and consulted. The Achāi takes the details of the incident and diagnoses the disease to have been caused by some evil eyes of a witch. The Achāi is requested to remove the same. Then a prescribed Puja is offered for ensuring the cure of the disease.

The Deshi Tripuris gave up all their earlier customs, rites and rituals of the Puratan Tripuris due to various reasons. They have come very close to the Bengalees. They have established matrimonial relationships with the Bengalee Hindus and observe all the customs and ceremonies of the Bengalees. They also speak the Bengali language which has become their mother tongue. Thus, though basically tribal peoples, these Deshi Tripuris have become closely aligned to the Bengali people settled in the State.
The diversity of the Tripuris' religious beliefs has generated a wide variety in their worship of various deities, and the rites, rituals, celebrations and social ceremonies associated with such worships. Their culture has evolved in multifarious directions providing a multiplicity of cultural patterns. Rites and rituals are observed on various occasions. Moreover, the rites are believed to contain the essence of life-spirit or fertility. If they can invoke this fertility through sacrifice by way of their rites, it will have a benign influence in their life. They believe that the 'killed enters the killer'. They further believe that this is the proper way of obtaining bliss. This notion of life-essence is found closely connected with magic.

Magic appears to the primitive people including the Tripuris too, to be a way to invoke the forces of nature. They resort to endless and multifarious rites in order to fulfill a desire or ward off a disaster, to bring down rainfall during drought, to control epidemics, to cause maternity in a barren woman, to reap good harvest during lean days, to destroy an advancing enemy and to serve different other motives for security of their lives. That is how magic had gained a firm grip upon the Tripuri tribes.
THE JAMATIAS

Genesis and Settlement

According to a hearsay tradition preserved in Tripura, the Jamatias have been regarded as a fighting class which comprised probably all the original inhabitants of Tripura who belonged to the Bodo Group of the Indo-Mongoloid family. Ethnologically and linguistically, the Jamatias are akin to the Tripuris and their physical characteristics also display a close resemblance to the Tripuri Tribe.

According to table No. XVII of 1931 Census published in Bengali by the Government of Tripura, the entire population was classified into 93 castes including tribes. According to Tripura State table No. 2 of 1931, the communities of Puratān Tripura, Deshi Tripura, Jamatia, Riang and Noatia were known under the generic name of Tripur Kshatriya. The member of Tripur Kshatriyas returned in 1941 Census had been far less than the figures given in 1931 Census and this was probably because of under-enumeration or due to the fact that many people did not enlist themselves as Tripur Kshatriyas.

Regarding the original home of the Jamatias, Hutchinson observes, "In the Census Report of 1901, for Bengal,
Mr. Gait, C.S., states that the Jamatiyas originally came from Achlong in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Achlong is a small tributary of the Pheni river in the north of the Hill Tracts, but I can find no trace of occupancy in the neighbourhood. On the other hand I have visited the ruins of what is reputed to have been at one time the capital of the Tipara Kingdom, situated on the Myree river, a tributary of the Kassalong and separated only by a range of hills from the Pheni. Here there are ruins of a big house and four or five large tanks with remains of masonry ghats of fire-burnt bricks at each corner; but wild elephants have worn these away by going to and coming from their baths. Dense trees and cane forests overgrew the site, but amongst the trees remain some fine specimens of cultivated mangoes. Ridges on the surface of the ground are traceable in the forests, giving proof of a period when the whole country was under rice cultivation, and there must have been a very big settlements of Tiparas in these parts. The site is now in the heart of the Kassalong forest reserve. This was, I imagine, the original home of the Jamatiyas.  

The origin of the word 'Jamatia' has not been conclusively established. The very word 'Jamat' gives a meaning of an assembled folk; the tribe-name Jamatia is, perhaps, thus derived. Some are of the opinion that the Jamatias were recruited in the army which was called Jamat and this

---

17 Hutchinson, R.H. Sneyd: An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, PP 153-154
ultimately developed into the name Jamatias.

A study of the ancient history of Tripura shows that for the smooth running of the state administration, the rulers of Tripura used to ask some of the tribals to reside over an area quite adjacent to the capitals. Men were recruited from among those tribes for the army to defend the country. Some authors believe that the army corps formed of these people were entitled 'Jamat'. These aboriginal tribes established matrimonial relations amongst themselves and thus a new society was formed and those who, intermarried, along with their children forming this new society continued to live together. In course of time, this new society came to be known as Jamatias. Many people also think that the Jamatias had emerged as a result of admixture of many tribals like the Tripuris, the Riangs, the Chakmas, the Mags, the Kukis, the Garos and the Halams etc. Again some are of opinion that they are called 'Jamat' because they liked to live in groups. Jamat is probably the source from which the term Jamatia had evolved.

It is evident from the facts stated above as well as from the very name of the Jamatias, that they are neither an original inhabitants nor one of the early settlers of Tripura. For long they used to cherish their old traditional beliefs and practice indigenous customs, but in course
of time due to their intimate contact with the Bengalees coming from neighbouring districts of Bengal, a synthesis of attitudes and social behaviours have developed in the life pattern of these inhabitants of Tripura.

Migration: It is stated earlier that the Jamatias form one of the distinct branches of the Tripuris. In the remote past, they were professional soldiers and were employed in the service of the rulers of Tripura. Some scholars think that the Jamatias had evolved from an admixture of the Kukis and the Tripuris. The Tripuris and the Kukis have been residing here from a very early age.

The Jamatias are known to have revolted against the royal authority in 1276 A.D. and this uprising resulted in a total defeat and complete subjugation of the tribe. Henceforth only the Jamatias grew humble and of mild disposition. 18

The concentration of the Jamatias are to be found in the sub-divisions of Sadar (2020), Khowai (4063), Sonamura (561), Kamalpur (27), Kailasahar (143), Dharmanagar (1), Udaipur (1605), Amarpur (1028) and Belonia (1038) according to the Census of 1971.

18 Sinha, Kailash Chandra: Rājamālā, p.16.
General Characteristics

According to 1971 census, the Jamatias numerically stood third among the nineteen recognised tribes of the State of Tripura and the Jamatia population stood at 34,192 comprising of 17,280 males and 16,912 females. This number shows an increase of about 40.37% over the population of 1961. The literary break up of this number may be of interest. The census of 1971 shows the Jamatias to be distributed as 5,063 literates and 29,129 illiterates.

The Jamatias were at one time regarded as a fighting class. They were probably a section of the original inhabitants of Tripura who belonged to Bodo group of the Indo-Mongoloid people. They are peace-loving and their society is full of discipline. There are hardly any occurrence of any kind of disputes or incidents jeopardising peace among the members of the society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number of tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Jamatias</th>
<th>Percentage of the Jamatias to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>14,756</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>24,359</td>
<td>6.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>34,192</td>
<td>7.59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Jamatias are physically very well built. The majority among them are of dark brown colour and of medium height. They have broad head, small eyes and flat nose. The mouth is a large one and the lips are thick. The male Jamatia possesses straight and coarse hair with scanty beard and moustache. The woman in her youth is healthy and impressive. Both the sexes are very active.

Rice is the staple food of the Jamatias. They eat fish, but meat is a taboo to most of the Jamatias. They are fond of different kinds of vegetables. But when one does not get any suitable vegetable, one has to remain contented with salt and chillies.

Country liquor prepared and brewed from rice is used at the time of worship and on festive occasions. Most of the Jamatias are not addicted to drinking.

The robe of a Jamatia is not only simple but also unspectacular. The adult male wears coarse cotton cloth produced by their own hands. He wears a shirt and a turban when he goes out. He, however, puts on a small piece of cloth leaving the whole body exposed when at home. He wears a sacred thread and this practice reveals strong Brahmanical influence. The woman is content to wrap her loins with a home-spun piece of cloth and
covers her breasts with another short piece of cloth. Now, this dress is to a great extent replaced by mill made cloth and ready made garments. Both the sexes wear marks of sandal-paste upon their foreheads.

The Jamatias speak in Kok-Borok language, commonly known as Murang or Tripuri dialect. It is the main prevailing language of the tribals. At present they can speak Bengali fluently.

Reproduced below are some words out of their dialect:

World - Ha  Stool - Khi  Witch - Chākāljuŋ
Sun - Sāl  Goat - Pun  Thread - Khutung
Fan - Kisib  Tall - Kucyg

Give me water - Anā tui rodi
I am ill - Ani sarir hāmiā

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

There are no sub-tribes to be found amongst the Jamatias. In this connexion Hunter observes, "The Tipperah are divided into four classes viz.,

Sub-Tribes
(1) The pure Tipperah, the class to which the reigning family belongs; (2) the Jamaityas (3) The Nawattias; and (4) the Riangs. With the exception
of the Jamaityas, each of these classes is subdivided into several castes."

The family among the Jamatias is patriarchal in nature. The father is the natural guardian of the children.

He is supreme in the house. The family is characterised by descent, inheritance and succession reckoned through the male, patrilocal home.

The male members of the family enjoy superior status. The opinion of the mother is nonetheless taken into account but she has no right or status in the eyes of law in the Jamatia society. Her duty is only to look after the domestic affairs.

All the members of the family, in their turn pay homage to the head of the family.

Monogamy is the general characteristic of the tribe, but polygamy is not altogether unknown. As a rule, the Jamatias do not take a bride from a different tribe. But there is no bar for a Jamatia boy to marry a girl of another tribe. Such marriage is however of a rare happening. One of the most prominent marriage types is known as marriage by negotiation. The guardians of the groom and bride meet at the house of bride's father and decide the bride price. The bride price may be

paid in cash or in kind. Another important system of marriage is known as Jamaikhata. According to which practice, as in case of some other tribes the prospective groom has to stay with the family of the bride and render service for a specified period. This system is not so rigid among these tribals and the period may be reduced by mutual agreement. As in the case of the Bengalees, among the Jamatias also the dowry system is gaining increasing popularity. Though divorce is not permitted yet this may be effected at present with the special sanction of the village council. The system of remarriage of a widow or a widower also exists in the society of the Jamatias.

Cremation of the dead body is the common practice among the Jamatias. Having cremated the corpse, the Jamatias clean and sweep the cremation ground and plant a basil or Tulsi plant there. After completion of cremation, they preserve the bones and ashes of the dead body which are immersed in some holy water in due course. A candle is lighted and some cooked rice and curry are offered at the place of cremation in the name of the departed soul. The same practice is followed for seven days after the cremation. After the expiry of the thirteenth days, they perform obsequial rites with the help of a Brahmin in accordance with the customs of the Kshatriyas. At the time of the funeral ceremony, the Jamatias make free
gifts of varieties of articles and cows to the Brahmins and hold a social feast.

VILLAGE ORGANISATION

The Jamatias have a village council, the chiefs of which are called Samajpatis. Usually there are two such chiefs for each council and they are popularly known as 'Muluk Sardārs' or leaders of the area. Besides these, there are the Dalapati and Sardār etc. guiding the affairs of the village. All the posts are elective, and such elections take place after the expiry of a Scheduled period of tenure.

The persons belonged to the tribe are known by different titles. The titles are significant of the type of work done by the people. The following titles are prevalent among the Jamatias may be of interest.

(1) Khebpāng : Khebpang is the owner of a house where some religious rites take place.

(2) Daria : Daria is a person who plays on the drums.

(3) Matai Bālnāi : The Matai Balnai are professionals who carry the idol of gods.

(4) Ojhāi : The Ojhai is the village priest.
The office of the Muluk Sardar is not hereditary. After the death or retirement of the Muluk Sardar, another person is elected on the basis of the qualification of seniority and fitness, rather than any other criteria for succeeding to the office of the Muluk Sardar. The villagers are ever bound to obey and carry out the orders of their chief.

The following types of disputes are generally disposed of by the village organisation.

(1) Social offences (2) Cases of divorce
(3) Breach of rules and norms of the society
(4) Cases of stealth and adultery etc.

The Muluk Sardars judge properly and adjudicate the disputes of their community in collaboration with the Dalapatis and Sardars carefully examining the merit of each issue in question. Because organisational efficiency of the village community, instances of internecine quarrel or adultery is hardly met with among the members of society of the Jamatias. If anybody goes to a law-court the Jamatia community is sure to ostracize him.

The village organisation as discussed above does not exist any more among the Jamatias. The village organisation of the Jamatia, now a days consists of the Sardar of each village. His post is hereditary or selected by the villagers.
He decides the matters in consultation with some elderly persons of the village. What I have observed in the Jamatia society reveals that they are a contented and peace-loving people.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Judging from their religious beliefs and rites, the Jamatias may be considered as Hindus. There are two main sects among the Jamatias, the Vaishnavas and the Saktas. There are many Jamatias who are devout Vaishnavas. They wear garlands round their necks and apply sandal paste upon their foreheads. Such Jamatias are popularly known as Sadhus. There is an effort on their part to reconcile their own tribal legend with the Puranas of the Hindus. This may be considered as an attempt on their part for the integration of the tribe with the Hindu population.

Some of the Jamatias set out on pilgrimage every year in order to visit places of worship associated with Vaishnavas. In this effort they are found to travel together to Varanasi, Brindaban, Nabadwip and some other holy places under experienced guides who collect money in advance in order to meet the expenses to be incurred for this purpose. In this
connexion S.B.K. Dev Varman observes, "They (Jamatias) not only spend what they have but even borrow to observe certain rites as directed by the priests of those holy places." 20

Like the Hindus, they engage brahmin priests to perform their ceremonies. The only images which were noticed by me during my visit to their temples happen to be those of Radha and Krishna and of Lord Gouranga. Communal worship of different gods by collecting khaini or monetary subscriptions is a common practice observed by the Jamatias. Everybody in a village has to pay a subscription towards a common fund for these worships. A good number of Jamatias assemble together everyday, and sing the hymn of Hari. They consider this performance of chanting the name of God as a mark of their devotion to God.

In recent years a few Jamatias are known to have been converted to Christianity.

The Jamatias worship many gods and goddesses which according to Puranic system, is done by the Bengali Hindus. Besides such Brahmanical gods they also worship some gods and goddesses held in esteem by the hill tribes side by side. We have already discussed that the Jamatias are treated as members of the

Kshatriya caste. So they observe most of the Pujas like the Tripuris and the Noatias.

They worship Lampra Puja, Khuluma Puja and Sangrama Puja etc. The rituals connected with the worship of these deities are similar to the worship of those deities already discussed above.

The Jamatias also observe Nakri Puja and Garia Puja. The rituals of worship of these two performances also bear close resemblance to that rituals observed by the Noatias. Generally they pay their whole hearted devotion to Gouri, Tripura Sundari, Chaturdas Devatas and the Gumti river etc.

Like other Hindus they also render some other Pujas to propitiate such deities as are noted below:

(1) Worship of God Siva (2) Goddess Durga
(3) Goddess Lakshmi (4) Goddess Sarasvati

To the Jamatias these performances are held with great amusement and merriment. They perform worship of these gods and goddesses with the help of the Hindu Brahmins.

Belief in magic and observance of magical rites are also quite common among the Jamatias. To protect the village from calamities, such as epidemic, draught and lean
days, the Jamatias perform certain magical ceremonies so that they can be saved from those maladies and acquire the desired bliss and contentment. The Ojhai is requested to propitiate the spirits against the vagaries of witches and warlocks. They consider themselves as Kshatriyas like the Tripuris, and as such the magical rites and rituals in respect of evil spirits are similar to those of the Tripuris.

THE NOATIAS

Genesis and Settlement

The Tripuris are mainly divided into five classes namely the Puran, the Noatia, the Jamatia, the Uchai and the Riang. The meaning of most of these names cannot however, be properly understood even after a thorough enquiry. It is not unreasonable to think that these names were somehow connected with totems and totem cult.

Lewin states, "The great Nowuttea clan with its many sub-divisions living for the most part in the Mong Rajah's country, on the banks of the Fenny, are in close contact with the Bengalees of the plains. They are consequently addicted to Hindoo superstitions and observances,
and I regret to say that latterly they have been some slight indications that the most important man among them are fostering the hurtful and obnoxious doctrine of caste and niceties of feeding." Lewin further observes, "There are four clans of the Tipperah tribe resident in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, as follows: The Pooran, the Nowuttea, the Osuie, and the Reeang. All came originally from Hill Tipperah." 

There can be no doubt that in ancient times the Noatias of the Chittagong Hill Tracts lived within the region controlled by the rulers of Tripura. It is probable that during some remote age when Hill Tripura was under the rule of some Hindu ruler belonging to the Kshatriya clan a group of the Tripuris left their original place of residence and took shelter in Chittagong hill tracts, following some religious squabble which had threatened to destroy their tribal identity. Whatever might have been the location of the Noatias' original home, in facial features and physical structures they are very close to the aforesaid Tripuri tribe and are to be classified under Mongoloid group. Though apparently Hindus, the Tripuris demonstrate some vital differences from the caste Hindus regarding their worship.

21 Lewin, T.H.: The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the dwellers therein, p.79.

and other religious practices. These differences lay probably in their original differences with the Hindu rulers of Tripura. This religious difference seems also to have contributed to their migration towards the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Some scholars believe that the Noatias could have been the original inhabitants of the Tripura State. The social rites and ceremonies of the Noatias bear a close resemblance to those of the Tripuris. Traditionally they are more or less similar to the Tripuris excepting in respect of disposal of the dead, on which occasion they observe the customs followed by the Riangs who are also grouped under the Tripuris. For this reason anthropologists like T.H. Lewin and R.H. Sneyd Hutchinson and others have classified the Noatias also under the Tripuris. This effort, however, had led me to try to trace the origin of the Noatias from another standpoint. During some periods in the past, the limits of the Tripura state had extended upto Burma from Brahmaputra and upto Aracan from the borders of Bengal. At that time many Tripuri tribal people residing at the outskirts of the capital fortified the southern boundary of the kingdom. In C 1512 A.D. Mahārāja Dharma Manikya occupied Aracan. Chittagong also came under the rule of Tripura during the reign of Vijoy Manikya. At that time many tribal peoples were attracted by the natural abundance and easy
livelihood available in the region and began to settle down in the Chittagong Hill Tracts permanently. In course of time, even after the conquest of the plain lands of Tripura by the Mogul rulers, those tribals did not return to Tripura. Chittagong Hill Tracts were then predominantly inhabited by the Chakmas and the Mags. As a result the Mags and the Chakmas came closer to each other and marriages came to take place between the members of the two tribes quite frequently. Such matrimonial contacts brought into offering a new tribe who, however, came to consider themselves different from the Tripuris. Those people had settled in the south of Tripura and in course of time, they gave up using the Tripuri language and lost contact with the culture and customs of the Tripuri tribe. Afterwards when they tried to mix with the Tripuris of Hill Tripura, they found their language, culture and customs were different from those of the Tripuris of Hill Tripura. The new 'Tripuris of this territory then came to be known as the Noatia or 'Katal' community; the word 'katal' in Cok-borok language means 'new'. The term Noatia also means new. This tradition led many people to think that the Noatia community has been a mixed tribe. It may be presumed that various tribes such as the Tripuris, the Chakmas and the Mags have been incorporated in this community. They have been dwelling in Tripura since time immemorial and have been pursuing their
old habits and beliefs. But during the last twenty seven years of their contact with the refugees from East Pakistan now called Bangladesh, they have been considerably influenced by these inflowing Bengali folks. As a result there has been a considerable cultural change among these people. All these led the Noatias to be held as a sub-tribe of the Tripuris.

From the census reports, it is found that the Noatias are being enumerated separately only from 1941 onwards. Before 1941 they were enumerated along with the Tripuris. During my survey, I asked the Noatias about the date of their migration. They however told me that they have been residing here from the earlier part of the nineteenth century.

The concentrations of the Noatias are to be found in the Sub-Divisions of Sadar (2), Khowai (1994), Sonamura (1784), Kamalpur (1288), Dhanmanagar (1), Udaipur (1989), Amarpur (2314) and Belonia (925) according to the census of 1971.

General Characteristics

According to 1971 census, the Noatia is the seventh among the nineteen tribes of the State of Tripura.
and the Noatia population is 10,297 formed of 5,269 males and 5,028 females. This number shows an increase of about 35.68% over the population of 1961. The literacy break up of this number may be of interest. The census of 1971 shows the Noatias to be distributed as 607 literates and 9,690 illiterates.

The Tripuris of this territory called this tribe 'Noatia' or Katal community in view of the fact that the term 'Katal' in Kok-borok language means 'new'. The Noatias have been dwelling in Tripura since time immemorial. They used to confine themselves to their old habits and beliefs before partition. But during the last 27 years of their contact with refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan, who are Bengalees, a synthesis of attitudes and social behaviour has developed in the life pattern of these original inhabitants.

Growth of Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tribal population</th>
<th>Population of Noatia</th>
<th>Percentage of Noatia to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>24,992</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>16,010</td>
<td>4.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>10,297</td>
<td>2.28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Noatias are of good physique, with thick and strong heels, broad head small eyes and flat nose. Their appearance cannot be said to be impressive. The average Noatia is of a medium height; their complexion ranges from dark brown to deeper hue. Sometimes they have beards, some keep their moustaches. Their physical type has been to some extent modified because of intermarriage with the Mags in Chittagong.

The principal crop and staple food of this people is rice. They are very fond of dry fish, pork and chicken. Their subsidiary foods consist of fish, vegetables etc.

They brew their own requirement of drink such as *Arak* and distilled country liquor which are used at the time of religious festivals and for merriment.

The dress of the Noatias is of the simplest description. The man wears a thick turban, a narrow piece of home-spun cloth and a shirt. When he is in the field he wears a napkin. The dress of the woman is equally unornate. She covers her breasts with a small piece of cloth which possesses fine artistic designs and the lower part of the body is covered with a long piece of cloth.
The Roatias are one of the growing tribes inhabiting Tripura. The dialect they use is called Tipra or Murang which belongs to the Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the great Tibeto-Chinese family of languages. They call their language Kok-borok, the main prevailing language of Tripura. They speak Bengali as well.

Reproduced below are some words out of their dialect:

Wind - Nakbār  Death - Thuimung
Thing - Mānui  False - Tātāl
Sky - Nakhā  Egg - Takto
Window - Khirkī  Wife - Hik

To what tribe do you belong? - Nung tēmā Jāta
Where is your home? - Nini pārā bara.

The Roatias are grouped into eleven clans which are as follows:

10. Khakla  and 11. Totārām

Out of eleven clans, only six clans are found
residing in Tripura. The clans are named either after a particular leader or a place or village to which the Noatias originally belonged. The clans sometimes are also named after a hill or a river near which the original ancestors of the people had lived.

The smallest unit is the family which is constituted of a man, his wife and their unmarried children. The joint family system is also prevalent among the Noatias. The family among the Noatias is patriarchal in nature. The sons inherit the father's property as a matter of right. Among the Noatias, daughters cannot inherit her father's property. Though the mother has no legal right to property, the opinion of the mother is held in respect.

Monogamy is the common practice but Polygamy is also permitted. Marriage by negotiation is the commonly accepted form of marriage. Parents of the bridegroom and the bride meet at the house of the bride where they finalise the details of the marriage. The marriage rite is performed by the Ojhai or the village priest on a scheduled date. However, other forms of marriage, such as marriage by service, which is locally known as "Jamalkhata" is also prevalent amongst the Noatias. In modern times, marriage as a result of love is also met with
among the people of this tribe. Child marriage is a very rare exception in the society. Divorce is effected by the husband or wife. Dowry system is also existent.

The Noatias cremate their dead. When the cremation is over, they perform some religious rites. After the body is consumed by fire, they preserve the bones and ashes of the deceased which are immersed in a river or stream.

Funeral rites. On the fourth day after the cremation, the grave-yard is washed and the symbols of some birds made of cane are kept surrounding the cremation ground. If the deceased is a renowned person, a flag coloured with red or yellow is fastened on the top of an adjacent tall tree. Oblation consisting of rice, curry and country liquor is offered for the emancipation of the departed soul. Such offering is locally known as 'Kakbali'. These are later taken away by the village ojhal. According to one's capacity, the Noatias perform obsequial rites within a year or so. The Noatias pray to God for the dead every year on the Chaitra Sankranti day i.e. the last day of the month of Chaitra, and a full meal is offered in the name of the deceased.

VILLAGE ORGANISATION

The Noatias have their own village councils. It is not a formal institution but exists as an inevitable part
of their social organisation. The selected elderly members of the village sit together for all important matters and confer among themselves. Their village headman is known as Samajpati or Sardar whose office is not hereditary. He is selected from among the elderly persons of the village. He must be an intelligent and wealthy person. He has different subordinates who assist him to settle disputes and look after other affairs of the locality. The offices of the subordinates are also not hereditary.

They have an unwritten constitution for the village council and this is upheld by the members of the village. The Samajpati or Sardar does not decide a matter on the basis of his own opinion; he consults the opinions of the subordinates and elderly persons of the village. Generally they deal with the following items of disputes such as transgression, divorce, theft and controversial issues of the village. When a case is complicated and not easy of solution, the Sardar or Samajpati acts in consultation with the elderly members of the village and reports the matter to the Panchayet organisation.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

It has been noted that the religion followed by the Noatias is highly influenced by the Hinduism particularly
of Sakti cult. They are found to pay homage to the deities of the Hindus. Many of the Noatias are religious beliefs found to lead the life of Vaisnava mendicants. Their faith and religion have many common points with those of the Hindus. Like the Hindus they believe that in the beginning there was water all around before the universe was created. This idea, it will appear, bears close similarity to the Hindu belief about creation.

There are considerable similarities between the religious beliefs, rites, rituals and ceremonies of the Noatias and the Jamatias. To set out on pilgrimage every year is a must among the worshippers of God Viṣṇu. Generally they go to holy places in India in batches.

They have two kinds of priests, viz., the Brahman Pandits and the Ojhai. The Brahman Pandit worships the deities according to the Brahmanical system and the Ojhai performs the puja in the tribals' process.

In recent times, a few Noatias are known to have embraced Christianity.

We have already noticed that the Noatias are treated as one of the five Kshatriya sects. Their Pujas are performed to propitiate the gods and goddesses of the
Brahmanical Purāṇas. Like other hill tribes, the Noatias offer some pujas through their ojhai priests as well. Such pujas as they observe under the guidance of the ojhais are Lāmrā Puja, Māilumā Puja, Tuimā Puja, Khulumā Puja and Sangramā Puja. The rituals of worship are similar to those performed by the Tripuris and those have been already discussed.

Besides the above mentioned pujas, the Noatias also perform a few other pujas in order to propitiate the deities which are as follows:

Nakri Puja:

This deity of this name is worshipped for the welfare of the village and for protecting the Noatias from all sorts of harms. This deity delights in receiving fowl or goat as sacrificed along with country liquor.

Gārias Puja:

This Puja is rendered in order to propitiate the deity for blessings. This worship is based on the beliefs that this Puja secures welfare, good fortune and hilarity throughout the year in the villages. They sacrifice Cock before the deity. Other animals excepting a pig, can be sacrificed. Country liquor is the most essential for this Puja. The Ojhai performs this Puja and he has to remain on
fast till the end throughout the worship. This Puja starts on the day of Chaitra Sankranti and is held every day up to the seventh day of the month of Baishakh. On the seventh day the Puja is completed and devotees start singing and dancing. The men and womenfolk enjoy a very hilarious day and the echo of their merry making with music and songs is heard through the villages.

Like the caste Hindus, the Noatias also worship various Hindu Gods and Goddesses such as Śiva, Durgā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Kālī according to the system of the Hindus through the Brahman Pandits. The Chaturdāś Devatās (fourteen Gods) and the Goddess Tripūrā Sundarī are also held in high esteem by these people.

The Noatias are also found to cherish belief in magic, witchcraft, ghosts, goblins, wizards, sorcerers etc. like the Tripuris. They take recourse to these practices to ward off evil spirits from the village.

The Noatias perform various rites and rituals for the enactment of magic. Such rites and rituals are performed by an ojhai.
The origin and evolution of the Uchais would make an interesting study. It is very difficult, if not impossible to trace the origin of the Uchais who happen to be a rather small tribe of Tripura. As in the case of other tribes, I have made many trips to those areas inhabited by the Uchais in order to ascertain the facts about their traditions and beliefs.

In course of such visits to different hilly areas of Tripura, I had the opportunity of talking with quite a few members of the Uchai tribe, some of whom were quite old and have stock of informations to give. In reply to my many queries, they revealed that originally they dwelt in Duapauthar, a hilly place situated in the north east corner of the hill tracts of Chittagong. Even how, quite a few of them retain a very vivid memory of their migration to Tripura under the leadership of one chief named Ramananda and finally get settled in this State approximately in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The Uchais further revealed that in the days of remote past they also belonged to Tripuri stock.
Captain T.H. Lewin observes "There are four clans of the Tipperah Tribe resident in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, as follows: The Pooran, the Nawuttea, the Oswie and the Reeang. All came originally from Hill Tipperah." 23

It is difficult to trace the origin of the word Uchai. Generally it is found that the name of a tribe is derived from the name of a leader or an ancestor or even a places of residence. It is also possible that the word 'Uchai' had been connected with some sort of a totem. All these will however remain inconclusive speculations in the absence of any definite clue towards the establishment of the origin of the tribe and the source of their name. It is quite clear that the Uchais from the point of their facial and physical features, dress, food, language, behavioural norms and spiritual faith, bear close affinities with the Tripuri tribe. The Uchais speak a language which belongs to the Bodo of Indo-Mongoloid groups of languages. In anthropological classification, the Uchais are known to fall under the great Bodo group of the Indo-Mongoloids who came from north-east India. Due to their close contact with the Bengalees, the Uchais have almost given up their traditional dress, food and social norms and spiritual ideas of the tribal pattern. Instead they have adopted many of

23 Lewin, T.H.: Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the dwellers therein, p.79.
the Hindu customs, rites and rituals, and have thus formed themselves into a Hinduised tribal group like many others.

In the remote past, the Uchais could be found both in the hill tracts of Chittagong as well as in the south-eastern corner of the same area. In this connexion Lewin observes, "The osuie are a comparatively small and scattered clan; some of their villages are found near the Fenny River; some on the hills near the Kurnafoolee, while two of their villages have gone southward into the Bohmong's country and have cultivated on the Doolookhyoung, a tributary of the River Sungoo." 24

The origin of the Uchais, may be studied from another viewpoint. It is believed that in the remote past, the Uchais were compelled to leave Tripura because of inter-tribal-clash and had to push themselves southward reaching the Chittagong hilly areas. But in course of time, the Uchais settled themselves in south-eastern areas of Tripura in search for better opportunities of life. Like the Chakmas, the Mags, the Noatias, the Uchais also probably migrated to Tripura during the first part of nineteenth century.

This accounts for the chequered career of this tribe who had to move from place to place due to probably

their differences with the main branch of the Tripuris, or for some other reasons. But ultimately they had found their way back to Tripura and had settled upon the rich but hilly tracts in the south-east. Though the Uchais remember their affiliation with the Tripuris, they have not been accepted officially as such. In the census reports they are shown separately from the native Tripuri tribes of the area.

Though the Uchais have one of the branches of the Tripuris, they have now been excluded from the main tribe and have been recognised by the Government of Tripura as a distinct tribal group from 1961 and they number as few as 766 only. During my survey it was transpired from their version that the Uchais took refuge in the sub-divisions of Amarpur and Belonia during the first part of the twentieth century.

The concentration of the Uchais are to be met within the sub-divisions of Sadar (1), Dharmanagar (56), Udaipur (6), Amarpur (665) and Belonia (333) according to the census of 1971.

**General Characteristics**

According to 1971 census, the Uchais are numerically the fourteenth among the nineteen recognised tribals
of the State of Tripura and the Uchais' population is 1061 persons consist of 534 males and 527 females. This shows an increase of about 38.51% over the population of 1961. The literacy break up of this number may be of interest. The census of 1971 shows the Uchais to be distributed as 136 literates and 925 illiterates.

The following table gives an idea about the growth of the Uchais' population in the State:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tribal Population</th>
<th>Population of the Uchais</th>
<th>Percentage of the Uchais to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>0.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>1061</td>
<td>0.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Uchais are a fine well built people. The complexion of the ethnic members of the tribe varies from very dark brown to black. They offer a sturdy look and a well-chiselled body. They have a good physique and many of them are of extremely active disposition. Their hair is black and thick. Their heads are broad, the chick-bones are high. The nose is large and flat with wide nostrils,
An uchai is an extremely mild, hospitable and simple person.

The Uchai's staple food is of a most primitive variety, quite simple and suited to his economic conditions. Rice is the main item of food. The staple diet is, however, supplemented by various kinds of vegetables, fish and meat.

Pork and fowl are also very much liked by the Uchais. He satisfies his hunger with different kinds of roots, wild tubers and creepers taken either raw or in the boiled state, when rice or other items of food are not available.

Dry fish (Merma) is also quite favourite with them. The woman prepares a variety of country liquor known 'Chuato' which has a special charm for the Uchais. The Uchais are by nature habituated to drinks. Quite apart from occasions having ritual and social significances, the Uchais avail themselves of every opportunity of taking country liquor.

An Uchai wears very scanty clothes to cover himself. A male person, when he is in the field or forest, puts on a loin cloth round the waist leaving the rest of the body exposed. He wears a pugree to save the head from the sun. When he goes to the market or any other place, he wears a dhoti and shirt made from home-spun cloth.
The Uchai woman wears three pieces of cloth. A long strip of cloth commonly known as 'Rignai' is used to cover the lower part of the body. The breasts are covered with a loin cloth locally known 'Risha' or 'Riah' and the other piece of cloth is fixed on the head. The Uchai woman in her youth takes much care of her hair.

The Uchais speak a language quite close to the other tribals of the State bearing close affinity with Austro-Asiatic (Tibeto Burman). In fact, today, most of the Uchais speak the language of their neighbours which is known as the Kok-Borok, language, the main prevailing language of the tribals of this State. Some of the Uchais can speak Bengali as well.

Reproduced below are some words used by the Uchais:

Today - Tini  Tomorrow - Khina
God - Matāi  Umbrella - Chhati
Ash - Thāplā  My - Āni
Elephant - Māyung  Dog - Sai

I am an Uchai - Āng Uchai na.
How many children have you got? - Nini Nucha Kaib Chok ankha.
Social Organisation

Every Uchai, when asked about his caste will first tell that he was an Uchai, whatever his sub-caste may be. They are divided into twelve sub-groups which are as follows:


It is believed that the names of these sub-groups are derived from the names of their earlier habitation, or village to which the group originally belonged or after any leader who had led the tribe at an early age. These sub-groups are quite friendly to one another. They have strong bonds of brotherhood which has given strength and cohesion to their society. The family of the Uchais in Tripura forms a social unit and is patriarchal sober in nature. Like the Riangs, they have consanguineous kinship based on the rule of Patrilineal descent. Lineage is traced through the father. The tribe is strictly endogamous but admits women of other tribes on certain conditions. The opinion of
the Uchai woman is accorded adequate consideration in affairs of the family.

Monogamy is the generally followed practice among the Uchais. Though polygamy has social sanction yet it is rarely visible amongst them. Several types of marriages are found among them, such as, (1) Marriage by negotiation (2) Marriage by service (3) Marriage resulting from love and elopement. The popular practice is marriage by negotiation. There is a system of bride price which is settled by the guardians of both the bride and the groom. Such bride price ranges between ₹ 100/- and ₹ 400/-. The bride-price has to be paid by the groom or his guardian to the mother of the bride for the price of the milk she had suckled. It may be paid also by service. Divorce is of frequent occurrence among the Uchais. The move for divorce can be initiated by either party if the other party is mad, lazy, barren, incurably diseased, quarrelsome or aggressive.

The mode of disposal of the dead body amongst the Uchais is cremation. The dead bodies of children and those dying of infectious diseases are however disposed of by burial. Their funeral rites are very interesting. While the family of the deceased lament and scream, the relatives and neighbours
come to the house of the dead. The dead body is removed from the room and placed in the courtyard. A pig is then killed and the meat is supplied to the persons assembled as a funeral feast. In return, the assembled persons give country liquor and money to the deceased. Then they observe certain other functions which accompany songs and dances.

When all the functions are completed, the dead body is brought to the cremation ground where the pyre is kept ready. The son has to set fire in the mouth of the dead body. In the absence of a son, the function is done by a daughter. If none of such progenies exists, then the near relatives are entitled to perform the rite. After the cremation, the bones of the deceased are collected and kept in an earthen pot. This pot is placed adjacent to a basil tree. The bones are immersed in water according to convenience. Offerings consisting of rice, meat, country liquor and various kinds of fruits are placed at the place of cremation in the name of the deceased. Obsequies are held according to the means of the descendents. There is no fixed time for this performance. The rich Uchais perform the obsequies after three days. Hindu brahmins are entrusted to perform the obsequies among them.
Village Organisation

The village council among the Uehais exists in the form of a council of the elders. Such councils concern themselves with minor socio-religious and socio-political affairs and are constituted of the aged and influential members of the society. The chief or headman is called Sardar. His office is not hereditary. He is selected or elected for a specified period.

The Sardar along with elderly members of the village assemble in a particular place of the village and settle disputes and problems of the village affecting compromise or by imposing fines. On rare occasions, when the guilt is considered unpardonable on the part of the council, excommunication is resorted to. The Sardar is, in theory a despot but, in practice, he is the advisor, guide and father of the village.

Many of the disputes of the Uehais are decided in their traditional village organisation. The disputes which are not decided by the village council or the Panchayet or which cannot be taken up by those due to the complicated nature of the disputes, are dragged to the law courts for trial.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Like the most other aboriginal tribes, the Uehais are also animists. According to the belief of the Uehais any
Religious beliefs

According to the Uchais, \( \text{Na bāgrara} \) is the supreme God. He is omnipotent and omniscient. He created the universe. He made all rules and regulations and customs. They believe that all the weal and woe of their daily life ‘depends of the wishes Na bāgrara’.

The chief village-deities of the Uchais are Subarāi and Hamrai. They live in the heaven situated in the sky above. They further believe that those who are sinners on the earth, are consigned to Hell. It is a very painful place where big worms feed perpetually on those thus punished and some other tortures are also inflicted upon them. After suffering such punishments, they are born again as beasts, birds on earth. Those who are virtuous on the other hand, take rest in heaven till the third generation. All these ideas appear to have been borrowed from the Hindus.

The Uchais have been living in Tripura since the first part of the nineteenth century. They confined themselves to their traditional beliefs of animism, their old customs, rites and rituals carried through generations, but their close contact and free mixing with the Bengalees who came from neighbouring areas a complex of new beliefs, rites...
and rituals have also been adopted by them. It is found that many of the rites and rituals observed by them are closely analogous to Hindu practices.

The Uchais revere a number of gods and goddesses such as the god of the village, god of the household, god of crop preservation, god of the hills, god of the forest, god of hunting and so on and so forth. Over and above, they also pay homage to the principal deities of the Hindus. Their worship is accompanied by singing, dancing and drinking.

Apart from the village deities, the Uchais pay homage to the numerous super-human agencies so that they may not do any harm. They propitiate those agencies for success in hunting, for peaceful journey and for the welfare of the village and its inhabitants.

Owing to missionary endeavours many Uchais have been converted to Christianity. From the data received from Rev. Lalhuala Darlong, General Secretary, Christian Mission, Arundhutinagar, it is learnt that two-thirds of the total number of the Uchais living in Tripura have by now come under the fold of Christianity of both Catholic and Protestant Churches. The religious beliefs of the Uchais may thus be grouped under Animism, Hinduism and Christianity.

The Uchais observe numerous festivals and worships
Rituals quite a number of deities throughout the year. Following is a brief account of these observances.

(1) **Worship of Subraî** - Subraî is the chief deity of the Uehais. He is propitiated for the general welfare of the village so that the inhabitants may have good health and crops may grow in plenty. The characteristics of Subraî appear to be quite similar to those of Mahâdeva, one of the three principal gods of the Hindus.

(2) **Worship of Motai Kotor Mâ** - Motai Kotor Mâ is the consort of the Subraî. She resembles goddess Kali, widely worshipped by the Hindus. Worship of this goddess is also supposed to bring forth many blessings.

(3) **Worship of Hâmrâî** - Hâmrâî is one of the chief village deities of the uehais. He is propitiated for the welfare of the village and its inhabitants.

(4) **Worship of Hâichukmâ** - Hâichukmâ is the guardian deity of the wood. She is worshipped for safe and successful hunting. She is also worshipped in order to ensure safe and successful journeys in the forest.
Worship of Burasar - Burasar is a jungle god. Puja is rendered to this deity so that the cultivation in forest can be saved from depredations of wild beasts.

Besides these pujas, which are by no means small in number, the Uchais also worship a variety of other deities such as, Lakshmi, Ganga, Kali and San. The Uchais also pay homage to the deities called Lapti, Larima and Jarima, who are all their own tribal gods. The Uchais engage brahmin priests as well as ojhais to perform these worships.

Magic occurs as an important part of the belief of the most of the Uchais. Like other aborigines, they also believe that the evil spirits lie hidden behind the hills, rivers and woods. Those evil spirits have given animation to natural objects. They pay homage to these natural objects.

Like other tribal peoples, the Uchais also believe in evil eye and evil shadows. When a member of the Uchai community falls seriously ill, the head of the house calls in the ojhai. He is the priest of the genii. He finds out the spirit responsible for creating disturbances to any person of the village. He is believed to know some
mantras which are required for the treatment of the illness.

Again when a Uchai's cow yields a good quantity of milk, a jealous person may cast evil eyes and cause injury to the cow and her power of giving milk. The Uchais also believe that some persons can possess evil shadows, and if a snake falls within his ambit, even the snake cannot move an inch.

To prevent all these influences of evil eyes and evil shadows, the Uchais wear amulets of various kinds. An expert in magic ties these amulets chanting incantations. Incantations are also uttered, in water or over some mustard seeds, a few grains of which are then wrapped up in big amulets and worn as a charm held by a black string round the loins or the neck.

THE RIANGS

Genesis and Settlement

Like other tribal people of Tripura, the Riangs too retain a memory of having come from outside. According to anthropological classification, the Riangs are to be placed under Mongoloid race. Various authorities like the Rajamala have indication
to the fact that the Riangs had entered Tripura from the adjacent Shan State of Burma through the hilly areas of Chittagong during the reign of Ratna Manikya in the fourteenth century. Bhabananda Mukherjee, an anthropologist of the Indian Museum, Calcutta also holds the same view. He says that the Riangs dwelt in the Arakan Region of Burma in the remote past. For some time about three hundred years ago they had been residing in the valley of the Karnafuly River in Chittagong in East Bengal now called Bangladesh. In course of time, the Mags had forced them to leave their place of residence and take refuge in and became the inhabitants of Tripura. The name of the tribe is believed to have been derived from the names of leader, ancestor or earlier abode.

Like many other aboriginal tribes the Riangs have mythological tradition concerning their origin. The following myth is prevalent among them. The Riang community at one time lived in the Māyānīthalāṅ region of Lushai province. Once in the past, because of the ill-feelings and clashes among the leaders of the community, a mentionable number of Sardars like Tuikluhā, Eyongsikā, Paisika and Tuibruhā accompanied by innumerable followers left their original motherland to take refuge in the valley of the Karnafuly river.

They were dwelling there under the rule of one, Kakchak by name. But as time passed by, an encounter with the Mags compelled them to quit Chittagong and take refuge in Tripura.

According to Kailash Chandra Sinha, the Riangs were actually a branch of the Tripuri tribe. He says that the Tripuris are mainly divided into four clans viz., Tipra, Jamatia, Noatia and Riang.26

Though the Riangs are generally recognised as a Mongoloid race speaking a language of the Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman Family of languages, yet basically they are very probably descendants of Austro-Asiatic or Austric Family and originally spoke a language of the Pala-Un-wa group.

Many scholars however think that the Riangs originated from the Kuki stock. But as they had their migration to Tripura State through the dense forests of Chittagong from the Shan State of Burma, they had lost much of their originality and having come in close proximity to several groups of people of the Mongoloid origin they get ethnically mixed up. Though they belonged to the Austro-Asiatic Family, the language they use now a days is found to bear close similarity to the language of the Tripuris. Thus not only in respect of language but also in respect of many of their distinctiveness

26 Kailash Chandra Sinha: Räjamālā Introduction, p.15.
they have undergone many basic changes due to coming in close contact with the Tripuris.

The rulers of Tripura in order to secure their position of authority and power had to lean heavily towards some particular tribes resident in the State. In comparison to other tribes and castes, the Tripuris were thus held in greater favour by the rulers and were given to enjoy various opportunities during the princely regime. Like the Kukis, the Riangs also had to suffer from discriminations of various sorts. They were forced to pay the 'Ghar Chukti' taxes at rates which were much higher than what the Tripuris had to pay. Indeed the Tripuris had to pay nominal taxes. Almost all the taxes that were required to be paid by the Riangs were punitive in nature. They were the worst sufferers in many other respects. The only familiarity that the Riangs had with the royal family was through their occupation which was to carry the palanquin of the royal princes. In this connection we may cite the authority of the Imperial Gazetteer of India. It states, "The Riangs, who are of Kuki origin and were formerly the Palki bearers of the Tippera Rajas."

On the other hand, the Tripuris enjoyed a good many opportunities and a number of privileges during the reign of

27 Tripura State Gazette Sankalan, compiled by Banerjee, Suprasanna, p. 17.
28 The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. XIII, p. 120.
the princes. Not only in economical and material prosperity, in matters of social hierarchy, and standard of living there had been a gulf of difference between the Tripuris and other people of the State. This is because on many occasions the Riangs broke out in open rebellion against the established order. The last of the Riang uprising took place as late as in 1924.

The Riangs themselves have however never acknowledged their Kuki ancestry. At some remote period the Riangs had clashed with the Tripuris. This conflict and warfare with the Tripuris resulted in their taking refuge upon the banks of the Karnafully river for years together. Ultimately, due to various reasons they came to live in Amarpur sub-division and gradually occupied the southern part of the State including the sub-divisions of Amarpur, Sonamura, Udaipur and Belonia. Now they have spread over in other sub-divisions also.

The concentration of the Riangs are to be found in the following sub-divisions: Sadar (300), Khowai (694), Sonamura (21), Kamalpur (2710), Kailasahar (7721), Dharmanagar (21207), Udaipur (2957), Amarpur (13653) and Belonia (9239), according to the census of 1971.
General Characteristics

According to the 1971 census, the Riangs are placed second out of nineteen tribes of this territory from the point of their numerical strength. They come only after the Tripuris, the most numerous of the tribal people of Tripura. The Riangs' population is 64722 consisting of 33452 males and 31270 females. This population shows an increase of about 14.36% over the population of 1961. The literacy break up of their number may be of interest. According to the census of 1971, the Riangs to be distributed as 5039 literates and 59683 illiterates.

The Riangs were formerly the palanquin bearers of the rulers of Tripura. When they entered Hill Tripura, they came in touch with the royal family of the state. Regarding religious customs and beliefs, the Riangs have adopted Hinduism to a very great extent even though they still retain many of their earlier characteristics in respect of social organisation, tribal beliefs and customs. Owing to inter-action between different groups of people in Tripura, new social forces have come into operation and old orders are speedily yielding to new ones. The social dynamics of the tribals of this area, therefore, offers scope for a study of engrossing interest.

The following table gives an idea about the growth
of the Riangs' population in the State:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Riangs</th>
<th>Percentage of the Riangs to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>38,566</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>56,597</td>
<td>15.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>64,722</td>
<td>14.37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Riangs have strong and stout body having broad heads, thinly bearded face, flat noses, and thick brows. Their complexion is quite fair. They have corpulent arms, firm and flat thighs. They show prominent cheekbones with broad and well developed chest. The male members usually preserve their moustache but shave their beard. The woman is a little shorter than her male counterpart. She is healthy and bears sprightly disposition. The Riang girl usually owns a most fascinating little figure and a very pleasing face.

The staple food of the Riangs is cooked rice. They are fond of fish and meat. They eat all kinds of vegetables. Dried and preserved fish are also highly favoured by them. They gather edible roots and creepers for their subsistence.
Food & drink

A type of home made liquor brewed from rice plays an important part in the life and culture of the Riangs. A good quantity of rice is used for preparation of the country liquor. The liquor is offered to worship and is freely taken on festive occasions. It is the duty of the females to prepare the rice-beer.

Dress

The dress worn by the members of the tribe is very simple. The males of the Riangs put on a loin cloth round their waist and a piece of cloth as wrapper for the upper portion of the body. The females wear a long piece of cloth known as 'Rignai' or 'Pachhra' which is wrapped around the waist hanging down upto the knees. The breasts are usually covered with a piece of cloth which possesses fine artistic designs formed of embroidery work known as 'Risha' or 'Riah'.

The Riangs have adopted the language of the Tripuris belonging to Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman family of language. Mukerjee in his article on 'cult of the language, Dead and Funerary customs of the Riang' states as follows: "Though they originally belonged to the Austro-Asiatic family of languages ...... the language spoken by them, at present, is related to the language of the Tri-puri ......"29 There exist slight difference between the

The Riang tribe is divided into two main groups viz. (1) Meskā or Mechhā and (2) Molsoi or Marchhai. These groups are found again divided into several sub-tribes:

The first group Meskā or Mechhā is divided into seven sub-tribes which are as follows: (1) Meska or Mechhka Sub-tribes (2) Rāichāk or Rāikāchāk (3) Charki (4) Māsā or Muchhā (5) Tuimuiyā fāk (6) Wairem or Waring (7) Takhmāyākāch or Tanga Yaks.

The second group Molsoi or Marchhi has again divided into seven sub-tribes which are as follows: (1) Molsoi or Marchhai (2) Darbong or Dalbang (3) Nakhyām or Nagkām
(4) Apet (5) Changpreng or Chungpreng (6) Sagaray (7) Riang or Reangkachak.

Though the Riangs are sub-divided into different Patrineal exogamous clans yet they do not follow strictly the rules of exogamy or endogamy. A man of one tribe may marry a girl of another tribe. The family among the Riangs is the basic social unit. Generally the family is a joint family. But now-a-days joint families are not so common owing to the increase in the size of the joint families and due to economic reasons. In isolated pockets, however, this ancestral trend may still be found to be persisting as surviving vestiges of the past.

The system of reckoning Kinship is based on two concepts viz. sandai and hokchu. Sandai is a close kin like agnates and hokchu is distant kin both from the father's and mother's sides. Total community life is regulated by the following factors:

(a) Primary concepts of Sandai and Hokchu;
(b) Socio-economic obligations;
(c) Ceremonial obligations.

Marriage
There are two types of marriage prevalent among the Riangs viz. (a) Halakchhai (b) Haiakchham. Marriage ceremony is known as Kailaimi. The most widely practised marriage-type among them is the marriage by negotiation. Both the guardians of the groom and the bride meet and chalk out the details of marriage which is later performed in the house of the bride. In a few cases, marriage as a result of mutual love is also found. In such cases the guardians do not put any obstacle. Marriage by service or 'Jemaikhata' system is also prevalent amongst the Riangs. Child marriage is not noticed among them. A Riang widow may re-marry after one year of the death of her previous husband. She is not permitted to wear any ornaments for this one year, and cannot join in music and dance during this time. Divorce can only be initiated with the consent of both the parties. Pre-marital mixing is not allowed.

When a Riang dies, his body is immediately removed from within the house to the open courtyard. Then the body is taken to the side of a tank or a river and is burnt by the side of water. After the body is consumed by fire the unburnt bones are collected and are kept on a bamboo structure for immersion in a river or a stream. Then an oblation consisting of rice,
meat and country liquor is offered in the name of the departed soul. The same practice is followed for seven days. According to one's capacity, the Riangs perform the obsequy within a year or so. During the ceremony, they observe various ceremonies which accompany songs and dances. The relations of the dead assembled to mourn and partake of country liquor during the rites. Finally the preserved bones are thrown into a river or a stream.

In case of death occurring from some infectious diseases like cholera, small pox or in case of death during childhood the dead body is buried. Among the Vaishnavas, the system of burial is a common practice.

The belief regarding transmigration of souls into animal bodies happens to be a very strong one among the people of this tribe.

Village Organisation

The Riangs have a memory of a powerful village organisation. This village organisation of the Riangs was associated with socio-religious and socio-political affairs of the tribe. Originally they had a king named 'Rāi' in the past who, as the supreme authority, used to run the administration through the religious chiefs and elderly persons of
the community. Now-a-days however, the village council performs the task of Administration. Different categories of personnel who generally comprise a Riang-village organisation may be enumerated as follows:

(a) Rai (Headman), (2) Chāpiākhā (second pillar of the community), (3) Chāpiā (Third pillar of the community), (4) Darkālim (Village priest), (5) Kāchākāk (minister), (6) Kāndā (servant of Rai).

There were certain other personnel, namely Dahāhajārī, Murī, Dugiā, Dàoā, Chhakiākrāk, Khāndā, Yakāchung etc. who were assigned numerous other duties.

The above pattern of village organisation is no longer prevalent, at present, amongst the Riangs. The present village organisation of the Riangs consists of the headman of each hamlet. He is known as sardar or Kāchāk in their language. Rai remains as chief only in name not in action. The village organisation, at present, consists of five or more elderly persons of the village. They in consultation with other elderly persons of the village deal with different types of disputes.

The following types of disputes are now-a-days, generally dealt with by the village council of the Riangs of this area:
(1) Cases of divorce  
(2) Adultery  
(3) Theft  
(4) Minor cases arising out of love affairs  
(5) Breach of social rules and norms.

For development of the village and to tackle the minor disputes in the villages, the Panchayet Organisation has been formed with two or three Mouzas as its jurisdiction. The Panchayet Organisation, in consultation with the traditional Village Organisation works for the development of the village.

Religious Life

The religion of the Riangs appears to be an interesting mixture of animism and Hinduism. Some of the Riangs have also embraced Christianity. It has been stated above that the Riangs came originally from the Shan States of Burma. From that place, the tribes migrated to Tripura state, gradually through Chittagong Hill tracts, and many other places. In course of migration, they naturally came in contact with so many races of those areas and got influenced by different religions.

During my visit to different hilly areas of Tripura, I could realise that the Riangs still retain many of their early characteristics in respect of religion. They also
have adopted Hindu religious practices to a great extent. They have been slower in borrowing religion from the Hindus, because of the fact that, they did not come in touch with the Hindus for a long time. This was because they lived for long in isolation and were held in a very low estimation by the Tripuris for long.

After the partition of India, the situation has substantially changed due to influx of refugees from East Pakistan now Bangladesh. The Riangs have since come in close contact with these people and have been profoundly influenced by Hinduism. But their attachment to practices and beliefs connected with animism has not been altogether given up. It is also found that due to close contact with the Hindus, some of them adopted the Vaisnava cult, while some others were initiated into Sakti cult.

According to indigenous belief of the Riangs, Achu Śib Rāi is considered as the creator of the universe. He is the Supreme Being, the omnipotent and omniscient. We reproduce here the story of the creation of the universe as held by the Riangs as told by Anthropologist Bhabananda Mukerjee. He puts it thus: "The creation of Riang universe was designed and ordained by the divine wish of AchuŚib Rai, the Supreme Being. In the same process of creation, the deities and the human beings were involved. The deities were born of two eggs and the human beings of two holy stones
(holongha matai), resembling eggs, with which Achu-Sib Rai was in deep meditation. The eggs and the holy stones were hatched by a bird. Riang pantheon bespeaks of many deities of which the principal deities having profound influence on Riang religious thoughts are Buraha, Toibuma, Soinairao, Banirao, Motaikotorma and Thumairao. Buraha is the god incarnate of Achu-Sib-Rai; Toibuma, his wife and Thuinairao, the king of all the deities. Toibuma is also conceived as the goddess of water and symbol of purity."

Rituals: The Riangs have a number of popular gods and goddesses and these they worship in the way prevalent among the tribal people.

(1) Matai Katar Puja: This worship is attended with similar process as existing among the Tripuris and discussed above.

(2) Tuima Puja
(3) Ker Puja
(4) Sangrama Puja
(5) Khuluma Puja
(6) Mailuma Puja
(7) Burachā Puja
(8) Lāmpra Puja

(9) Garia Puja: The Riangs worship the deity like the Noatias and the process has already been discussed above.

The Riangs worship the following deities in addition to the above:

(10) Budui-rao: These deities are seven in number. They are called the gods of evil spirits. These evil deities are worshipped in order to secure safety from disturbances in the village.

(11) Balakana: Balakana is a popular spirit. He is worshipped before the cutting of crops of Jhum cultivation and before such crops are brought home.

Besides these, they also perform some other rituals as Chitra gupta Puja, Matangi Puja, Tripura Sundari Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Chaturdas Devta Puja etc.

A community worship of the Riangs is effected through subscription paid by each family; this subscription is called Khāin. Such communal worship is performed at least once a year. They sacrifice goat, fowl, duck, and pigeon etc. on this occasion as well as at the time of worship of other deities. During their community festival, a meeting is held by
the tribal chiefs. They discuss social and religious matters and chalk out different plans for the uplift of the community.

Magic forms an important part of the belief of the Biangs. Although it can be vouched for certainty as to whether the Biangs borrowed this belief from the Hindus. But there are some evidences showing the influence of the Hindus upon the Biangs' magical practices.

The Biangs take recourse to magical rites with a view to tackling impersonal forces and spirits through appropriate rites and spells. Such rites can be performed only by an Ojhai, a specialist in the art of magic. They perform different rites and rituals for the enactment of magic, but their belief in evil spirits and witchcraft is very confusing.
THE HALAMS

Genesis and Settlement

It is generally believed that all the aborigines in Tripura had entered the State from outside. The Halams also are not taken as natives of the soil or autochthones of Tripura. In determining the origin of the Halams, a knowledge of its past history is the most essential.

Origin

But as no such history is available to us, we are to rely upon their physical appearance, language, religion, rites, rituals, social norms, dress and food etc. It may be convenient to start by examining their distinguishing features. It is pertinent to mention that, their religion, language, habits, customs and spiritual faith came to be mixed up with those of the other tribes of Tripura, and as a result it has become difficult to trace their original characteristics. Again, Tripura is now overflowing with the influx of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan now called Bangladesh. These refugees have come with an advanced culture and heritage and have influenced the heterogeneous population of Tripura in a large measure.

Judged from the linguistic point of view the Halams are to be classified under Kuki-Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman Family. Again, the different tribals of Tripura form a single ethnical unit as they came in close contact with one another and their different cultures got mixed and had evolved into a more or less comprehensive one.
The Halams were a section of the Kukis who constitute a sizeable section of the population. Among the Kukis, a section of people who showed allegiance to the rulers of Tripura came to be known as the Halams. Though the Halams were a wild tribe, they are scrupulously loyal to the rulers. The Halams had been scattered over different parts of Tripura and ultimately settled down in the state. The Halams are known as 'Mila Kuki'. The Kukis and the Lushais call them as 'Rang-long'.

Like many other wild races, the Halams too have mythological stories concerning their origin. The following myth prevalent among them may be of interest. 'Khurpuitothhum' was the birthplace of the Halams. It is situated in the mountainous region just to the north of Manipur. We have already stated that the Halams are considered as a section of the Kukis. In the language of the Kukis, the word 'Khur' means 'source' and 'Pui' stands for 'river' and 'Ta' means 'from'. Therefore it can be assumed that the original dwelling place of the tribe was located by the side of a river flowing out of the 'Barail' ranges, the memory of which they had cherished for centuries. In the past there had been many a struggle between Manipur and Tripura. In C 1328 A.D., there was a dispute between the Tripura State and Manipur in respect of the possession of Thanghum, a village, west of the Surma and Barak rivers close to Manipur. There are reasons to believe that the original home of the Halams was somewhere near this
The Halams have interesting tradition about the origin of their name. In the language they speak, ḫā means the earth or the country and lam stands for road or way. Whose duty it was to protect the earth and the road came to be known as 'Halams'. It has been observed earlier that the Halams were a section of the Kuki tribe. The Kukis who showed allegiance to the king came to be known as the Halams. The Halams call themselves the sons of Siva. Some authors are of opinion that they originated from the Kirātas. It is said that the Halams were also originally a ruling tribe like the Tripuris. In the names and the titles of the rulers of Tripura, one can trace the influence of their language. The memories of the appreciation and honour received from the royal court of Tripura are still treasured in the minds of the people belonging to the tribe. The ceremony of 'Hasam Bhoj' (feast—a cheerful festival) is still observed by the Halams as a reminiscent of an earlier tradition.

Hunter says "The Hallams are undoubtedly of Kuki origin. Their language is a mere dialect of Kuki". So it can be said that the Halams have been one of the branches of the Kukis. It is quite probable that they came to Tripura along with the Kukis. According to their own view, they had taken refuge in

Tripura from the mountainous regions of northern Manipur.

If we examine the census reports it is learnt that the Halams have been residing the Tripura from a remote age. The number of Halams stood at 2215 in 1901 when they were found settled in the Sib-divisions of Dharmanagar and Kailasahar. Among them, a section of sub-tribes like the Rupini and the Kalai came in close contact of the Bengalees.

The concentration and settlement of the Halams Sub-division-wise are as follows: Sadar (2159), Knowai (2479), Sonamura (471), Kamalpur (3532), Kailasahar (990), Dharmanagar (2430), Udaipur (3552), Amarpur (3461) and Belonia (2) according to the census of 1971.

General characteristics

According to 1971 census, the Halams stand as the fifth of the nineteen tribes of the State of Tripura and the Halam population is 19076 consisting of 9855 males and 9221 females. This shows an increase of about 17.04% over the population of 1961. The break up of this number from the point of literacy may be of interest. The census of 1971 shows the Halams to be distributed as follows: Literate: 1813, Illiterate: 17263,
Growth of Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tribal population</th>
<th>Population of Halam</th>
<th>Percentage of Halam to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>14,842</td>
<td>6.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>16,298</td>
<td>4.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>19,076</td>
<td>4.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Halams are a tribe of people of fine muscular build. His complexion varies. It may be dark-yellow, brown, dark olive, copper coloured or yellow olive. The head is broad with a flat face. The eyes are almond shaped with prominent cheekbones having medium sized lips. His nose is short and flat with wide nostrils. The male Halam has scanty hair on his face. The female Halam is short in stature, possessing a strong physique and is of very active habit. They reveal a cheerful and honest-looking face.

Rice is the chief food of the Halams. Their subsidiary food consist of different kinds of leaves, creepers, and edible roots. Dry fish is a favourite items of their dish. They eat various kinds of fish and meat. They are quite fond of
Pork. The Halams brew their own requirements of drink which is made of rice. They offer country liquor to their deities at the time of worship. Wine is also used on festive occasions.

The male Halam wears a short loin cloth about a foot in breadth and ten to fifteen feet in length. He wears a shirt when he goes out. The female Halam wears a piece of loin cloth which is wrapped round the body, and is known as 'Pachhra'. The breasts are covered by a piece of cloth known as "Risha". Children below six years of age generally remain naked.

The Halams speak the language of the Kuki-chin group of the Tibeto-Burman family. But most of the Halams are bilingual and can speak Kok-Borek language fluently. There is no difference between the language of the Kukis and the Halams excepting slight variations revealed in respect of their pronunciation caused due to close contact with the Tripuris. In this connection W.W. Hunter states, "The Hallams are undoubtedly of Kuki origin. Their language is a mere dialect of Kuki and

a Kuki and a Hallam can readily understood each other. Reproduced below are some words from Halam dialect:

- Village = Khúa
- Star = Arsi
- House = In
- Cat = Meng
- Father = Pā
- go = Sero

I am going to market now — Atun bāzār kaserāng. Later on I shall go to my house — Nikan Kaim Kaserāng.

Social Organisation

Originally the Halams were divided into twelve clans or dafas which were known as the 'Bara Halam'. Subsequently they have been divided into sixteen sub-tribes. The following are the sub-tribes of the Halams: (1) Kalai (2) Kulu or Khulang (3) Korbang (4) Kaipeng (5) Chadai (6) Dāb (7) Thāngchehp or Thāngachep (8) Kaireng (9) Sākchehp or Sākāchehp (10) Nabeen (11) Bangsah (12) Morchhum (13) Rangkhol (14) Rupnī or Rupnī (15) Lāngai (16) Lānlung.

Besides these clans, the Mambahg clan also claims to belong to the Halam tribe. Each dafa name is considered to

have its own meaning. The name of the dafa is derived from the name of the chief of the community or important works and deeds of eminent persons of their tribes or of places of habitation. Sometimes it is found after a profession or a residence on a hill or river in which the original ancestors lived.

A family with patriarchal authority forms the unit of the Halam society but joint families are also not altogether unknown. In such joint families all male members of all living generations, in the patriarchal line of descent, along with their wives and their unmarried sisters and daughters live together. Both exogamy and endogamy are allowed among them and this means they can marry both within and outside the clan.

The Halams are usually monogamous, but polygamy has not been totally abolished among them. Generally parents take the sexual affairs of their children as a matter of course and this results in marriage by negotiation. One of the most common marriage systems is known as 'Damadutha' or marriage by service. During the tenure of the groom's staying in the bride's house, if the bridegroom is not acceptable, he is

paid some compensation and then there ends of the contact without any further result. Widow re-marriage is also practised among the Halams. Child marriage is unknown amongst them. Divorce is rare. When someone intends to secure a divorce he or she has to show reasons for the desired step. Then either of the spouses who is judged to be the offender is required to pay a fine for securing a divorce. Over and above, he or she has to slay a pig and entertain the villagers with its meat. If a woman divorces her husband, their offsprings are claimed by the ex-husband as a matter of right.

The dead body among the Halams is cremated. Like other primitive tribes, they also observe certain functions surrounding the death. When such functions are completed, the dead body is brought to the cremation ground where the pyre would be kept ready. After cremation is over, the place is washed and cleaned and sacramental offerings of cooked rice, meat, country liquor and also tobacco, if the deceased was in the habit of smoking, is offered by the mourners in the name of the dead.

Funeral rite is held for the emancipation of the departed soul. It is performed according to the sweet will
of the descendants and there is no fixed time for this performance among the Halams. The sons are entitled to perform the obsequies. In the absence of a son, the rite is performed by a daughter. If none of such descendants exist, then it devolves upon wife or brother. When none of any relations exists then the obsequies of such deceased are not performed at all. On the day of funeral rite, food, clothes, meat and tobacco are offered for the satisfaction of the departed soul. These offerings are taken later by the Ojhai or the village priest. A few rich Halams now-a-days perform their obsequies according to the Hindu practices. This is evidently a result of their intimate contact with the Hindus.

Village Organisation

The traditional village organisation of the Halams exists in the form of a council of seven or more elderly persons of the village. They select or elect a Sardar who is held as the chief of the village council. He has to be an intelligent and influential person. Generally, his post is hereditary. Within the village, big or small, all village folks lead a harmonious life. The village councils usually meets now and then, is responsible both for co-ordinating the religious activities of the community and maintaining
The titles of Ray, Kachak, Galim, Khanial etc. occur among the personnel of the village council of the Halams. There had leaders known as samajpati. The chief of the village council in consultation with other members of the same, deals with the following types of disputes viz., social offences, breach of rules and norms of the village, cases of stealth and adultery and so on and so forth.

**Religious Life**

Though the Halams are descendants of the Kukis, their religion has now come to be highly influenced by the Hindus of the Sakta community and they show great devotion and reverence to Kali and Durga. Indeed, their faith and religion offer a mixed form of animism and Hinduism. Some Halams belonging to the clans of the Kalai and the Rupini also profess Vaishnavism. The Halams usually follow the practices observed by the Tripuris in respect of religion. They worship the gods and goddess of the Hindus and also worship different deities of tribal aboriginals. They revere and worship a large number of deities but all of them are not given the same exalted place.

According to the Halams, God is one and He is the Supreme Being, Omnipotent and Omniscient. They also believe.
that there are numerous other gods and goddesses and also spirits possessing divine power. The spirits according to them are capable of doing acts, both cruel and beneficial to men. They pay homage to such spirits with the help of Ojhai who is an expert in the art of magic. To protect the village from calamities, such as epidemic, drought and lean days, they perform endless worships and ceremonies for attaining bliss and contentment.

During 'community worship', a meeting is held where social, cultural and spiritual matters are discussed. This community worship is known as 'Bara Puja' which is performed once in four or five years.

A few amongst the Halams have been converted into Christianity, but animistic rites and rituals and belief in evil spirits have not altogether been given up even by these Christian converts.

Like the Hindus, the Halams worship numerous deities. The deities held in respect of the Halams which include both deities of the Brahmanical pantheon as well as tribal deities, may be enumerated as follows: (1) Siva (2) Durga (3) Kali (4) Sundralapo (5) Sundar-roy (6) Bukanda-roy (7) Srikalaray (8) Kalaroy (9) Kalakkipradan (10) Khalangma or Eltasiknekda (11) Nachensing
During the worship of the above deities, the oblations offered are bound to include animals, birds, eggs and country liquor etc. Some deities are supposed to take great delight in receiving burnt fish and burnt meat. Rice and banana are offered as oblations to Śiva and Yamārāvana Sundar-roy and Bukanda-roy Pujas are known as 'Bamboo pujas'. One bamboo is fixed in the ground of the alter and the Halams pay their reverence to the deities as symbolised in the bamboo. The deities mentioned from one to five in the above list are worshipped for the welfare of the village and its inhabitants. The other deities are worshipped in order to secure protecting of the Halams from various harms and also for success in hunting. Among the Halams, the Ker Puja is a must. During the worship nobody is entitled to enter or come out within the boundary specially marked for the purpose in the village.

Besides all the above mentioned pujas, they also perform a community worship which is known as Barpanja or Gangā Puja or Suvma (river) Puja. It is the most important and sacred festival of the Halams and is held once in four or five years. Hundreds of goats, ducks, pigs and more than one bison are sacrificed on this occasion. Great quantities of country liquor is also offered. This puja is regarded as
very sacred occurrence and of great spiritual significance. They perform this puja with all their energy and devotion. For this puja, every family of the village has to pay khain or subscription. A substantial amount of money is thus raised for the purpose of holding of this great worship.

The most important festival among the Halams is 'Hasam Ehoiam'. It is held on the day of 'Vijaya Dashami'. The word 'Hasam' means a soldier. This communal dinner is offered for the army personnel. During this festival, the Tripuris, the Kukis and the Halams assemble at a place and observe the day with merriment. According to S.B.K. Dev Varman, "It had a political significance during those days when obedience of soldiers to their king was a Machiavellian necessity connected with statecraft." 36

Like all other hill tribes, the belief in magic and witchcraft among the Halams is widespread. Their belief in evil spirits and the deterrent power against such spirits held by the Ojhai's guide many of the social behaviours of the Halams. They believe that each species of tree, shrub, plant and herb has its own spirit and to these spirits, it is their duty to pay their reverence. The Halams take recourse to magic to deal with the evil spirits through some rites and rituals. The Ojhai or the

village priest is a person among them who is believed to have the power by which he can cast away evil influences applied to the Halams. Burnt fish and burnt meat are often offered to ghosts and goblins in order to propitiate those agencies.

THE KUKIS & THE LUSHAIS

Genesis and Settlement

The similarities in language, customs, manners, religion and social organisation, leave little doubt about the fact that the Kukis and the Lushais originally lived very close to each other in the same land. T.H. Lewin, J. Shakespeare, J.P. Mills, R.H. Sneyd Hutchinson also advocated the same view. About those Lewin had observed, "The Lhoosai commonly called the Kookies, are a powerful and independent people, who touch upon the borders of the Chittagong Hill Tracts". Shakespeare went a step further to state that the Kukis and the Lushais belonged to the same race. In this respect he observes, "There is no doubt that the Kukis, the Chins and the Lushais are of the same race". 38

37 Lewin, T.H. - The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers therein, p. 98.
The Lushais claim that they descended from a certain Thang-ura who came from the union of a Burman with a Paihte woman. Again the Paihtes say that the Lushais descended from Boklua, an illegitimate son of the Painte Chief Ngehguka. Thangura ruled over Singlung in south western China. From Thang-Ura, there sprang as many as six branches of the tribe known as (1) Rokum (2) Zadeng (3) Thangluah (4) Pallian (5) Rivung (6) Sailo.

Owing to various calamities they had migrated to the Shan country situated to the north-east of Assam and lived happily there. Later due to a famine in that area, they were compelled to leave the place. Then the different branches of Thang-Ura moved towards different directions. Some took refuge in the Chindwin valley in the China Hills. From China Hills, a majority of the people started towards Lushai Hills in quest of having good jhuming land. In this connection J. Shakespeare says, "The Rokum the eldest branches, are said to have passed through the hills now occupied by the Lushais, and of their descendants are said to be found on the Tipperah-Sylhet border". 39

Clear evidence is available that in earlier times the boundaries of Tripura extended far into the Arakan border on

the east and the shores of Bay of Bengal on the South. Gradually the tribes (the Kukis and the Lushais) from Lushai Hills moved towards present Hill Tripura in search of more fertile jhuming land. On the other hand, some of the tribes like the Lushais and the Kukis also moved from Burma to Chittagong Hill Tracts and Assam. J. Shakespeare observes, "The country into which the various Thankur Chiefs moved, under pressure from the Chins, was almost entirely occupied by small communities having no power of cohesion. The greater part of these were absorbed, and now from the majority of the subjects of the Thankur-Chiefs, but some fled west into Manipur, Silchar, Sylhet and Tipperah, where they are known as Kukis". 40

The word Kuki is a vague term as applied by the plains people to the tribes of the Chin-Lushai-Kuki group from remote past. The tribals themselves, however, never call themselves by that name which they regard as contemptuously used by the people of the plains. Kuki is a generic term covering a number of tribes, sub-tribes and clans with varying customs and manners with certain common characteristics which mark them as separate from other tribes. The Kuki tribe, which is now claiming to be a separate independent tribe includes most of the Kuki clans.

The name Lushai is only another name for one of the numerous Kuki clans. The word 'Lushai' has been the subject of much controversy. Lewin opines that 'Lu' in the Kuki language stood for head and the root 'Sha' is a verb meaning 'to cut'. Shakespeare thinks that the derivation was 'Lu' a head and the adjective 'Shei' means 'long'; because of the fact that the Lushai clan binds their hair in a knot at the back of the head, while the Panais, another clan binds their hair in a knot on the top of the head. But Hutchinson does not agree with this view. He says that the majority of the clans bind their hair at the back of the head. The Kacharis call the Kirat as Luchhais - a term which means head-hunters. In course of time the word 'Luchhai' yielded place to its variant as 'Lushai'. In connexion with the word 'head-hunters', we may quote the opinion of Shakespeare. He says, "It used to be considered that all the inhabitants of these hills were head-hunters. In fact, so great an authority as colonel Lewin derives the name 'Lushai' from 'Lu' 'a head' and 'Sha' 'to cut'. This of course, is a mistake as the name of the clan is not Lushai, but Lushei and though 'Sha' does mean 'to cut' it does not mean 'to cut off' and could not be used of cutting off a man's head, but that such a mistake should have been possible shows how firmly rooted was the belief that head hunting was one of the peculiarities of the population of these Hills". 41 41 Shakespeare, J.  Op. Cit. p.60.
The name of the Kukis first appeared in the first chapter of Rajamala, edited by Kali Prasanna Sen. The territory is believed to have been originally inhabited by the different branches of the Kiratas. These Kiratas, afterwards, came to be known as the Kukis. The Kukis are called 'Chikam' in the Tripuri language. On the other hand, there is a synonym for the word 'Kuki' in the own language of the Kukis as 'Hayeth'. The Kukis by this territory are known as 'Darlong'. Long ago, they obtained the appellation 'Kuki' from the Rajas of Tripura.

Regarding these tribal peoples of Tripura S.K. Chatterjee observes, "The Kuki-Chin tribes present an important branch or section of the Assam Indo-Mongoloids. They have their Kinsmen in Burma, and appear to have settled in a fairly ancient times in Manipur and the Lushai Hills, as well as in the Chittagong hill tracts. From Lushai and Manipur they come in large numbers to Tripura State, where they form an important section of the people. These Indo-Mongoloids are known to the Assamese and Bengalis as Kukis, and to the Burmese as Chins (written Khyin) and Kuki-Chin has been adopted as a composite and inclusive name for them".

When Jujaru Pha, a ruler of Tripura attacked Rangamati to impose his suzerainty over the area, the dauntless Kukis

took the leadership of the army of Tripura. Some opine that the Kukis entered Tripura hailing from the Lushai and the Mizo Hills long ago being allured by the prospects of getting promising Jhuming land in this area.

Hunter observes, "The Kukis of Hill Tipperah are the same race as the Lushais, who live further to and who call themselves kachha Kukis. To the Burmese they are known as Lankhe. Most of the Kukis in Hill Tipperah live in the northern portion of the hills, and the tribe is there known by the name Darlong". 43

According to Kailash Chandra Sinha, a compiler of the Rajamālā, the Kukis are Kirātas but their appearances are not similar to those of the other hilly tribes. His complexion is darker than that of the other tribal people; he has an elevated nose, slender lips and his face is suppressed like that of the people of the Tartar or Mongolian descent. Kailash Chandra Sinha further opines that the physical appearance of the tribes had been changing gradually due to intercourse with many captives from the plains. 44

While upholding the view of Kailash Chandra Sinha, Lewin observes, "They differ entirely from the other hill

44 Sinha, Kailash Chandra : Rājamālā, p. 338.
tribes of Burman or Arracanese origin in that their faces bear no marks of Tartar of Mongolian descent. They are swarthy in complexion, and their cheeks are generally smooth among the Howlong tribe. However, one meets many men having long, bushy beards. I should be inclined to attribute this to a mixture of Bengalee blood, from the many captives they have from time to time carried away.  

As early as C 1240 A.D., the Kukis could be traced in Tripura when the Kuki troops are known to have fought against the emperor of Gauda in favour of Kirtidhar alias Chengthum Pha, the ruler of Tripura.  

Migration  
So it can be assumed that the Kukis have been living in Tripura from a very remote age. If we analyse the census report, it is found that the number of the Kurkis and the Lushais were only 7547 and 136 respectively in 1901. It has already been stated that the Kukis and the Lushais belong to the same race. They were divided into two tribes under the names Kuki and Lushai at a certain stage of their development. The Govt. of Tripura also recognised them, having separate entity from as early as the beginning of this century.  

In this connexion we may quote the opinion of S.K. Chatterjee regarding the trend of migration of the

---

Kukis towards Tripura. He says, "From Lushai and Manipur they (Kukis) came in large number to Tripura State where they form an important section of the people". Shakespeare also advocated the same view.

The concentration of the Kukis are to be found in the Sub-divisions of Sadar (603), Khowai (1332), Kamalpur (460), Dharmanagar (363), Udaipur (587), Amarpur (2017) and Sabroom (9) and the concentration of the Lushais are to be found in the sub-divisions of Sadar (102), Khowai (12), Kamalpur (1), Kailasahar (72), Dharmanagar (3452), Amarpur (2) and Belonia (31) according to the census of 1971.

**THE KUKIS**

**General Characteristic**

According to 1971 census the Kukis numerically stand eighth among the nineteen recognised tribes of the State of Tripura. The Kuki population stands at 7775 heads comprising 3606 males and 4169 females. This number shows an increase of about 40.58% over the population of 1961. The break up of this number as regards literacy may be of some interest.

The census of 1971 shows the Kukis are distributed as 1,113 literates and 6,662 illiterates.

Kuki is a generic term covering a number of tribes, sub-tribes and clans with varying customs and manners with certain common characteristics which mark them as separate from each other. The Kuki tribe, which is now claiming to be a separate independent tribe embraces most of the clans tracing descent from the Kukis. The Kukis of this territory are known as Dimolong. The Kukis are called Chikam in Kok-Borok language and Hau in Manipuri language and the bond of unity amongst the Kukis is commendable.

Growth of Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Kukis</th>
<th>Percentage of the Kukis to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>2,721</td>
<td>0.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>5,531</td>
<td>1.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>7,775</td>
<td>1.73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Kukis have Mongolian features with eyes set wide apart, a high forehead having flat nose with broad nostrils, long upper lip and high
Cheekbones. Their head is broad and they wear no beard and are of swarthy complexion. Their legs are short as compared with the length of their bodies and their arms are long. In physical characters form both men and woman may be considered as well built. The kuki woman is of short stature. She is strong and well shaped. Both the sexes wear the hair parted at the middle, combed back and tied in a loose knot on the nape of the neck.

Rice is the staple diet of the Kukis. They are quite fond of meat. No beasts or birds are held as taboo by them. Dry and half scorched meat and fish are their favourite dishes. They brew their own liquor. There are two types of such drink namely Zu and Rakza or Zutak. The habit of drinking is quite widespread amongst them. Parents and children enjoy intoxicating drinks together. Every important function is performed in accompaniment with a drink.

A man usually wears a narrow waist cloth, and a tight fitting jacket. He puts on home-spun pagree with embroidered ends. This dress is in keeping with the fashion which prevailed among them in the remote past. The hair is done in a tight bun on the top of the head and held in position with metal pins. A woman wears a short piece of cloth known as Pachhras round.
wrapped round her waist and it hangs up to knees. The upper part of the body mostly remain bare.

The Kuki dialect is derived from the Kuki-Chin languages. Regarding their language, Grierson states, "The Kuki-Chin languages belong to the Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman family."  

The Kuki and the Lushai speak dialects of considerable similarity.

Here are some words out of their dialect.

- Dog - Ui
- Hot - Alum
- Picture - Milem
- How do you do? - Na dêm maw?
- What is your name? - Nir hming i chêng?
- Come - Hongkal
- Moon - Thâ
- Mother - Nu

Social Organisation

In the census of 1931, fifteen sub-tribes were mentioned by Somendra Chandra Debbarma. He further stated that only five of such sub-tribes were to be found in Tripura.


J. Shakespeare stated in his 'Lushei and Kuki Clans' that the Kukis had eighteen sub-tribes. But the Government of Tripura however recognised seventeen sub-tribes in 1956.

The order of the Government runs as follows:

Sub-tribes

"The constitution (scheduled Tribes)

(Part C States) Order 1951 have been amended by the Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes lists (modification) order, 1956 according to which the enumeration of scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes has been conducted in 1961 census in Tripura. The 1951 list of scheduled Tribes has been modified by inclusion of seventeen Sub-tribes of Kuki. (1) Balte (2) Belalthut (3) Chhālayā (4) Fun (5) Hajanjo (6) Jangei (7) Khereng (8) Khephong (9) Kuntei (10) Lāifang (11) Lentei (12) Mizel (13) Nānte (14) Pāitu or Paite (15) Rāngchan (16) Rangkhole (17) Thānggluya". 49

The differences in the number of Sub-tribes of the Kukis probably arose due to Anglicizing the spelling of these names differently by various authorities.

The family among the Kukis is patriarchal in formation. Woman cannot inherit any ancestral property. Property is always divided amongst the sons. The youngest son inherits the highest portion of the property and the eldest one then has his portion and

and the remaining sons share equally of whatever may be left. When the father of the household dies, the mother becomes the head of the family. The whole burden of the physical labour of the household always falls upon the women. They fetch water, hew wood, help reaping the crop, lend their hand in spinning, cooking and brewing wine etc. When a man is lazy, coward or bodily unfit, he is often found dressed in women's clothes and working with women.

Though the monogamous type of marriage is prevalent among the Kukis yet polygamy is also not infrequent. Marriage is a civil contract dissolvable at the will of any of the parties concerned. Demanding of bride price at the time of marriage is a common practice. Generally the price consists of guns, gongs etc. The debt incurred for the purpose is allowed sometimes to go on for generations. A girl may go with any young boy she likes. If any guardian gives a girl in marriage to a young man whom the bride does not like, she generally flees away from her husband. Such action is not considered wrong by the society. A young boy may also serve in order to win wife in his father-in-law's house for a period of some years. There is no religious ceremony or any function on the occasion of the marriage excepting only the holding of a big feast and a dance. Premarital sexual relation between the unmarried persons of both the sexes is prevalent amongst the Kukis but adultery
is rarely to be found. The offence is punished by the society. Child marriage is not practised among these tribes. The Widow is allowed to remarry anybody she likes to marry. Generally, the widow does not marry again if she has a child. Divorce is recognised by the society. If a man abandons his wife without showing any cause, he was to leave the house of the bride.

The Kukis bury their dead. In case of death caused by any contagious disease such as cholera, small pox or the like, the dead body is buried outside the village to avoid the risk of contagion. When the death occurs due to accident or any unnatural cause, the dead body is buried at some distance from the village to prevent the evil spirits from creating disturbance.

Normally the dead body is preserved for days together, in order to facilitate a last visit by the friends and relations of the family to the departed. They assemble in the house of the deceased where drink and food are supplied to them.

Before the burial, offering of oblations consisting of meat, rice and zu are placed in the name of the departed soul. Then they bury the deceased. Beasts and birds are also
killed and the heads of the same have to be thrown into tomb.

In the past, when a chief died, the occasion was celebrated as if it was a gala festival. The dead body of the deceased chief was placed in a wooden box and laid in a state at an open place. Then a blazing fire was made encircling the bier on all four sides. This fire was kept blazing for ninety days. During this period oblations consisting of enough meat and drink were offered in the name of the chief. The tribals assembled in numbers to dance and make merriment producing a somewhat barbaric grandeur. Heads of as many plains men as possible were secured by killing such victims and thrown into the pit where the chief would be buried. The tribals also prayed to their highest deity 'Pāthian' for the salvation of the departed soul of the chief. Finally, after the specified period of observation of the festivities was over, the body would be laid at rest with necessary pomp and grandeur. Such spectacular burial is not practised any more.

Village Organisation

The villagers always respect the chief. The chief who is locally known as Lāl or Kalim is the recognised head of the village among the Kukis. His word is law to the villagers. His office is hereditary. He settles all disputes in collabora-
tion with his assistants. The chief is supposed to lead the villagers against any enemy attack from without. In fact, the village chief, an autocrat ruler of the village. Three or more elderly persons are chosen by the chief in order to assist him and they are locally known as 'Kāburs' and their subordinates are known as Gāpia-Kālims and Gāpia Kāburs. All these men form a council and this council is called by the Kukis as 'Kawnbul' while the Bengalees call it as 'Kārbāris' (man who manages affair, from the Bengali word Karbar meaning an affair). These persons are supposed to advise the Lāl or Kālim on all matters of the villages and all negotiations with the outsiders are carried out through the assistants. Any breach of rules and norms and neglect of communal discipline may be dealt with a severe punishment on the offender. Every house of the village contributes its quota towards the chief's maintenance. The above village council is not seen in different places amongst them. In the past the practice of slavery, could be traced in the Chief's house. Those who committed murder, theft or other crimes in the society could be held as slaves and as such had to serve under the chief of the clan. Slavery was not considered a painful institution and slaves were not ill treated. They would get the share of chief's property and in return did all the house-hold duties and carry on the chief's cultivation.
Religious Life

Like most other aboriginal races, the Kukis are also basically animists. They are atheists. Hutchinson also admits the same view. He states, "The religion of the Kukis is wholly Animistic. Their principal endeavours are directed to propitiate the spirits of evil. They recognise a future abode where the spirits of the 'dead reside, and this is known as Mi-thikhua or the village of Dead Men' but they have no idea how long they are to remain there or what they are to do".  

According to the Kuki belief Pāthien Pri is the creator of the universe. Their Pathien Pri corresponds to the 'Pātyen' of the Pānkhos and the Benjogis. Pāthien Pri is omnipotent and beneficient. But the trouble lies with Huai who resides in stream, mountain, forest. The priest or magician who can perform beneficial rites, is known among the Kukis as a Puithiam. He is a person who has the power to drive away the evil influences applied by Tui-huai, Rām-huai to a Kuki man or woman.

The Kukis believe in various other spirits as well. These spirits are held to be uniformly bad and all the Troubles

50 Hutchinson R.H. Sneyed - An account of Chittagong Hill Tracts p. 139.
and misfortunes experienced by the members of the tribe are attributed to these spirits. Innumerable sacrifices are prescribed so that the malevolent spirits could be held at bay.

The Kukis do not believe in anything beyond this world. They, however, believe that innumerable demons inhabit in the hills, rivers, forests and trees. So they worship the evil spirits and their abodes.

The Kukis hold some distinctive opinion about life beyond death. They do not believe of hell or heaven. In this connexion, Hutchinson states, "The Kukis have no idea of hell or heaven, or of any punishment for evil deeds or reward for good actions. They do believe, however that when a person dies or spirit seizes his soul and carries it off, and at the moment of his being carried off whatever is named the dead man will obtain and enjoy hereafter". 51

Like the Khasis, the most momentous aspect of the religion of the Kukis is the glorification of the dead ancestor and worship of the same. Such worship for the appeasement of the deceased ancestor is performed with offerings of meat, rice Zu (country liquor in their language) etc. Such ancestor worship is intimately associated with the principal festivals known as Theng-Chhuah observed by the Kukis in the name of the dead.

They pay homage to the various deities of the forests. Among all worships, 'Siva Puja' exists as the most important and sacred puja of the Kukis. It has no resemblance to the \textit{Siva Puja} of the Hindus. Pigs, ducks, goats are sacrificed on the occasion of the worship of Siva. Sacrifice of bison is a must. They perform this puja with all their devotion. This puja is regarded as very holy and of great spiritual significance.

The religious ceremonies observed by the Kukis mainly consist of sacrificing animals. Their system of worship and the predominance of the belief in spirits held by the Kukis bear out that they are basically animists and animism forms the basis of their religion.

Due to pressure from the Christian Missionaries both Protestant and Catholic, many Kukis have been converted to Christianity. Even though many of the Kukis have subscribed to Christianity, strong influence of Animism still survive among them.

The Kukis render pujas to propitiate the supreme being Pathian with all devotion. Such worship is performed not only for their own selves but also for all living beings. The priest known as the Puithiam performs all the religious ceremonies.
The Kukis worship a number of spirits. A few of such spirits are mentioned below:

1. Tui-huai These stand for spirits held in popular esteem. They inhabit water
2. Ram-huai mountain and land etc. They are believed to be much harmful unless properly propitiated.
3. Khuāvāng

Religious ceremonies of the Kukis mainly consist of sacrificing animals. The important rituals observed by the Kukis may be described as follows:

1. Sākhuā: A very popular sacrifice is called Sākhuā. It means sacrifice to the guardian spirit of the family. It is performed once in four years. A pig is sacrificed outside the house but it is cooked in the house. The skull of the pig is hung within the boundary of the house. This skull of the pig is believed to have magic properties capable of warding off evil.

2. Khal: 'Khal' is a type of sacrifice made to propitiate the spirits known as the Hui, who is believed to reside in stream, mountain, forest, tree and the like. They are also supposed to frequent the villages and houses. There are many sorts of Khals. Those are:

(1) Tui-huai
(2) Ram-huai
(3) Khuāvāng
(a) Yok-te-khal: On the occasion of worship of Vok-te-khal a small pig is sacrificed and the skull is hung above the bed of the sacrificer.

(b) Ar-khal: When a red cock is sacrificed it is called Ar-khal. After the sacrifice the feathers from the tail of the cock are hung over the parents' sleeping place.

(c) Khel-khal: When a goat is sacrificed it is called khel-khal. It is performed on the occasion of a marriage.

(d) Van-chung-khal: When a white cock is sacrificed, it is called Van-chung-Khal.

(e) Khal-Chung or Mei-awrlo: A goat may also be sacrificed on the occasion of Khal-chung or Mei-awrlo.

(3) Dai bawl: On the occasion of Dai bawl a cock and a hen are sacrificed at a time.

(4) Different sacrifices in case of illness: -

(a) Ui-hring: A full grown dog or bitch is sacrificed to perform the Ui-hring. Blood of the sacrificed beast is then collected and smeared on the sick man's wrist. This is believed to have the power of curing the disease.

(b) Hring - ai-tan: Same as above but the incantations uttered are different.
(c) Khreavang - hring : On the occasion of this sacrifice it is the note of the Puithiam to prescribe what animal would be sacrificed.

(5) Sacrifices to remove barrenness in woman : A white hen as it has laid an egg is sacrificed. The rite is believed as helpful in eradicating barrenness among women.

(6) Nao-bri : Various animals are sacrificed when a person is sick.

(7) Various sacrifices are performed in connexion with hunting and jhuming.

Festivities

The Kukis, a happy people who take great delight, are observing different festivals.

Kut : The Kukis have several festivals known as 'Kut' connected with jhum cultivation in its different phases such as cutting, burning, cleaning and sowing etc. The following are some of the more remarkable festivals :

(1) Chap-char-kut : When the Jhums have been cut, the Kukis in general make merry and the girls and the boys dance and the boys dance and sing collectively. This festival is known chap-char-kut.
(2) Mim-kut: When there is no further need of weeding in the jhums, they observe a festival known as Mimkut. Song and dance are indispensable part of this festival.

(3) Fal Kut: When the harvest is over, the Paithiam will take a small pig and a pot of 'Zu' and make a sacrifice outside the village while the whole community must attend the festival.

(4) Kong-pui-shiem: When the Fal-kut festival is completed, each house will manufacture 'Zu' and kill a pig or fowl and make merry while the young boys and girls will dance and sing together.

(5) Chukchai: The Chukchai festival is a very popular festival among the Kukis. This festival is performed at the time of gathering harvest. On this occasion all the people of the village are assembled and the Chief goes to the forest and cuts down a big tree which is taken back to the village. Different animals are sacrificed and offered during this festival. Dance and music accompany drinks and other merriments.

The cult of the sorcerer is an inseparable part of the Kukis' social life. Evil spirits are believed to lie hidden in the personalities of men, women and children. The evil spirits are souls, ghosts, Goblins, trolls, pats, demons,
witches, deities, devils, some gods and so on and so forth. Regarding this belief Hoebel remarks, "We all know them by name - souls, ghosts, goblins, poltergeists, genni, trolls, spirits, elves, pixies, leprechauns, fairies, witches, demons, devils, angels and gods. Their essential quality is their ethereal embodiment; they are beings without real flesh and blood. — non-material, but real enough for those who believe in them."  

Kukis' sacrificial rites have something to do with the spirit of the deceased. According to them, through a sacrifice the spirit of the animal killed comes to reside in the person of the killer, thus adding to his active strength and energy.

The Kukis are Animists. There was a time when the Kukis propitiated different evil spirits of the hills, mountain and streams. They believed that those evil spirits delighted in having a man's blood. Innumerable human sacrifices were prescribed for the propitiation of such spirits. They sacrificed persons of different ages, collecting those from the plains to please the evil spirits. According to them, human sacrifice was not sin at all. After sacrificing a man, they would take food while the blood still dripped from their hands. Due to various reasons, this practice of human sacrifices has died out, but this has been followed by a corresponding rise in the number of animal sacrifices.

52 Hoebel, E. Adamson - Man in the primitive world, p. 528.
The Ojhai or the medicine man among the Kuki society is known as Puithiam. He finds out the genii who create disturbances off and on. Puithiam is the person who can say what particular demon is angry and needs propitiation. He will also decide what animal should be sacrificed. The Puithiam gets his remuneration for the work performed by him in kind or in cash.

Their ceremoniea mainly consist of sacrificing animals. They make offerings consisting of the meat of hen, rooster and pig with cooked rice along with sufficient quantity of 'Zu'

THE LUSHAIS

General characteristics

According to 1971 census the Lushais numerically stand eleventh among the nineteen tribes of the State of Tripura.

The Lushai population according to the census of 1971 stands at 3672. This number consists of 1800 males and 1872 females and shows an increase of about 22.89% over the population of 1961. The literacy break up of this number may be of great interest. The census of 1971 shows the Lushais to be distributed as 2397 literates and 1275 illiterates.

The name Lushai is only another name for one of the numerous Kuki clans. The Kacharis call the Kiratas Luchhais -
a term which is usually held to mean head-hunters.

The Lushais are traditional inhabitants of the hills and generally they are to be found living upon high hills. The location of a village is determined by the facilities that are available in the vicinity for cultivation. The Lushais are noted for the unity among different units and individuals of the tribe.

There is an under current of animism, among the Lushais and this could not be totally eradicated even after they had come in contact with the Christian missionaries. The Lushais have by and large embraced Christianity, and have adopted western dress and manners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Lushais</th>
<th>Percentage of the Lushais to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>2369</td>
<td>0.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>2988</td>
<td>0.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>3672</td>
<td>0.81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Lushais are a people of fine muscular build. Their complexion varies from dark-yellow to brown, dark olive, copper coloured or yellow olive. The head is broad, face is round, the eyes are almond shaped and the cheek bones are quite prominent. The nose is short and flat with wide nostrils. The male
Lushai has no beard and whiskers. The female Lushai is short in stature. Long hair is worn by both the sexes, in a knot over the nape of the neck and parted in the middle.

Rice is the staple food of the people belonging to the Lushai tribe. They are quite fond of meat. They are known to eat several kinds of meat but the flesh of leopards and tigers are only eaten by the children. Meat of puppies and rats are eaten with relish. They eat vegetables as subsidiary food. There are two kinds of such liquors taken by a Lushai, namely Zu (fermented drink) and Rakzu or Zutak (distilled drink). The latter kind of drink is used on special occasions. They take intoxicating drinks only when they have full leisure and can enjoy it in company of a party of friends.

Dress: Same as the Kukis

The Language of the Lushaies belongs to Kuki Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman family. But as most of the Lushais are now converts to Christianity. They have picked up English and can speak this language. Shakespeare states 'Lushai or Dulen, which is the dialect of the Lushei clan, modified, doubtless, by contact with those of other clans, is now the lingua franca of the whole Lushai Hills, and is understood in many parts of the adjoining districts.'

According to Grierson, "Chin is a

53 Shakespeare, J: Op. Cit. P. 113
Burmese word used to denote the various hill tribes living in the country between Burma and the provinces of Assam and Bengal. The Kuki-chin languages belong to the Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman family.  

Reproduced below are some words from Lushai dialect.

Come = Lokāl  
Sun = Ni  
Moon = Thlā  
Fire = Mei  
Water = Tui  
Drink = In  
How do you do? = I (E) dam em?  
What is your name? = I (E) hming enge ni?

Social Organisation

Shakespeare in his survey takes note of twelve clans of the Lushais. He states "These clans have adopted most of the manners and customs of their conquerors and to an ordinary observer are indistinguishable from the true Lushai". The clans are as follows: (1) Ghawte (2) Chonghthu (3) Enamte (4) Kawlni (5) Kawlhring (6) Kiangte (7) Ngente (8) Pāotu (9) Rentlei (10) Roite (11) Vāngchhia (12) Zawngte. 

Among the Lushais, the family is Patriarchal. The youngest son of the parents gets the largest share of the

---

father's property. The rest have equal shares. When a married
Lushai is without a son he adopts a son
from among the sons of his near relations.
The widowed mother becomes the guardian in the house of her
sons at the death of her husband.

Normally the Lushais are monogamous but the chief of
the clan can take more than one wife. A Lushai can marry any
girl according to his choice excepting his sister or his
mother. There is no superstition among the Lushais in regard
to marrying the first cousin from the
father's side. Marriage is purely a civil
contract which is made through the guardians of both the
bride and the groom. If an unmarried woman establishes an
extra marital sex relationship with a young boy with a fair
amount of secrecy, no notice is taken by the community. Widow
re-marriage is prevalent among the Lushais. But the widow
does not often have herself of this privilege of taking a
second husband if she has children by her first marriage.

Divorce is permitted among the Lushais. If a couple agrees to
sever marital tie with mutual consent, the pair can do so. But
if the proposal of separation comes from the groom's side, he
has to pay an alimony but if it comes from the side of the
bride, the groom has to pay nothing.
Like the Kukis, the dead is buried by the Lushais. They also place numerous offerings surrounding the death. Other functions are attended with similar methods existing among the Kukis. I did not find any difference between the Kukis and the Lushais in respect of the rites of the burial. The processes of funeral rites of the Kukis have already been discussed.

Village Organisation

Like other tribals the Lushais are also found to have village organisations in the form of elder's councils. Each village is like a separate state, ruled over by its own chief. His office was originally hereditary. The chiefs appointed one or more elderly persons known as Upās to help them. They dealt with all the disputes arising among the villagers and all matters connected with the village. The following officers were also appointed to assist the chief, viz., (1) Rāmhuāl—advisor in connection with the land (2) Tlāngān—Messenger (3) Thirdeng—Blacksmith (4) Puithiam—Sorcerer.

The chief was, in theory, a despot, but the nomadic instinct of the people was so strong that any chief whose rule was unduly harsh soon found his subjects transfer their allegiance to some other rival chief. So the chief had to use
tact in keeping his villagers under control.

The above tribal organisation is not prevalent now-a-days any more among the Lushais. They are now educationally and culturally more advanced and have adopted many traits of the modern western society. The office of the Chief remains only in name but not in reality. Within a village, big or small, a village council exists for securing a harmonious community life. The village council deals with the religious activities, maintained ideally and peacefully and settles disputes among the villagers.

Religious Life

J. Shakespeare states that, "the ancestors of the old Kukis and the Lushais were related and lived very close together somewhere in the centre of the hills on the banks of the Tyao and Manipur-rivers". So it is obvious that the religious beliefs, rites and rituals of the animist Lushais and their traditions should be similar to those of the Kukis already described above. In this connection, we may quote the opinion of Gilchrist. He states, "The Lushais were wholly animists".

During my visit to different parts of Tripura, I did not notice any difference between the life and rituals of the two.

57 Macall, Anthony Gilchrist : Lushai Chrysalis p. 67.
Everywhere I have however noticed that the Lushais are much more cultured and advanced than the Kukis. They have derived many of their habits and practices from the Christians.

**Christian festivals**

The following rites and rituals are observed by the newly converted Christians.

1. **Sunday Prayer**

   The converted Christians both men and women of the Catholic faith gather in the local church and sing hymns and listen to the Gospels of the Bible. The eldest of the village give instructions based on the Gospels. But in respect of the converted Christians of the Protestant faith the Deacon i.e. the Church-leader leads the prayer but in absence of him, the prayer is led by a man nominated by the Deacon.

2. **Daily Prayer**

   The members of the family of the Christians gather in a particular room in their house in the evening. The family members recite certain prayers in chorus. This system is maintained by the Catholics. But the Protestants follow a different system. The members of the Protestant families assemble in a place twice a day, once in the morning and again in the evening and recite prayers individually. But sometimes they also offer their prayers only once a day.
3. Christmas Day:

All the members of a village of Catholic inhabitants celebrate 'Christmas Day' which is preceded by elaborate preparations for twenty-five days. On the other hand, the Protestants observe the festival with a programme such as the formation of a choir party, decoration of the church yard, delivery of sermons by a few members and entertainments or feasts for indefinite period according to the local situation and circumstances.

4. Good Friday:

All the members of the Catholic faith of a village celebrate the event of the death of Jesus Christ which is preceded by preparation of forty days. All joyous activities are avoided during these forty days of preparation; the devout Catholics observe fasting and abstinence from meat etc. Those of the Protestant faith assemble on that very day only and offer prayers. The Deacon or the Church leader gives sermons on the death of Jesus Christ.

5. Easter Sunday:

Celebration of resurrection of Jesus Christ is observed with merriment. They observe the day with special service through a choir party; sometimes special hymns and sermons on the resurrection. They take better food on that day as a token of merriment and jubilation.
THE CHAKMAS
Genesis and Settlement

The origin of the Chakmas provides an interesting study. In determining the origin of the tribe, when its past history is not available, particular notice has to be taken about their physical features, dress, food, origin language, social characteristics and religious belief and practices. Further a study of their age long environment can also be helpful in the matter.

The name Chakma is considered by some to have been derived from the Maghi word 'Chaok', meaning 'of mixed origin' and the Chakmas are undoubtedly in the main descendants of Maghi women and Mogul soldiers. 58

H. H. Risley opines that the Chakmas are an off shoot of Task or Tsek tribe of Arakan. Lewin opines that, "the name of Chakma is given to this tribe in general by the inhabitants of the Chittagong District, and the largest and dominant section of the tribe recognises this as its rightful appellation. It is also sometimes spelt Tsakma or Tseak, or as it is called in Burmese Thek" 59. According to Lewin the Chakmas did not originally belong to Chittagong Hill Tracts. While extending

support to the opinion of Lewin, Hutchinson observes "The Chakmas are undoubtedly of Arakanese origin. They immigrated into the Chittagong District where they intermarried largely with the Bengalis, whose language they speak. The Chakma is of medium stature and thick-set build, with fair complexion and a cheerful, honest-looking face. Physically he is a finer specimen of manhood than the Magh.\textsuperscript{60} The name Chakma has been derived from the word Champa. One it is believed, there were two powerful kings ruling at Champaknagar or Champanagar, Bijoygiri and Harish Chandra by name. They were both Kshatriyas of the Solar race (Vanti). The Chakmas, according to tradition retained by them, claim themselves to be the successors of those kshatriya founders.

There is some controversy regarding the location of Champaknagar or Champanagar of this tradition. Hutchinson said that Champanagar was in Bihar. He further opines that, "The tribe consider themselves descendants of emigrants from Bihar who came over and settled in these parts in the days of the Arracanese King. After a great deal of trouble I have succeeded in piecing together the semblance of a history, compiled from notes given me by the Chakma Chief and some of the influential Dewans of the tribe.\textsuperscript{61} Lewin holds that this Champanagar was a town near Malacca. From the accounts of Fahien, the well

\textsuperscript{60} Hutchinson, R.H.Sneyd; Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers (Chittagong Hill Tracts), p 21.

\textsuperscript{61} Hutchinson, R.H.Sneyd; An account of Chittagong Hill Tracts, p, 89.
known Chinese traveller who visited India during the Gupta period, Champanagar was the Capital of the Kingdom of Karnapur considered to have been situated near Bhagalpur in Bihar.

We do not find mention of Champa or Champanagar of Champaknagar in the Rājāmālā. A song is current among the Chakmas which has a mention of a place named Noornagar. This Noornagar is situated in Hill Tripura. It is believed by some that the Chakmas were formerly in Hill Tripura where they had been settled from a very ancient age. This belief would associate the Chakmas with Hill Tripura from a very remote past.

Lewin tried to prove that the Chakmas were once Muslims and their religion along with nomenclatures, titles, customs and rituals have been transformed in course of time. Their close contact with the Bengalis, led to their accepting the religion and social behaviour of the Bengalee Hindus and this had ultimately developed in the life pattern of the Chakmas. In this respect, Hunter, however, states "The religion professed by the Chakma is Buddhism, but from their constant contact with the Bengalees they have now added to their own rites march of Hindu superstition".  

---

Mr. B.C. Alem classified the Chakmas as belonging to the Mongoloid stock. He says "the Chakmas are Mongoloid race, probably of Arakanese origin. Though they have intermarried largely with Bengalees, they are divided in the three sub-tribes, Chakma, Doingnak and Tanchangva. The Doingnaks broken away from the main tribe a century ago and fled of Arakan, of late years some have returned to the Cok's Bazar subdivision of Chittagong District". J.H.Hutton also holds the same view. His argument was that the Mongoloids are almost hairless, thinly bearded, flat nosed and thick browed and possess almond shaped eyes. These physical characteristics of the Chakmas led Hutton to hold the opinion that the Chakmas belonged to the Mongoloid class.

From the above opinions of different scholars, it may not be unreasonable to conclude that the original home of the Chakmas might not have been in Arakan, as claimed by some. We can assume that the Chakmas had made movement towards Arakan through Hill Tripura when some of the Chakmas, perhaps were allured by the fertile jhum land and had settled here permanently. Again, due to some political upheavals, the Chakmas of Arakan had to flee from that place. In course of their movement some of them might have migrated towards Hill Tripura and had settled in their new habitat.

63 Allem, B.C.; Provisional Gazetteers of India p, 410.
It has already been stated that some of the Chakmas were allured by the fertile jhum land in Tripura and had settled down here in some remote age. When the Chakmas fled away from Arakan, some of them might have migrated towards Hill Tripura. Seeing the better position gradually the Chakmas of Chittagong Hill Tracts migrated to Hill Tripura for better avenue of life in the remote past. In the Census report of 1901 the number of the Chakmas in Tripura stood at 4510. W. H. Hunter in this regard states that in 1872 about 400 persons of the Chakmas migrated from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and had settled in the territory of the Tripura Raja. The reason assigned by the immigrants for changing their place of residence was that they had exhausted all the land fit for jhum cultivation near their former residence and that they were tempted to migrate to Hill Tripura because of the splendid opportunities available there for jhuming.64

The concentration of the Chakmas in different subdivisions may be stated as follows: - Sadar (59), Khowai (5), Kamalpur (247), Kailasahar (8912), Distribution : Dharmanagar (9215), Udaipur (228), Amarpur (6959), Belonis (959) and Sabroom (2078). These figures have been taken from the Census of 1971.

**General Characteristics.**

According to the 1971 census, the Chakma is numerically the fourth among the nineteen tribes of the State of Tripura. The Chakma population stands at 28622 heads consisting of 15030 males and 13632 females. This population shows an increase of about 28.04% over the population of 1961. The break up of this number from the point of literacy may be of interest. The Census of 1971 shows the Chakmas to be distributed as 3648 literates and 25014 illiterates.

In respect of dress, the Chakmas resemble the Burmese and Shan people and there are some customs which hint at the existence of a form of Animism which is common to the Chakmas and Burmese tribes. Underlying their Buddhism, there is a strong current of Animism. In spite of their close contact with the Bengalees, the traditional and cultural traits of the Chakmas have not disappeared. Though relegated to a secondary position, many Hindu rituals and customs are also found prevalent amongst these people.

The following table gives an idea about the growth of the Chakma population in the state.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Chakmas</th>
<th>Percentage of the Chakmas to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>14353</td>
<td>6.03 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>22386</td>
<td>6.22 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>28662</td>
<td>6.36 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Chakma with his broad head and roundish face, with the depressed bridge of his flattened nose, with his protruding cheek-bones, with his broad and well developed chest and sinewy arms, with his thick and muscular thighs and with rather squinting look of his twany eyes, offer rather a sturdy look. He is strong and stout but by no means well-proportioned. His complexion, though fair, lacks charm and polish. The male members of the tribe who are hardly endowed with any beard worth mention are at best homely in their style of dress. The women are known to wear their hair quite long reaching as far down as the knees.

Rice is the staple food of the Chakmas. Pork is also favourable with them. They eat different varieties of meat, and also vegetables of different kinds. To the Chakma folks, wine is always a favourite item of consumption. They brew their own liquor. In all ceremony country liquor can not be missed.
The rich Chakmas wear their dress according to the Bengali fashion. The poor, however, puts on a rag pulled between the legs and tucked into a string round the waist in front and behind. The dress of the women is attractive. The women wear a long dark blue skirt falling up to the ankles with a broad strip of embroidered (Rish or Risha) piece over the breasts. The women weave their own skirts and breast pieces.

The language used by the Chakmas happens to be a dialect of Bengali. This was previously written in a corrupt Burmese script. According to Grierson, "A broken dialect of Bengali, peculiar to the locality and of a curious character, is spoken. It is called Chakma and is based on south-eastern Bengali but has undergone so much transformation that it is almost worthy of the dignity of being classed as a separate language. It is written in an alphabet which allowing for its cursive form, is almost identical with the Khmer character, which was formerly in use in Cambodia, Laos, Annam, Siam, and at least the southern parts of Burma. This Khmer alphabet is, in its turn, the same as that which was current in the south of India in the sixth and seventh centuries".  

In this respect Hutchinson observes, the dialect is Chakma and is a corrupt form of the Bengali language, written in corrupt Burmese. Chakma's language is an admixture of Bengali, Arakanese, and other words taken from the dialect of the Hindus and the Muslims of Chittagong. Over and above these many Arabic, Pali and Sanskrit words have also crept into their language.

Reproduced below are some words from Chakma dialect:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>River</th>
<th>Gāṅg</th>
<th>Comb</th>
<th>Kāgal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Nāng</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Mui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Pānī</td>
<td>Where</td>
<td>Kudu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Milā</td>
<td>Cock</td>
<td>Rādā Kureh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is your name? - Ta Nāng Ki?
Where are you going? - Tui Kudu Jāttā?

**Social Organisation**

The Chakmas are divided into many clans or Gojas. In Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Chakmas constituted some twenty one gozas or clans. But Captain T.H. Lewin has found as many as forty Gozas or clans among the Chakmas. In Tripura, the Chakmas

---

66 Hutchinson, R.H. Sneyed., An account of Chittagong Hill Tracts, p. 18.
are found distributed among nine clans or Gozas which are as follows:

1. Malima
2. Tainya
3. Barua
4. Kurcha
5. Kadua
6. Larma
7. Bumá
8. Koda
9. Wangcha

The names of their clans are derived from the heroic deeds of the tribal chief or the localities where those chiefs once inhabited. Generally, quite a large number of clans or Gozas trace their origin from an ancestor, historical or mythological and a few others are associated with the names of places of habitation or even a totem.

Both endogamy and exogamy are prevalent among the Chakmas. This means that the Chakmas can marry both within the clan or outside the clan. The Chakma family society is patriarchal in character. As the Chakma is male-dominated, the man's clan remains unchanged and the woman comes to be known by the clan of her husband.

Most of the families are simple. Husband and wife along with their children complete a family. Joint or extended types of families are also not unknown. In ordinary families, parents live with their unmarried children, where
as in joint or extended types of families, married sons are found to live with their parents. Polygamous types of union, where two wives live jointly are also found. All the members of the family pool their resources for the upkeep of the family.

The prevalent form of marriage is monogamy but a male Chakma may take a second or a third wife if he so desires. A male Chakma may also marry any girl of his own clan who is not closely related to him.

**Marriage**

It is expected that he would provide an extra lavish marriage feast by way of a fine if he marries a girl of another clan. On the occasion of marriage among the Chakmas, usually the proposal comes from the suitor's side to the girl's parents who, however, do not take any initiative in this matter, lest it should create any doubts about the girl's character or other inadequacies. Both the guardians of the groom and the bride then meet and fix up all the details of marriage. This ceremony is called Tain mang. This type of marriage is known as marriage by negotiation. Besides, such negotiated marriages, marriage by love or elopement is also prevalent among the Chakmas to some extent. This is called Monomilaney Bibaha or marriage by elopement. Unlike among the tribals, child marriage is
also in vogue, but it is now extremely rare. A Chakma woman is not permitted to put on ornaments after the death of her husband and she has to use simple clothes befitting a widow. Divorce is now rare among the Chakmas.

The usual practice with the Chakmas is to cremate body after death. After death the body of the deceased is kept in a wooden box, preserved with the aid of different process so that the distant relations pay a last visit to the deceased.

After the funeral bath, the Chakmas wrap the deceased with a piece of new cloth and place it on a bamboo bier. Oblation consisting of rice and curry is placed in bowls touching the head and foot of the deceased. Then a silver coin is placed on the chest of the dead body. The Chakmas also observe certain other functions before the cremation. When the body is brought to the cremation ground where a pyre is kept ready, the body is burnt with its face to east in case of man and while a woman is burnt face westward. The priests chant certain prayers at that time. The Chakmas collect the bones of the deceased which are then thrown into river or stream.

Eleven days after the death, obsequies are performed in a befitting manner. Monks, ascetics and relatives of the deceased are invited on that day and a grand feast
according to one's financial capacity is arranged. The priests chant prayers for the deceased. The householders and the relations donate money to the Buddhist mendicants for the salvation of the departed. Some of the Chakmas perform annual obsequies.

Village Organisation

The Chakmas have their own tribal organisation known as village council. The discipline among them is very strict. The head of the council is known as Dewan. He is the Supreme authority of the village. Besides Dewan, there are some other village officers known as Khijayas, Talukdars, Karbaris and Sardar. They are assigned different duties to perform on behalf of the council. The Sardar or Samajpati is the supreme authority of the village. He is an autocrat ruler of the village. Personal disputes and general problems of the villages are discussed and disposed of by the council. The village Council organises and manages annual worships and other celebrations of the community. It also decides cases, when aggrieved persons lodge any complaint in respect of theft, adultery and divorce etc. This council may impose fines on the offenders according to the nature of the offence or may take any other deterrent actions according to their pleasure.
Although the Chakmas are basically Buddhists, they bear a distinct Islamic influence in their social behaviors and conventions. On the other hand, it was observed by me during my visit to different hilly areas of Tripura, in their rites concerning the deities, they bear marked traces of Hinduism. According to Risley, though the Chakmas are now Buddhists, they were at one time animists. Worship of certain stones and trees still survive among the Chakmas. Echoing his opinion, McDougall rightly remarks, "Mr. R.R. Marett and others have attempted to describe a pre-animistic conception, which attributed an ill-defined power or virtue to all things that evoked awe in the mind of primitive man, it is suggested that this notion was the common matrix from which ideas of the souls of men, animals and plants, anthropomorphic conceptions of natural forces, the ideas of gods and demons, in fact, all ideas of spiritual existence, have been differentiated."
Though the Chakmas embraced Buddhism, at some remote age they also preserve certain rites and practices of the Hindu religion. The Chakmas have been coming into close touch with the Hindus in their day to day life. Thereby they came to borrow many religious notions and practices generously from the Hindus.

The Chakmas believe that the universe is formed by a combination of three elements viz., Vasumati, Chunglang and Parameswari. Belief in these three elements requires them to begin all religious rites by worship of these forces. The worship of forces is nothing but the worship of nature which is based on the personification of natural phenomena.

About the worship of nature, Frazer defines as such

".... First, in regard to the worship of nature, I mean by that the worship of natural phenomena conceived as animated, conscious and endowed with both the power and the will to benefit or injure mankind. Conceived as such they are naturally objects of human awe and fear. Their life and consciousness are supposed to be strictly analogous to those of men, they are thought to be subject to the same passions and emotions, and to possess powers which, while they resemble those of man in kind, often far exceed them in degree. Thus to the
mind of primitive man these natural phenomena assume the character of formidable and dangerous spirits whose anger it is his wish to avoid, and whose favour it is his interest to conciliate. To attain these desirable ends he resorts to the same means of conciliation which he employs towards human beings on whose good will he happens to be dependent; he proffers requests to them, and he makes them presents; in other words, he prays and sacrifices to them; in short, he worships them. Thus what we may call the worship of nature is based on the personification of natural phenomena. Whether he acts deliberately in pursuance of a theory, or as is more probable, instinctively in obedience to an impulse of his nature, primitive man at a certain stage, not necessarily the earliest, of his mental evolution attributes a personality akin to his own to all, or at all events to the most striking, of the natural objects, whether animate or inanimate by which he is surrounded. This process of personification appears to be principal, though it is probably not the only source of the worship of nature among simple folk. 69

Though the Chakmas believe that they came from the slopes of the Himalays, the birth place of Buddha yet, very possibly they had actually came from Thailand or Shan States of Burma, from which places they had carried the traditions of Buddhism with them.

During my visit I came to learn that Sakti cult is also dominant among some of the Chakmas and some Chakmas have embrace Vaishnavism. The Vaishnavas are, however, quite few in number.

In the Chakma Society, five types of priests are found. They are (1) Bhikku (2) Raulee (3) Ojhai (4) Rarhi (5) Gankuli.

(1) Bhikku : - A Bhikku (Bhikshu) is a Buddhist monk.
(2) Raulee : - A Raulee has to perform of customary rites.
(3) Ojhai : - (1) The male Ojhai worships gods and goddesses and witchcrafts.
(2) The female Ojhai has to perform the duty of a midwife.
(4) Rarhi : - He performs the magic rite.
(5) Gankuli : - Gankuli is another type of priest.

From 1920 onwards there has been Christian Missionary activities in Tripura and some among the Chakmas have also embraced Christianity in recent times.

The Chakmas render pujas to propitiate the following deities:

Rituals

(1) Thamāra Puja - This puja is held at the bank of a river or cherra. This deity is worshipped for the welfare of the village and its inhabitants. The expenditure is met through subscriptions paid by every family of the village.
(2) **Chung Pula** :- It is a very important, sacred and obligatory performance to be observed by the Chakma tribe. Marriage is not valid until this puja is performed. They also worship this deity in order to avert any imminent danger.

(3) **Bunapara Puja** :- This deity is worshipped for the future welfare of the family.

Numerous deities of the Hindus are also worshipped side by side. The important pujas observed by the Chakmas are as follows : (1) Lakshmi Puja (2) Parameswari Puja (3) Kali Puja (4) Sarasvati Puja (5) Nabagraha Puja etc.

The Chakmas also observe the following festivals during the following pujas viz., Visu, Wasu, Wagya and Maghi Poornima.

(1) **Visu Sankranti** :

It is the most important and holy festival of the Chakmas. The festival is held in the month of Chaitra (March-April). It takes place near a temple named Kyang where a bust of Lord Buddha is installed. Phool visu starts before the day of Visu Sankranti. This festival is continued for a week. Song and dance are performed by the members of the tribe on this occasion.

**Wachhu** :-

In the Burmese language, Wanchhu means a full
moon in the month of Asharh (June-July) and 'wa' means a quarterly ritual and Chh'u means full moon.

The Chakmas are also inveterate believers in magic. According to Radcliffe-Brown "Rites can therefore be shown to have a specific social function when, and to the extent that, they have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments on which the constitution of the society depends. I ventured to suggest as a general formula that religion is everywhere an expression in one form to another of a sense of dependence on a power outside ourselves, a power which we may speak of as a spiritual or moral power". 70

Magic acts to overcome the mystery of a world of unseen powers. When misfortune comes to the lives of the Chakmas in the form of epidemic, death, lean, harvest, famine and drought etc., they take recourse to the performance of magic in order to be saved from such calamities. Among the rites and rituals of the Chakmas, magic has a place of special prominence.

The priest who performs the magic rites among the Chakmas is known as the Barhi. It is he who officiates and performs all the necessary rites and practices so that

the members of the tribe may feel safe and protected from the evil influences of natural calamities.

THE MAGS

Genesis and Settlement

The Mags form a numerically insignificant but culturally powerful group of people settled in Tripura, a people who appear to have migrated from Arakan area in Burma.

The origin of the word 'Mag' has not been conclusively established. The idea widely prevalent among the people holds that the name had been derived from their ancestors who lived in ancient Magadha, a part of modern Bihar in India. As the Mags follow the Buddhist religion, the idea associating them with the birth place of Buddha has been of considerable fascination to them.

But to the Bengalees the word 'Mag' signifies a race of pirates. These pirates used to carry out depredations along the coaster areas of Bengal in medieval times. They used to come from Arakan area. These piratical Arakanese were given the name 'Mag'. There is a Bengali saying, 'Magher Mulluk', signifying a place completely devoid of any safety or law and order. Owing to the prevalence of this idea among the Bengalis, the Mags objected to be known by this term. They prefer to call themselves 'Marmas'.
The name 'Mag' is the popular designation of an Indo-Chinese tribe of which the members describe themselves by different group names such as Marma Mag, Bhuiya Mag, Rigraysa Mag, Arakan Mag and Jumiya Mag. The term Marma is a corruption of Burma, as pronounced by the Jumiya Mags. The educated members of the community however think that the appellation 'Mag' is an insulting term unfairly conferred by the Bengalees on them.

After analysing the physical appearance and facial features of the members of the tribe, Risley opined "The physical characteristic of most of the Mags are unmistakable Mongolian".71

There is a little doubt whether the Mags really have strong Mongoloid traits. In examining the language of the Mags, Grierson opined that the Mags belonged to the Indo-Chinese racial stock. He states, "The Arakanese are called Maghs by the natives of India; the Burmans of Pegu call them Rakhaing-tha i.e. sons of Rakhaing (Arakan)".72

Lewin named them Khyangtha and Tangtha. According to him Khyangtha means 'children of the river'; who are of Arakanese origin, speak the ancient Arakan language and observe the Buddhist religion and customs. According to


Lewin, Tangtha means 'children of the hills' who are either aborigines or of mixed origin and speak different languages.  

Laje Somendra Chandra Deb Barman, Census Officer of Tripura, had extensively consulted the Moharajoang or the ancient history of Burma and Rajoang or the history of Arakan for his work particularly in order to find out the origin of the Mags. He states that according to the Moharajoang, long before the birth of Lord Buddha, there was a king in Kapilabastu, an ancestor of Lord Buddha himself, named Abhiraja. At that time Kapilabastu had extended its control over Nepal and adjoining regions. Being disgusted with long internecine struggle, the king with a handful of very faithful followers left Kapilabastu and proceeded towards the east and finally came to a place named Tagaon on the bank of Irabati and founded his capital there. Abhiraj had two sons, Kanrajgaji and Kanrahgi. After the death of the father, the two brothers started a bitter struggle over the issue of succession. The friends and well-wishers of the two princes tried their level best to mediate and bring an end to this struggle. At last both the sons were informed of the well-wishers that whoever was able to construct a temple within a single night would be the rightful claimant to his father's throne. The younger

73 Lewin, T.H. : The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the dwellers therein, p. 73.
Kanrangi was very clever. He constructed a temple over a night and ascended the throne. The elder brother Kanrajgaji having been unsuccessful at his attempt went away followed by a few faithful friends. He travelled along the bank of Irabati towards south and established a new kingdom. After a while he gave his kingdom to his son and came to Kaukpandaung, a hill in the north Arakan and established his second kingdom. The Arakanese claim that they are the descendants of Kanrajgaji and his followers.

J.P. Mills, I.C.S. holds a somewhat different view about the origin of the Mags. He opined that the Mags belong to the Tai Clan. This clan lived sometimes in China. Later, due to different reasons some members of this clan went to the south and south-west. Some of them came to Arakan and lived there. Again some of the Arakanese came to Coxbari sub-division of Chittagong district during the first half of the seventeenth century and began to live there. After a while, however, they were subdivided into many groups. One of these groups went to Bengal and some others (two to three of them) entered the Chittagong hill tracts. The leader of one of the groups who came to the Chittagong hill tracts was Regretsa. He belonged to the Phru family. They were called southern Mags. They began to live upon the bank of Sangu.

1340 T.E.

74 Census Report of Tripura, 1931 (Bengali edition) compiled by Somendra Chandra Debnath, p.90.
and its branches. The other groups were found scattered over different places under the leadership of different persons. One group, under the leadership of Palangsa came to the hilly region of Sitakunda and lived there. They were called the northern Mags. For economic reasons, certain members of these groups came to the very thinly populated part of Tripura and began to live there. 75

J. P. Mills further states that there were two separate groups, both known as Mags. One group was formed of the Buddhists of Chittagong and the others were the Arakanese Mags. The Bengali speaking Buddhists of Chittagong considered themselves as Khatriyas. They hold that their forefathers came from Maghadha. After Maghadha was conquered by the Moguls, their ancestors left their original home and came to Chittagong and the adjoining places to preserve their religion. 76

Heinz Bechert had made a detailed study and discussion about the Mags and the contemporary history of Arakan, Burma, independent Tripura, Mogul empire and British empire. He states that the Mags were the descendants of the Arakanese. The Mags love to call them Marma. The

language of the Mags and the architecture of Buddhist temples built by the Mags of Chittagong and the Arakanese are found to bear very close similarity. Again the language and religious rites and rituals of Arakanese follow the pattern of the Burmese. Bechert wrote that even before the tenth century A.D. there had been dispute over the lordship of Arakan. In the tenth century there was a struggle between the Arakanese and the Tripuris over Chittagong. After the tenth century, the Burmese king, for sometime had captured Chittagong. Chittagong changed hands for many a time between the Kings of Bengal and the Kings of Arakan during the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth century Ali Khan of Arakan conquered the place called Ramu and seized Chittagong temporarily. It is believed that this was the time when the Arakanese began to migrate to Chittagong. In C 1512, the Tripura king wrested Chittagong from the Moguls. In C 1587, the Arakan king with the help of the Portugeese invaded Tripura and the Arakan soldiers advanced upto Udaipur. At that time a few Arakanese began to settle in Tripura and Chittagong hill tracts. During the seventeenth century, again Chittagong changed hands several times and until it was finally conquered by East India Company in 1760, there was a complete anarchy in Chittagong. In 1784, the Burmese king Bodawpaya had conquered Arakan and had annexed the area. At that time, a maximum number of Arakanese had entered into the British
territory of Chittagong and Chittagong hill tracts for seeking asylum and began to live there. Thus for many reasons and during different times the Arakanese (Mags) people came and settled into Tripura.

After the perusal of these different opinions of different scholars, it may be concluded that the Mags were not the original inhabitants of Chittagong and Chittagong hill tracts or Tripura. They are the descendants of the Arakanese and the Burmese and actually belong to the Mongoloid stock.

In the early part of the seventeenth century, the Mags migrated from their earliest habitation in Arakan and had made movement towards Cox-bazar and thence gradually they migrated further into Bengal. In course of this movement the Mags had splitted up into various groups. Having settled and cultivated the land in Jhum process in some areas, the Mags turned towards east and entered the low hills in the north of Chittagong Hill Tracts. This migration did not come to an end till early in the nineteenth century. In the meantime the Mags had lost many of the Burmese characteristics.

The rulers of Tripura had recognised the Mags as permanent subjects of the State. On an analysis of the census reports of the twentieth century, it is found that the Mags have been living in this State from a fairly early age. In the census report of 1901, the number of Mags in Tripura stood in 1491. They had been residing at that time in the sub-divisions of Belonia, Sabroom and Amarpur, when a large number of Mags lived in the southern side of Karnafuli river. The descendants of the Arakanese and the Burmese thus migrated from their earliest habitat in the seventeenth century and had made movement towards the Chittagong hill tracts in the last part of the eighteenth century and had spread over various places in the low hills in the Chittagong hill tracts. Some of these might have emigrated to Hill Tripura.

The concentration of the Mags in different sub-divisions may be stated as follows: Sadar (25), Khowai (130), Soramura (36), Kamalpur (1097), Kailashbar (36), Dharmanagar (4), Amarpur (785), Belonia (5794) and Sabroom (5366). These figures have been taken from the census of 1971.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-division</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadar</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khowai</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soramura</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamalpur</td>
<td>1097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kailashbar</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharmanagar</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amarpur</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonia</td>
<td>5794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabroom</td>
<td>5366</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General characteristics.

According to 1971 census, the Mags are placed numerically to be the sixth out of the nineteen tribes of the State of
Tripura. The population of these people is enumerated as 13273 heads consisting of 6841 males and 6432 females. This number shows an increase of about 26.12% over the population of 1961. The break up of this number from the point of view of the literacy may be of interest. The census of 1971 shows the Mags to be distributed as follows: Literate 1494 and Illiterate 11779.

The Mag is a happy go-lucky tribe easily pleased and are most independent in nature. He is always quite prepared to pay respect where it is due. In the Mag society, food winning and earning of livelihood are mostly entrusted to woman. Farming is done by women and men first act as auxiliary workers. A Mag is found extremely deficient in memory. He has a child's love for anything bright especially flowers which occupy a very important position in their life. The Mags are truthful, simple, frank and sincere by nature. They usually don't believe others and recent outsiders' meddling with their affairs.

The following table gives an idea about the growth of the Mags population in the State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Mags</th>
<th>Percentage of the Mags to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>8035</td>
<td>3.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>10524</td>
<td>2.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>13273</td>
<td>2.95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The physical appearance of the Mags calls for close observation. In stature the Mag is short and sturdy. He has a broad head with Mongoloid face and his complexion is light brown. With small eyes, depressed and well developed chest a Mag looks quite sturdy and well built. The male usually has a straggling moustache, and he occasionally wears a beard. A Mag girl is a most fascinating little creature, possessing a very lovely face.

Rice is the staple food of the Mags. They also eat meat and fish. Dried and preserved fish and meat are quite favourite to them. During the rains, they eat potatoes, bamboo shoots and various kinds of vegetables. There is no restriction in the matter of eating the flesh of dead animals. They brew their own requirement of drink. Addiction to liquor is now a very wide spread phenomena prevalent among the Mags. Some of them also take opium.

As regards dress, a Mag's taste is very simple. He wears a white or black short jacket with long loose sleeves buttoned or tied at the neck and a piece of cloth called lungi reaching from the waist to the knee. During the Puja, he generally wears a turban of white cloth, which he adjusts in a way peculiar...
to himself, and a coloured silk lungi. The female members of the tribe wear a long piece of cloth. It is wrapped round the waist, with the edges well twisted and kept in position by the graceful curve of the hips. A piece of cloth with beautiful design, about ten to twelve inches in breadth is bound tightly over the breasts. Dhoti, shirt and Lungi are also now worn in imitation of the Bengalees. Both men and women bear tattoo marks on different parts of the body.

**Language:** The Mags use a language which belongs to Burman group of the Tibeto-Burman family. According to Grierson, their (the Mag's) language, called Maghi, is akin to Arakanese. 78

The Mags also have a separate script. According to Hutchinson, "The dialect in current use is Maghi, a corruption of Arracanese, which is itself a dialect of Burmese, written in the Burmese characters." 79

Reproduced below are some words out of their dialect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Maghi</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Mage</td>
<td>Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River</td>
<td>Myeet</td>
<td>House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Mee</td>
<td>Monkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Re</td>
<td>Man</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is your name? - Ma nemy Jaley?
Have you taken your meal? - Ma thame Chabey la?

---

79 Hutchinson, R.H.: An account of Chittagong Hill Tracts p. 18.
Social Organisation

The Mags are divided into two endogamous clans (osa or sa) with descent in the male line. In Chittagong Hill tract, the Mags are found distributed in fifteen clans. In Tripura, there are seven clans, as follows:

(1) Palaing-ťsa
(2) Patam-ťsa
(3) Logeias-ťsa
(4) Rekhol-ťsa
(5) Karaonuru-ťsa
(6) Lungdren-ťsa
(7) Kheui-ťsa

A clan is named after a profession, a residence on a hill, a mountain, a river near which the original ancestor is said to have lived and the like.

The structure of the family among the Mags is patriarchal. The father is regarded as the head of the family. The succession goes to the eldest son and in the division of a property, where there is more than one son, one half goes to the eldest son, one quarter to the youngest son and the other sons if there are any, share the remaining quarter among themselves. If there are only two sons, the eldest son would get five-eighth of the whole property and three-eighth would go to the younger. In the event of there being no son, the succession goes to the daughters. Again, as for the mother's
wealth in kind like ornaments is concerned, the eldest daughter would get half of the share. All the members of the family pay respect and obedience to the head of the family.

A Mag may marry any female of his own clan if she is not of a near blood relation. Exogamy i.e. marriage outside the clan is strictly forbidden.

Monogamy is the general practice in the society. Polygamy is however permitted in exceptional cases.

Different types of marriages are prevalent amongst the Mags. These varieties may be classified as follows:

1. Marriage by purchase. This is called Khubu Mibu Prijāll in their dialect
2. Marriage by mutual consent or love marriage. It is called Khubu Mithānjāri
3. Marriage by service. This is called Khamatori in the Mag language

Bride price system is in vogue as in the case of some other aboriginal tribals and is paid in cash or kind. This system is called Asonsa in their dialect. The consent of the bride and the groom however happen to be a decisive factor in all kinds of marriages. The marriage ceremony is simple and does not entail much expenditure.

Generally child marriage is not in practice. A Mag widow may remarry if she so desires. Among the marriage of
girls may take place before attainment of puberty, but such marriages are exceedingly rare among others. Divorce is rare. Freedom amongst females is one of the remarkable characteristics amongst this tribe.

The usual practice with the Mags is to cremate their dead. The dead body is first washed with hot water and then dressed in new clothes. Thereafter the body is laid out on the floor in the centre of the house, upon a bamboo cot. A priest chants certain prayers upon the body of the dead. Before the bier is removed to the site of cremation, the dead body is preserved at least for two to three days so that the distant relatives may assemble in order to pay a last homage to the deceased. The dead body is then taken to the site of cremation and placed on the funeral pyre with its head placed towards the north. The priest chants more prayers and the nearest blood relation sets fire to the pyre. After the body is cremated, oblation consisting of rice, curry and country liquor according to means is offered.

For seven days, after the cremation of the body, lamps are lighted in honour of the dead at the place of cremation. On the seventh day, the priest clad in his saffron-coloured robe comes to the house of the deceased and chants some mantras and reads prayers along with the members of the family of the dead. Some monks, ascetics and relatives are
are invited and a feast is arranged. Alms are also given by the relatives.

**Village Organisation**

The social organisation amongst the Mags is sound and quite commendable. The Mags have their own village council and essence of a true democracy may be found here. In respect of these councils they follow some unwritten constitution. The heads are known as Bomarang, Chowdhury and Tehsilder. The office bearers are chosen on the basis of social status, intelligence and affluence.

The village council deals with cases of breaches of social norms and rules, cases of love affairs & divorce etc. They, in a meeting of a few elderly members of the village try their level best to compromise the matter.

**Religious Life**

The Mags by and large profess Buddhism, but this Buddhism happens to be much mixed up with Animism. They propitiate varieties of malevolent and evil spirits which are believed to have the power of influencing their lives and actions. The believe that it is possible to know the future outcomes of an undertaking in dream.
The Mags have very little contact with the tribes of other religions. They live secluded among themselves. They are very conservative in manner and habits and are still unaffected by other religious groups. Their contact with the people of Bengal has however resulted in the development of a certain inclination towards Hinduism in their attitudes.

The Mags are found to maintain several keyangs (temples of Buddha) which are managed by celebrated priests. Each kyang, situated in a solitary place, is found to contain a large number of images of Lord Buddha. Most of the villages boast of a little Buddhist temple which is always built well apart from other houses.

The Mags have clear conception about heaven and hell. In their dialect, the heaven is called Sagrafun and the hell is called Norefun. And they refer to their god as Phora who is none other than Lord Buddha.

The Buddhists give a religious sanctity to the full moon days. So all the Mag-festivals are celebrated during full moon. The full moon in the month of Magh (January-February) is called in the Mag language 'Tabung Labre' and it is the most important sacred occasion in the Mag society. This was the day on which Lord Buddha is known to have gone out on his great journey.
Their religious performances are conducted by the priest called Barhi who holds a position corresponding to a Brahmin among the Hindus. The name of their religious scripture is Thaduttuang.

In course of my conversations with persons in authority in Christian Society, I came to learn that they had so far met little success in bringing persons belonging to this community to the fold of Christianity.

The following are some of the deities of the Mags to whom worship is offered by them:

(1) **Chung-Mong-ley**: Chung-Mong-ley is a popular deity worshipped by the Mags and the Puja is considered very sacred and obligatory. The deity is particularly worshipped at the time of marriage or when a child is born or a new house is constructed.

**Rituals**

(2) **A-boma-Kirey**: A-boma-Kirey is a deity of good harvest. This god is worshipped in order to secure a bumper harvest in Jhums. An alter of bamboo is built in the Jhum field. Fruits, grains and country liquor are offered and a fowl is sacrificed.

(3) **Khyungshang**: This deity is worshipped to ward off sickness from the family. An alter is built above water and goat and pigeon are sacrificed.
(4) **Rijnar**: This deity is the goddess of cholera. The Mags pay great respect to this deity evidently out of fear. This scourge is terribly dreaded by the Mags. Worship of this deity bears resemblance to the Ker puja of other tribes of Tripura.

(5) **Ing-nek**: This deity is worshipped once a year for the welfare of the house and its members.

The Mags also observe some other Pujas like chichi Puja (Baradevta), Chini puja (Sarī), Kāli puja and Ganga puja etc.

A note on some of the festivals observed by the Mags is given below:

(1) **Boat festival**: The boat festival was one of the popular festivals of the Mags. On the occasion of the boat festival the Mags used to prepare some toy boats out of cloth and coloured paper. The toy boats were then made to float down the river. They do not, however, observe this festival any more in Tripura.

(2) **Water festival**: This festival resembles to certain extent, the Holi festival of the Hindus. Both men and women come out in groups with buckets and syringes and spray water to one another. It is held on the last day of chaitra. This festival bears a close similarity to the water festival observed by the Burmese people.
Buha Chakra: On the occasion of this festival by a labyrinth is constructed with bamboo fencing. The gate of entrance of this labyrinth is dark while the gate of exit is kept lightened. This festival is held on the full moon day in the month of Magh (January-February).

The belief among the Mags in evil spirits is quite widespread and charms used are plentiful. The evil spirits are souls, ghosts, goblins, demons, witches and so on and so forth. In this connection Phayre remarks "Like the wild tribes of the present day, they (Mongoloid tribes) probably had no worship but that of the invisible beings called Nat, whom they believed to rule over the woods, the hills, and the streams, who influenced their lives in hunting, fishing and tilling; and when offended punished them with sickness, blight or other calamity." 80

When a person falls ill, it is often thought that an evil spirit has captured his soul and is holding it to ransom. A small offering to appease the spirit may secure the soul's release.

When a new house is erected a bamboo pole is set up and on the top of it is fixed a model of a bow with an

arrow pointed skywards. The magic idea behind this is to ward off any evil spirit who might cast an evil eye on the new endeavour.

**Buddhist Festivals**

The following festivals are observed by the tribals of the Buddhist faith. These festivals are celebrated with the rites and rituals of Buddhism. Among the festivals 'Vesākha Purnimā' (April–May) is the most important ceremony. On this very full moon day nativity, attainment of enlightenment and final demise of Lord Buddha took place. The festival of this full moon is performed in a temple known as Kyang (Vihara) wherein an image of Lord Buddha is placed. The devotees gather round the Kyang and start circumambulating the shrine from left to right through spacious porch devoutly chanting the glory of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. After that, the devotees enter the temple and kneel before Lord Buddha and offer worship devotedly. Then the Monks make the devotees recite the five precepts (Panchaśīla). Different scholars give instructions based on the Tripitaka. Songs and dances sometimes accompany the rituals.

Several other festivals are also observed by the tribals at different times which deserve mention. These festivals may be listed as follows:
(1) **Ashādha Purnima** (June-July):

It is also called Wachhu in the Burmese language. 'Wa' means a quarterly ritual and 'Chhu' means fullmoon. During this full moon, the following events of Buddha's life took place.

(a) The Bodhisatta had entered the womb of his mother.

(b) He left the worldly life and became an ascetic (Mahāvinīśa Kramana).

(c) First sermon was delivered to five monks at Isipatana (Dharma Chakra - pravartana).

(d) Quarterly rainy retreat starts.

(2) **Bhādra Purnima** (August-September):

It is also called Madhu Purnima. On the day of this full moon, honey was offered to Lord Buddha by a monkey at Pereliyā forest.

(3) **Āśvin Purnima** (September-October):

On this full moon day, the following events took place:

(a) End of the rainy retreat.

(b) Buddha asked His disciples to preach His teachings.

(c) Katinchimaranadana starts and it continues for a month.
(4) **Magha Purnima** (January-February):—

Lord Buddha declared at **Pavaranagara** that he would die on the next **Vesaka Purnima**. Further Lord Buddha started his final journey to **Kusinagara** where he was ultimately laid to rest.

During these festivals as discussed the method of worship is the same as done on the occasion of the **Vesaka Purnima**. All the full moons are very sacred to the Buddhists. Certain events of Lord Buddha took place on one or the other full moon days. So the Buddhists observe the above festivals devotedly. During this period they do not kill any animals nor do they take meat.

There is another festival of the Buddhists known as **Kathinacivara**. This festival starts from the following day of **Asvin Purnima** and continues up to **Kartik Purnima**. It is held in the Buddhist monasteries wherein the **Bikshus** observe rain retreat. The devotees invite at least five **Bikshus** and donate saffron robes and essential other articles to them. This festival continues at least for two to three days in each Kyang.

From **Ashadha Purnima** to **Asvin Purnima**, the quarterly ritual is observed. During this festival both men and women (devotees) take **Astashila** from the **Bikshus** particularly on the days of **Astami**, full moon, and new moon days. Such devotees remain in the shrine throughout the day and night
and give alms to the Bikshus and listen to religious discourses based on the Tripitakas.

There is another festival known as the 'Bengali New Year day'. Like the Hindus, the Buddhist tribals also observe this day. They offer worship to Lord Buddha, give alms to the Bikshus and exchange fraternal greetings.

During the past, because of influence of the Hindus, the Buddhist tribals had started paying their reverence to numerous deities of Hinduism. But recently orthodox Buddhists are exerting that the Buddhist tribals are not to do the same and those are being gradually drawn away from the Brahmanical deities.

THE GAROS

Genesis and Settlement

According to Playfair an authority on the Garo people, the name Garo has been derived from Gara or Ganchings, a section of the tribe and in course of time this Gara had been modified to 'Garo'. He offers another view that when the Garos were migrating from Tibet, one of the original leaders of the Migrants was named Garu, and that the tribe came to be known after the name of their leader.81

Various resemblances in the linguistic and some other basic traits of life between the Garos and the Tibetans

81 Playfair, A: The Garos, P 7
have also been traced by a comparative study of these two tribes. As a consequence, it has been suggested that the original home of the Garos was in Tibet. Endle is of the opinion that, "The Garos, a race obviously near of kin to the Kacharis, have a tradition that in the dim and distant past their forefathers, i.e. nine head men, the offspring of Hindu Fakir and a Tibetan woman came down from the northern mountains, and after a halt at Koch-Behar, made their way to Jogig-hop, and thence across the Brahmaputra to Dalgoma, and so finally into the Garo hills". 82

If the Garos are examined from the linguistic point of view and other aspects of life, they may be grouped under the great Bodo race of Assam. The Bodos were spread, at present, over an extensive region of the Brahmaputra valley and the adjoining districts of North-East Bengal. The Garos may have hailed from Tibet to Bhutan and from there they had moved towards the Garo Hills. The Garos passed through the Brahmaputra and gradually they wandered as a nomadic tribe in search of better habitats along with good Jhuming land in the Southern part of Gopalpara, the northern and the western part of the Garo Hills and ultimately they settled down over the entire area now known as the Garo Hills and some portion of the Kamrup district.

Gradually the Garos were divided into many groups and each group came to be governed by an influential chief. Though they had now settled down, they had not altogether given up their nomadic habits. Sometimes, batches of these people used to come down to the neighbouring plains in quest of food and other articles. Gait and Allen considered the Garos and the Rabbas dwelling on the northern slope of the Garo Hills as belonging to a common stock.

In course of time, the Garo Hills became densely populated and consequently owing to economic reasons and paucity of fertile land, some groups of the Garos moved towards the Cachar Hills. Gradually, wandering for some time as nomads, a number of the Garos had entered Hill Tripura for a better State of existence and easier availability of food and other necessaries of life.

The routes followed by the Garos in course of their emigration to the Hill Tripura has been suggested by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee as follows "where, as Garo, they form a bloc of Bodo Speech ...... From Nowgong district in Assam their area of occupation extended to Cachar district(particularly in the north Cachar Hills) and into Sylhet, and from Cachar and Sylhet they extended further to the South, to Tripura State". 83

After considering the opinion of S.K. Chatterjee, it may be concluded that the nomadic Garos migrated towards Tripura being allured by fertile Jhum land here. From the Census report, it is learnt that the Garos numbered 273 in 1911 while in the Census of 1901, there had been no mention in this tribe. It is consequently believed that they came to Tripura sometime between 1902 and 1910.

The concentrations of the Garos are to be found in the Sub-divisions of Sadar (1155), Khowai (111), Sonamura (114), Kamalpur (1165), Kailasahar (818), Dharmanagar (42), Udaipur (1818), Amarapur (292) and Belonia (144). These figures have taken from the census of 1971.

General characteristics.

According to 1971 census, the Garos stand ninth among the nineteen tribes of the State of Tripura. The Garos have a population of 5559 heads consisting of 2730 males and 2829 females. This shows an increase of about 1.37% over the population of 1961. The break up of this number as regards of literacy may be of interest. The census of 1971 shows the Garos to be distributed as 1129 literates and 4430 illiterates.
The Garos still retain many of their cultural
traits which they had brought from their ancient home and the
place of their origin. They are an independent people, with
a genuine love for democracy. Other ideals such as equality
before law, equal rights and opportunities for all, freedom
of opinion and its expression are also to be found amongst
the Garos. At one time Animistic beliefs were quite predo­
minant among the Garos. But of late quite a large number of
the Garos have embraced Christianity and are adopting
Christian way of life. The following table gives an idea
about the growth of the Garo population in the State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Garos</th>
<th>Percentage of the Garos total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>3451</td>
<td>1.45 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>5484</td>
<td>1.51 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>5559</td>
<td>1.23 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Garos are generally strong and stout. They
are not dark in complexion. They have broad head and their
nose is a little flatter than that
Ethnic characters of the average plain peoples. They
have full round face, scanty hair and other characteristics
of the Bodes. A woman of the Garo tribe is of short stature. Their appearance in youth is very handsome and impressive. Both the sexes are well-built.

The staple food of the Garos is boiled rice. Dry fish or Naka happens to be a very favourite item of their food. They collect and preserve a good quantity of Naka for the rainy season. The Garos can eat any kind of meat. Their most favourite meats are beef and pork. The Hinduised Garos however do not eat beef. Like Naka, they preserve meat for days or months together. They eat bamboo shoots and tapioca. When poor Garos cannot manage to procure rice, they live on fruits, vegetables, bamboo shoots and such other roots available in the woods. The consumption of country liquor prepared and brewed from rice happens to be a very important element in their life and culture. Liquor brewed by them is known as Pachua or Pocha which is made of Bimi rice. It forms a very important item of their beverage. It is taken as a stimulant or tonic. It is used in worship and festival occasions also and is offered to a guest.

Dress of the Garo is quite simple. By nature they prefer scanty covering. The male Garo wears a lengot (a narrow strip of cloth used as a suspensor) and if manageable, a shirt
and a turban. The woman puts on a small piece of black cloth round her waist. Both the man and woman are known to keep long hair on their heads. Women generally wear guernsey to cover their breasts.

The Garo dialect belongs to the Bodo group of the Tibeto Burman Sub-Family of the great Tibeto-Chinese family of languages. According to Grierson, "The Garos call their language 'Mande Kusik', i.e. the language of the men, or Achik Kusik i.e. the language of the hill men. All the dialects bear a strong resemblance to each other, though to a foreigner, learning to converse with the natives, the differences are striking enough. The Atong or Kuchu dialect presents the greatest variation. There is close similarities between the language spoken by the Bodo Kacharis and the Garos. Both speak dialects which has no scripts.

Here is reproduced some words out of their dialect:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Paā</th>
<th>Eat</th>
<th>Cha.a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Mā</td>
<td>Hen</td>
<td>dobimā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird</td>
<td>dōō</td>
<td>Servant</td>
<td>Nokhol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House</td>
<td>Nok</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Waāl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you sleeping ?</td>
<td>Na. a Tusiengamā ?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are you going ?</td>
<td>Na. a batchā re. engā ?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Organisation

The tribe is divided into several exogamous divisions. The most important of such clans are the Marak and Sangma. Later on three more clans like Momin, Chira and Areng have come to be included among the Garos. It is believed that the names of these clans have sprung from some totems.

Some of the sub-clans of the Garos are as follows:

1. Marak - (a) Chambuqong (b) Bāłowāri (c) Wāgi (d) Ṛṅgshāi
2. Sangma - (a) Ḍagītōk (b) Āmdāng (c) Bāṅgshāll (d) Bāṅjolgrī (e) Chisām (f) Dāreng (g) Māndā.
3. Momin - (a) Gābil (b) Wātra (c) Rongchū (d) Sākā.
4. Chira - Dālbot
5. Areng - (a) Dockik (b) Nongbāk (c) Chīngkotā.

The main clan is known by the term Machong and the sub-clan is known by the term Chatchi. The Hill Garos have three clans like Awe, Ābeng and Dūāl.
Among the Garo, the family is matriarchal in the sense that the woman inherits the property. Though the mother of the household is the real ownership of the property, the father can use it during the life of the owner. He cannot sell the property but he has full power to use or dispose of the property for the benefit of the family. The youngest daughter of the parents inherits the mother's property and after her, one of her daughters inherits and inheritance goes on like this. All the daughters of a parent do not get the property. The best of the lot, generally the youngest one is chosen as the successor. The parents may give some portion of the property out of love and affection to any other child. When any one of a couple dies without a daughter, the village council selects one to inherit the property.

In marriage, the Garos are strictly exogamous and consanguineous marriages are totally forbidden. According to social customs, one has to take a wife from a different clan. The children are known by their mother's clan.

Among the Garos, marriage can be arranged either after the capture of the bride by force or by negotiation. The former practice is, however, prevalent amongst the Garos on a large scale. When a Garo girl reaches marriageable
When an opportunity comes, the guardians of the bride captures the youth. Sometimes during any ceremony a youth visits the house of a girl of another clan to participate in dance and musical performances in order to attract a young girl.

Marriage by negotiation is also prevalent among the Garos. Cross-cousin marriage is not uncommon. Monogamy is the common practice among them but polygamy is rare. Widow re-marriage is permitted. Divorce is also allowed. The system of bride-price is unknown to them. Illegal children are not discriminated against and are treated as legal ones among the Garos.

**Village Organisation**

In each village, there is a village council consisting of some elderly members of the village. The chief of the village council is called Nokmā or the village head. He is the supreme authority of the village. He is a very important and influential person. The Nokmā is empowered to settle disputes of simple nature. When a case is found to be of complicated nature, the Nokmā refers the case to the Panchayat organisation.

The function of the village council of the Garos is to settle disputes among the villagers by mediating
between the contesting parties, to give consent to the betrothals at marriage, to realise compensation or 'dai' for breach of social norms and to reconcile differences among the inhabitants of the village.

The dead are usually cremated. In case of deaths from cholera, small pox, leprosy or deaths from unnatural causes, the dead are buried far away from the village boundary. When the cremation is over, the bones and ashes are collected in a basket. Then the crematory is washed and the basket with the contents is buried, preferably by the bank of a river or a stream and the ashes are carried to the forest to be buried there. A slab of stone is kept before the tomb and an enclosure made of bamboo mats which is known as delang is erected round the spot. Oblations offered in this connection consist of rice curry and country liquor which are offered every day before the delang for a month.

During the wangla ceremony the entire delang (enclosure) is set in fire. Then the people of that village dance and sing and thus dancing and singing put out the fire, and thus the post cremation ceremony is completed.

The Christian Garos however bury their dead according to Christian practice.
Religious Life

Judging by his religious beliefs, the Garo also appears to be basically an animist. He is however not totally animist as would be found from his religious rites and beliefs which may be regarded as combinations of religious beliefs ancestor worship, worship of natural forces of the world. In this connexion Major A. Playfair observes, "A great reverence for ancestors and for the deceased in general, is clearly indicated in the Garo funeral observations, such as the placing of food for the spirits, the erection of shrines for the temporary sculpture of the bones, and the carving of memorial posts, but I cannot find that ancestor worship itself is practised. There is no deification of ancestors and no sacrifices are offered to them. The Garos fear the return of the dead in ghost form, but they look to their re-incarnation after a period of penance".35

The Garos believe that there is an Almighty deity above all and his name is 'Tatara-Rabuga'. This Tatara-Rabuga had created the universe. But everything after creation seemed wet. So he placed the sun and the moon in the sky and caused wind to blow. Gradually the earth became fit for emergence of life. Then he created the first

man whose name was Sani and the first woman known as 'Muni'.

The same belief is also found prevalent among the 'Gond tribe.

The Garos believe in rebirth of human beings. They have to take rebirth in accordance with the deeds performed in the present life.

Regarding the Garos' animistic religion, Major A. Playfair observes, "Like all animistic religions, that of the Garos consists of the belief in a multitude of beneficent and malevolent spirits. To some is attributed the creation of the world, to others the control of natural phenomena and the destinies of man from birth to death are governed by a host of divinities whose anger must be appeased by sacrifice, and whose good offices must be entreated in like manner."

In respect of religions of the Garos, B. Chowdhury observes, "They (The Garos) respect all the faiths of the people, and in this respect their outlook is much broader than that of many others acknowledging some or other of the noble faiths or religious beliefs of the human beings".

A large number of the Garos in Tripura have been converted into Christianity. Though the Garos have subscribed to the religion brought by the Christians sediments of beliefs in animism have survived in their subconscious mind.

---

86 Playfair, A. The Garos, P 30
87 Chowdhury, B.N. Some Cultural And Linguistic Aspects of the Garos, P 42
The Garos are in the habit of worshipping a number of semi-divine entities in the belief of securing protection from various misfortunes.

Saljong & Saljong is the name of the Sun-god. He is also the god of fertility. He is worshipped for good harvest. The Garos pay great respect to this deity who is extremely popular with them.

Though innumerable rites and ceremonies, the following deities are worshipped by the Garos at different times during the year.

(1) Susime : - Susime is the name of the moon god.
(3) Geora : - the thunder.
(4) Norechire-Kimorebkre : - the rain.
(5) Mane : - the earth.
(6) Chorabudi : - the protector of the crops.
(7) Nawang : - the keeper of the dead. He is believed to be an evil spirit. He can cause distress to human beings.

The Garos also worship hills, mountains, trees, plants, and rivers for fulfilling their worldly desires.

There are some agricultural festivals which are connected with different phases of cultivation such as cleaning, sowing, harvesting and storing. The main
agricultural festivals are Agalmaka, Gitchingpong, Michitata, Bangchugala and Wangla etc. The Garos also observe some specific rites when there are droughts, calamities and misfortunes.

The Garos have certain ceremonies which are performed once a year by the whole village for the safety of the inhabitants of the village from any danger or an attack by any enemy from without. The name of this performance is Asongtata ceremony.

Like all other primitive tribes the Garos also cherish firm belief in the power of magic which is exercised for the purpose of warding off calamities and distresses of various kinds. They resort to multifarious rites to ward off evil spirits in order to bring down rainfall during drought, to ensure safety from any epidemics, to reap a good harvest or to ensure the defeat of an enemy or enemies and also to ensure security of their lives.

Hence magic serves to replenish the life essence. The priest or medicine man in the Garo society is regarded as a saint. The Garos try to appease the evil spirits by offering various sacrifices.
THE SANTALS

Genesis and Settlement

The Santals are considered as a Pre-Dravidian tribe of the Central Belt of India. An enquiry into their origin and subsequent developments, offers an interesting and fascinating study.

Charulal Mukherjee, an authority on the Santals, is of the opinion that the word 'Santal' has been derived from their abode 'Saont' or 'Sant'. He also quoted from W.B. Oldham who thinks that the name Santal is an abbreviation for the word 'Samantawala'. (Samanta lit. bordermen).

The Santals are of dark-complexioned, long headed, flat nosed, thick liped people donning curly hairs. They acquire a medium height. Depending on some theories on modern anthropology, some scholars have tried to establish that the Santals are of Proto-Austroloid stock and they had emigrated from Australia.

Like many other tribal folks of Tripura, the Santals too are not native of the soil. They are known to have migrated from the west probably from Bengal. Gait observes, "Their language, (Mundas) with the kindred dialects spoken by the Santals, Hos and other tribes inhabiting the Chotanagpur Plateau,

88 Mukherjea, Charulal: The Santals, p. 44.
has been shown by Pater Schmidt to form a sub-family of the family called by him the Austro-Asiatic, which includes Mon Khmer, Wa, Palaung Nicoborse, Khasi and the aboriginal languages of Malacca. There is another family which he calls the Austro-nesian, including Indonesian, Melanesian and Polynesian. These two families again are grouped into one great family which he calls the Austric... Geologists tells us that the Indian Peninsula was formerly cut off from the north of Asia by sea, while a land connection existed on the one side with Madagascar and on the other with the Malayan Archipelago; and although there is nothing to show that India was then inhabited, we know that it was so in Palaeolithic times, when communications were probably still easier with the countries to the south-east and south-west than with those beyond the Himalayas.39

Hunter, Keane, Risley and S.C. Roy have all supported the view of Gait. They also hold that the Santals immigrated from Australia and its adjacent countries.

Risley observes, "Their low stature, black skin, long heads, broad noses and relatively long fore-arm distinguish them from the rest of the population and appear at first sight to confirm Huxley's surmise that they may be related to the aborigines of Australia. Linguistic affinities, especially the

39 Gait, Edward Albert: An introduction to Mundas and their country by Sarat Chandra Roy, pp XII & XV.
resemblance between the numerals in Mundari and in certain Australian dialects, and the survival of some abortive forms of the boomerang in Southern India, have been cited in support of this view, and an appeal has also been made to Sclater's hypothesis of a submerged continent of Lemuria, extending from Madagascar to the Malay Archipelago, and linking India with Africa on the one side and Australia on the other. But Sir William Turner's comparative study of the characters of Australian and Dravidian Crania has not led him to the conclusion that these data can be adduced in support of the theory of the unity of the two peoples. The facts which cast doubt on the Australian affinities of the Dravidians finally refute the hasty opinion which seeks to associate them with the tiny, broad headed, and wooly-haired Negritos of the Andamans and the Philippines.

The Santals themselves recount a story about the origin of their race. It runs as follows: A wild goose laid two eggs. From these two eggs sprang Pilchu Haram and Pilchu Burhi. They were the original parents of the Santals. They gave birth to seven sons who were the fathers of the seven groups of the Santals. The tribes according to this story originally lived in Hihiri of Ahipiri.

---

The early Santals lived at Campa for many generations. Their kings belonged to the Kisku Clan. From there, the nomadic Santals were scattered over various directions. A batch of the Santals reached Tundi near Dhanbad from Sikhar.

Mr. Skrefsrud opines that the Santals came from the North-West. On the other hand Dalton thinks that the Santals hailed from Assam. Risley did not support their views. He observes, "The earliest abode was Hihiri or Ahiri Pipri, a name of which Mr. Skrefsrud derives from his origin, and which others identify with Pargana Ahuri in Hazaribag. Thence they wept westward to Khoj-Kaman, where all of them were destroyed for their wickedness by deluge of fire-rain, except a single pair who were saved on the banks of a great river, and after that to Jarpi, where is the great mountain Marang Buru, through which they could find no pass. Here they offered sacrifices to the mountain God, and prayed him to let them through. After a while they found a pass leading into a country called Ahiri, where they dwelled for a time, passing on to Kendi, Chai and finally Champa. In Champa they sojourned many generations, and the present institutions of the tribe were formed. At last the Hindus drove them out of Champa, and they established themselves in Saont, and ruled there for two hundred years. Again pressed by the Hindus, they wandered on under a Raja called Hambir Singh to the eastern part of the Manbhum district near Pachet. Here after a while their Rajas
adopted the Hindu Religion and set up as Rajputs, so that at the present day they intermarry with the family of the Raja of Sarguja. But the people would not change their religion, so they left their chief to rule over Hindus and wandered on to the Santal Parganas, where they are settled now."

However, in course of time the Santals were found in the Chhotanagpur plateau and in the adjoining districts of Midnapur and Singhbum and had made movement towards the north during the close of the eighteenth century. In fact, the Santals are found scattered over wide areas of the country but they have not given up their nomadic habits. Ultimately in 1836, the British Government allotted them a permanent territory to settle in peace. This area came to be known as Santal Pargana. In 1855, the Santals rose in revolt against the British administration. This event is known in history as the Santal revolt. The main objective of the rebellion was to obliterate all signs of foreign domination. In this encounter, ten thousand Santals are believed to have been killed.

As a consequence, the Santals were filled with grief and developed great doubts about their safety in Santal Parganas. Thereafter they had decided to leave their abode and had migrated to different places. They moved to places wherever

work would be easily found, particularly as labourers in agricultural fields. They are hard working and of happy disposition and appear to be a people of contented disposition.

It is learnt that the Santals migrated from Chhotanagpur and Santal Parganas to some districts of Bengal and plantation areas of Assam. From these places they had migrated to Tripura as tea-garden labourers. In the census report of 'Tribes of Tripura' it is found that the Santals have been residing here from the first part of the twentieth century. According to 1911 census report, the number of Santals was 1035.

The concentrations of the Santals are to be found in the sub-divisions of Sadar (638), Khowai (916), Kamalpur (80), Kailasahar (78), Dharmanagar (63), and Belonia (447). These figures have been taken from the census of 1971.

General Characteristics

According to 1971 census the Santal is thirteenth among the tribes of Tripura, numerically. The population of the Santals was enumerated as 2222, of which 1189 are males and 1033 females. This number shows an increase of about 42.25% over the population
of 1961. The break up of this number from the point of literacy may be of interest. According to the census of 1971 the Santals are distributed as 202 literates and 2020 illiterates.

The Santal tribe is divided into exogamous groups. The very existence of the society of Santals depends upon mutual co-operation of the tribes. The Santals consider their tribal solidarity and strength to be of foremost importance. In the preservation of this tribal entity, the Santals are fired by a primitive fantacism and they take all measures whereby, they think, they can purify the tribe. They believe that intrigues beyond the permitted degrees and associated with non-santals can be the cause of great danger to the tribe.

The Santal appears to be a jolly good person who seems to hold the maxim of "eat, drink and be marry and care not for the morrow" to the utmost. He is generally a meek fellow, but if he once says 'No' nobody can turn it into 'Yes!'.

The following table gives an idea about the growth of the Santal population in the State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Santals</th>
<th>Percentage of the Santals to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>1562</td>
<td>.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>2222</td>
<td>.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In appearance, a Santal can be regarded as one who possesses all the characteristics of a person of the Pre-Dravidian Stock. They have finely longhead, chiselled bodies and are of medium height. Their noses are broad with a depressed bridge. They are ox-eyed. The lips are thick and projecting. Their skin colour vary from very dark brown to black. The male Santal has no beard and his hair is black, straight, coarse and curly.

Boiled rice is the stample food of the Santals. They eat many worms and insects like Kurkuti (red ant) and Kalei (termite). They also eat the meat of various kinds of animals and birds such as the tiger, bear, crow, mice, frog and snake. They also eat various kinds of leaves, bamboo shoots and flowers as well. They brew their own drink which they term 'Handia' or rice-beer. It is offered to their gods, goddesses and spirits. They also use it at the time of merriment.

The male Santal wears a scanty dress. He puts on, while at home, a loin cloth commonly known as "Panchi" but when he goes out he wears a thick cloth approximately five cubits in length commonly known as 'Kutcha'. The female Santal wears a Sari,
which is not more than four yards in length, ties round the waist, carries up over the left shoulder hanging in the front so as to cover the breasts. The children up to the age of five wear a very short loin cloth which they term ‘gandree’. Teen-age girls wear saris with two borders, and these are not more than one and a half yard in length. The lower garment known as ‘Panhand’ touches up to the knee and the upper garment known as ‘Gamcha’, covers her breasts. The dress of the female Santals varies from place to place. Both the Santal man and woman take delight in wearing tattoo marks which is required both by their religion and established social norms.

The Santals have their own dialect known as Santali. It is divided into two sub-dialects called Karmeli and Mahalesh. According to Grierson “Santali literally means ‘the language of the Santals’... there are only two dialects and even these do not differ much from the standard form of speech. ... Santali has, to some extent, been influenced by the neighbouring Aryan languages. This influence is, however, mainly confined to the vocabulary, though we can also see how Aryan suffixes and Aryan Syntax are beginning to make themselves felt, and some of the most usual propositions are perhaps Aryan.” They have drawn

upon other languages, but the influence of Bengali is, perhaps, the most prominent. Santals are bilingual.

Below is reproduced a few words from their dialect.

Son  - Hopon  Uncle  - Hudin bābā  
Mother  - Ayo  Wife  - Bāhu  
Husband  - Herel  Daughter  - Hoponerā  
Father  - Bābā  Father in-law  - Honhār bābā  
Who/does play on flute?  - Kāhār banshi bāje?  
My heart is weeping  - Amār antar kāndise.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

According to Santal traditions, there are twelve sub-clans of the tribe which are as follows:

(1) Hansdak (2) Murmu  (3) Kisku (4) Hembrom
(5) Marndī  (6) Soren  (7) Tudu  (8) Baske
Sub-tribes
(9) Besra  (10) Paunria  (11) Conren
(12) Gondwar.

Anthropologists like E.T. Dalton, Campbell, Risley, S.C. Roy, J.H. Hutton, W.W. Hunter have expressed wide differences regarding the origin of and meaning of the various names of
the Santal's sub-clans. Campbell gives only the names of eleven sub-clans. Every sub-clan has its taboos, buttressed by mythical tales. According Chatterjee and Kumar "The Santals are sub-divided into 12 exogamous septs, viz., Hasdak, Murmu, Kisku, Hembrom, Mamdi, Saren, Tudu, Baske, Besra, Pauria, Chore and Bedea. Out of these 12 septs, we have measured actually 8 septs, excepts Baske, Pauria, Chore and Bedea." 93

The family among the Santals is patriarchal in nature. The son inherits the father's property as a matter of right and he lives with his father. On the other hand the father is the natural guardian of his children. So the descent is reckoned as patrilineal. The wife has no legal right in the eyes of law in the Santal Society. "Her duty is only to look after the domestic affairs. The father is respected by all the members of family and he may be considered a patriarch in the truest sense of the term.

Though the Santals have been divided into exogamous groups in respect of marriage. These two groups are known as Jatia Pera and Bondhu Pera. The Murmu clan is grouped into Jatia Pera (friends of the same blood) and the rest of the Santals are grouped as

Bondu Pera (the clan with whom they may enter into matrimonial relations). So it may be stated that each of its groups is exogamous in respect of its own group, but endogamous in respect of the other groups. They have various other restrictions regarding their marriage. Cross cousin marriage is strictly prohibited. Children of a brother and sister cannot marry. Different marriage customs closely resemble Hindu practices. This is, perhaps, because the Hindus, themselves might have assimilated some similar Pre-Dravidian practices in the remote days.

Different types of marriages are found among the members of the Santal society viz., (1) Orthodox marriage or marriage by negotiation which is arranged by the elders of the families. This kind of marriage, as Risley mentioned is Bapla or Kering Babu, literally means "Bride purchase" which Campbell referred to as 'Kirui Babu Bapla'. Another type is known as 'Marriage by love' resulting from the freedom of frequent mixing of boys and girls, permitted by their parents. Generally all the formalities are not observed in this type of marriages. Occasionally the couples elope and the marriage is

solemnised outside the village. Other types such as 'Marriage by capture' is rarely found among the members of this society. Widow re-marriage is permitted. In this marriage bride-price is quite nominal. Child marriage is common.

The Santals cremate their dead. When somebody dies, some religious performances are enacted for the satisfaction of the departed soul. The dead body is rubbed with oil and turmeric. Then the body is purified by spraying water with cowdung. A handful of paddy is thrown over the spot and some quantity of paddy is placed into the right palm of the deceased. Then the body is taken for bath to be done according to prescribed rules.

When all the performances are over, the dead body is placed on a bier and the bearers slowly move towards the cremation ground. The women folk have no right to accompany the funeral procession; so they are forbidden to proceed further. When the body is brought to the cremation ground where a pyre is kept ready, the body is taken round the pyre three times and then placed on it. A fowl is then sacrificed and hooked upon a post pitched nearby. Mahua leaves are placed on the chest, the naval and different parts of the body of the dead, after which the son of the deceased sets fire to the body.
In case, the deceased has no son, the right of putting the fire would go to father, brother, agnates or other male member of the clan, in the order mentioned.

When the body is half burnt, the tooth cleaning twig of the deceased along with some grass, fish and meat are offered to the gods at a cross road. Again when the cremation is over, the mourners spray water over the ashes and a bone from the forehead of the deceased is collected. The collected bone is then put inside an earthen pot and is buried under the earth near a sal tree through a ritual called Jiling Dahar.

Then, all the members of the deceased's family observe Telnehan or Choto Kaman ceremony which means purification. For at least seven days they consider themselves impure. On the expiry of the period, they arrange for a festival called Gintora and thus purify themselves. All the members of the family can do the household works thereafter.

**Village Organisation**

The Santals govern themselves through representatives chosen from among the elderly persons, who are responsible to their respective village councils. An outsider can get
acquainted with a Santal Community in order to learn the Santals' way of life and culture only through the village headman, called the 'Manjhi'. According to custom, he is to collect rent and allot land among the villagers. He holds rent-free land and settles disputes. He is assisted by some members of the village council chosen from among the elderly Santals of the village.

There is the 'Paranik', another important authority of the village social life. He is the assistant headman who also holds rent-free land. The person known as the 'Joy-Manghi' is the third most important person in a Santal village. He has to arrange feasts and controls the morals of the village. The 'Godet' is just another person who carries out the commands given by the headman and his assistants. The Godet also holds rent-free land. The 'Nacke' is the village priest who preserves the knowledge of rites and rituals of all religious functions. The 'Cudan Nocke' is the assistant of the Nacke whose special function is to propitiate the spirits in respect of the magico-religious beliefs of the Santals.

The village council is not a formal institution of the Society. It is wonderful relic of the ancient past embedded in the Santal tradition.
Here in Tripura, generally all the elderly persons of the village meet together in order to dispose of all important matters and confer freely among themselves. When any matter is complicated, and not easy for solution, some elderly members of the village consult with the Panchayet organisation situated within its jurisdiction.

Religious Life.

From religious point of view, the Santals stand to be treated as animists or spiritists. Their chief deity is 'Sun' who created the universe. According to some scholars, the god 'Thakur Jip' and not the sun had created the world. In this connexion, Risley states, "Marang Burn, the Great Mountain or the very high one, who now stands at the head of the Santals Pantheon, and is credited with very far-reaching powers, in virtue of which he associates both with the gods and with the demons." But Hunter however held that "the national god of the Santals is Marang Buru, the Great Mountain, who appears in their legends as the guardian and sponsor of their race; the

divinity who watched over their birth, provided for their earliest wants, and brought their first parents together in marriage."

Some other scholars think that 'Sin Bong' is the chief deity of the Santals. However, the educated Santals, living under the influence and the close touch of the Hindus will readily identify their chief-deity in accordance with the idea of the Hindus.

Many scholars have pointed out that the religion, rites and rituals of the Santals are so mixed up with those of the Hinduism that it is not possible to trace the tribal identities of the Santals any more. The tribes are slowly getting merged with the Hindus except for certain tribal features which still mark their distinctiveness.

The chief village deity of the Santals is called 'Marang Buru'. 'Marang' means great and 'Buru' stands for mountain. Hence Marang Buru means the Great Mountain. The chief deity delights in receiving a white fowl and a white goat as sacrifice and country liquor. He is propitiated for the welfare of the family and he is worshipped during all festivals such as birth, death and marriage ceremonies of

the Santals. The Santals hold the fish as a sex symbol and emblem of fertility. To catch fish in Hako Katkomday is a must, as they consider that it would bring forth fortunate marriage and welfare in the family.

They further believe that every ritual performed contains the life-essence. If this life essence can be captured through a ritual, it would mean security, prosperity and divine protection for the performer for all time. The Santals have built up a theory in respect of disembodied spirits and regard the dead ancestors with religious reverence and awe. When a new baby is born, steps are taken to protect the child from any danger from without. The tribal deities and ancestor spirits are worshipped to bring good luck to the new born.

Again, the marriage of a Santal is closely associated with religion, and the function of marriage is accompanied by offering of vermilion to ‘Marang Buru’ or ‘the Great Mountain’ and a fowl to the dead ancestor.

The Santals believe in life after death. They expect the soul of the dead to be straying in an intermediary stage world. They look upon death as the most mysterious of all events in human life.
The Santals believe in many village deities which
Rituals they worship at different times of the
year.

(1) **Marang Bura**

He is the chief deity of the Santal. He has vast powers
of doing good as well as doing mischief.

(2) **Monrenko Turuiko**

This deity has five brothers and six sisters. He is
propitiated for the welfare of the village.

(3) **Jaher Era**

She is a female deity. She is revered for the general
welfare of the village and its inhabitants. She delights in
receiving a brown hen and a red she-goat.

(4) **Gosana Era**

She is also a female deity. She is worshipped for
abundant crops.

(5) **Manthi Haram**

He is the village deity. He has power over witches.

(6) **Kalachandi**

These deities are considered

(7) **Kala Mahichandi**

to be wicked deities.

(8) **Hasan Kudra**
Apart from the village deities, the Santals pay homage to the mountains and hills with innumerable super human agencies called 'Pats'.

(1) **Barha Pat**:
   - He is worshipped for success in hunting.

(2) **Mangar Pat**:
   - He is propitiated from any harms from without.

(3) **Buddha Pahar**:
   - He is revered for protecting from successful journey.

(4) **Pauri Pat**:
   - She is worshipped for success in journey.

(5) **Chandra Pal**:
   - He is propitiated when there is drought.

(6) **Duarsani Pat**:
   - As above.

In addition to the above deities, the Santals have borrowed the belief in and worship of 'Siva and Durga' from the Hindus.

Magic and witchcraft are essential parts of the belief of the Santals. They take recourse to magic to deal with the impersonal forces and energies through various rites and spells. Such rites are performed by
the Ojhai. He is the specialist in the art of magic and Witchcraft. He has his special methods of dealing with the supernormal phenomena by magical practices. These practices are made when there is drought, epidemic in the village and when any member of a house falls ill.

The Santals believe that a woman possessing a malevolent eye, can cause ruin to a member of the family by her baleful influences.

The Santals also believe that if a child vomits or he has a bowel complain or high fever, the child is under some evil influence. The ojhai is then called in and he reads incantations and removes the spell.

In by gone days, if a person was about to die due to some evil influence, such a person, it was believed could be cured by some experts in witchcraft by causing the death to another person and securing the life of the person thus killed for the dying one.

THE ORAONS

Genesis and Settlement.

The origin of the tribe of Oraons cannot be traced with certainty. Different authors and anthropologists who
have worked with the Oraons. are not agreed on this issue.

They only leave us with a sense of deep curiosity about these charming group of people sparingly settled in Tripura. The Oraons call themselves as Kurukh in their own dialects.

In this connexion, Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy states, "The Oraons in their own language call themselves Kurukhs. The origin of the national name of the Oraons is sometimes traced to one of their mythological hero kings called Karakh. To this personal tradition ascribes the origin of the ancient name Karusdes, which roughly comprised what is now the district of Shahabad - a former home of the Oraons". He further quoted the observation of Dr. Francis Buchanan's account from Eastern India, Vol.I, p.405. Buchanan states in this issue. "Another Daitya named Karakh, of these remote times, is said to have had possession of the country between the son and Karmanasa, which was then called Karukh - Des. Few traces however remain of this personage, and sometimes afterwards a new name Kikat, was applied to the country. It is by many alleged that the whole of Kikata in more modern times took the name of Magadh, from the Mags, who settled in its eastern parts."97

Dalton observes "The Khurnkh or Oraons of Chutia Nagpur are the people best known in many parts of India as dhangars, a word that from its apparent derivation (dang or dhang, a hill) may mean any hillman". 98

Some anthropologists consider the Oraons as belonging to Pre-Dravidian racial stock. This opinion is based on the physical features of these people. They have black complexion, flat nose, curly hair, round skull, broad head and medium height. Noting these physical features, Risley said, "No signs of Mongolian affinities can be detected in the relative positions of the nasal and malar bones, and the average nas-malar index for a hundred Oraons measured on the system recommended by Mr. Oldfield Thomas Omes to 113.6". 99

It is certain that the Oraons bear no resemblance to the Mongoloid, Chinese or the Malaysians. According to some modern anthropologists the Oraons are considered as Proto-Austroloids. They are supposed to have first hailed from south-east Asia.

98 Dalton, E.T. : Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, p.245.
The Oraons came to Tripura from the hilly regions of Chhota Nagpur, Orissa and Rajmahal area of India proper. It would be better to rely upon Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy who had the opportunity to come in close touch with the Oraons for long forty years for determining the origin of the Oraons. According to S.C. Roy, "For the racial and linguistic affinities as well as for the origin of the Oraons the traditions of the people point to the Deccan as their original home". He further states, "the primitive stage of savagery in which the forefathers of the Oraons once lived in the hills and hill caves of southern India, wandering about, ill clad and ill-armed, winning as best as they could a precarious subsistence from the hill and forest". He again remarks, "it is not unreasonable to conclude that the forefathers of the Oraons had the monkey for their tribal totem, and formed part of the aboriginal army of the Aryan hero of the Ramayana. Again, the similarity of the story told by the Oraons as to the origin of the name Oraon with the story given in the Ramayana as to the birth of the monkey king Sugriva would seem to confirm the view here suggested". 100

According to Dalton, the traditions of the Oraons unite them with the tribal people in the western coast of

India i.e. Gujarat or Konkon (Western part of present Maharastra). This theory was advocated by R.C. Caldwell and E.A. Gait. Gait opines that the Oraons hailed from the Carnatic up the Narmada river and lived happily in Bihar.

Owing to various pressures from different corners they started towards northern India and had taken shelter in the Rhotas Plateau of Kaikur hills in Shahabad district. The rulers of the Mogul dynasty extricated the Oraons from that area, as a result of which some of them took refuge in the Rajmahal hills and some settled in the north-east portion of the Plateau of Chhotanagpur. Here they rose against the Mundas who had occupied the territory earlier. Gradually the Oraons took possession of that territory and settled there.

In course of time, owing to various socio-political causes, the Oraons immigrated gradually from Chhotanagpur in search of fertile land for jhuming and employment in tea plantation, and moved towards Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

During my investigation, I had asked the Oraons about their original home and date of immigration towards Tripura. On such enquiry I came to learn from them that Chhotanagpur was their original home and they had migrated to Tripura about two to three generations back. From the census report, it transpires that they hailed to Tripura during the first ten years of the
twentieth century. According to Census reports, the number
of Oraons were only 315 in 1911 and the number of them stands
at 3428 in the Census of 1971.

The concentrations of the Oraons are to be found
in the sub-divisions of Sadar (976), Khowai (700), Kamalpur (44),
Kailasahar (1360), Dharmanagar (269),
Distribution Udaipur (24), Belonia (31) and Sabroom (24).
These figures have been taken from the Census of 1971.

General Characteristics

According to 1971 census, the Oraons occupy the
twelfth position among the nineteen tribes of the State.
The Oraon population stands at 3428
persons consisting of 1679 males and
1749 females of the total population. This shows an increase
of about 19.23% over the population of 1961. The break up of
this number as regards literacy may be of interest. The
census of 1971 show the Oraons are to be distributed as 201
literates 3227 illiterates.

The very existence of the society of the Oraons
depends upon mutual cooperation. The Oraon society of
Tripura is found distributed over different parts of the
The Oraons very possibly came to Tripura as tea garden labourers. They believe that they are all brothers and sisters, as they live in the same village. If there is a death in the community, or a marriage is celebrated, all the people of the village gather together on the occasion. Each takes interest on the occasion as if the person involved was a relation of his. They have such a strong bond of brotherhood among themselves that this has given strength and cohesion to their society.

The following table gives an idea about the growth of the Oraon population in the State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Oraons</th>
<th>Percentage of the Oraons to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>2375</td>
<td>.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>3428</td>
<td>.78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to anthropological classification the Oraons are considered to have descended from Pre-Dravidian races. Their skin colour is dark. The nose of the Oraons is very broad depressed at the root. They are thick-lipped with curly hair, long-head and round skull. The Oraons are of medium height. They generally wear moustaches and they shave their beards. Both
Boiled rice is the staple food of the Oraons. They also eat snail, fish and meat of different birds and animals. They are also fond of different kinds of vegetables. There is nothing particular in the method of preparations of their meals. Country liquor is widely consumed by the Oraons. This liquor is prepared and brewed from rice and is called handia (rice-beer). It plays a very important role in the life of the Oraons. They smoke tobacco and bidi.

The Oraons are simple in their dress. The male Oraon wears a dhuti and a shirt, when he goes out. He wears at home a loin cloth. Occasionally he puts on trousers and a guernsey. The female Oraon wears a sari, blouse and petticoat in imitation of the Bengalis. The children wear pant and frock etc. The female Oraon wears flower in their chignon. Both Oraon men and women love to have tattoo ornamentation on different parts of their body.

The Oraons speak a language known after them as the Oraon language and this language belongs to Kurukh dialects.
of the Dravidian group. It is the traditional dialect of the Oraons. But some Hindi and Bengali words have crept into their language. Dr. Grierson says, "It has borrowed much of its vocabulary from the Aryan languages in the neighbourhood." He further states that, "Kurukh is not literary language and has no written character. The gospels in Kurukh have been printed in Devanagri type".

Here is reproduced some words from the Kurukh dialect.

Leg — Khed  Cow — Gunri
God — Dharmi  Gold — Sona
Come — Barai  Water — Aam
Father — Baba  Cat — Berkha

You go — Nim Kalai
My house — Engai Vipa

Social Organization

The Oraons have ten clans which are as follows:

(1) Tirki  (2) Ekhar  (3) Kirpotas
(4) Larkar  (5) Kujran  (6) Ghedhia
(7) Khakhar  (8) Minzir  (9) Kerketar  (10) Barar.

---

102 Ibid. p. 411.
They cannot marry within the clan. They observe many strict taboos. These taboos derive from faith in totem. The clans of the Oraons are quite friendly to one another.

The family among the Oraons is patriarchal in nature. Generally the eldest male member of the family is regarded as the head of the family and he has the sole authority over all the members of the family. He acts as the counsellor in all the affairs of the family, religious and social alike. All the members of the family also give him implicit faith and obedience.

Monogamy is the general practice observed in the Oraon society, but Polygamy is also not unknown. This practice is, however, confined to rich families.

Several types of marriages are found among them.

1) **Marriage by negotiation**: Two parties meet at the place of bride's father and chalk out the details of the marriage. Payment of bride-price is to be made by the groom or his relatives to the bride's father.

2) **Marriage by love and elopement**: Love marriage is found among them and marriage takes place after elopement with mutual consent.
3) *Ghar Jamai*: When a man has one daughter only, he likes to keep his son-in-law in his own house with the consent of the groom's father. This type of marriage is called "ghar Jamai" system which is prevalent among them.

Child marriage, though approved by religion, is discouraged by the community. Though one marriage is permissible, plurality of wives is not discouraged. Adult marriage is the practice. The system of divorces is also found among the Oraons. It is allowed when it is proved that either of the partners is mad, impotent, barren or quarrelsome, then husband or wife can exercise the right of getting a divorce from his or her partner in life. Again when a couple has a child, the village council tries its best to prevent the divorce and to adjust their differences, if any.

The Oraons are used to cremate their dead. When a person dies, the Oraon women weep loudly. Like other primitive people, they also observe certain practices surrounding the dead body. In case of victims of cholera, small pox, leprosy and tuberculosis or persons dying from unnatural causes viz., snake-bite, thunder or lightning are buried and also in cases of death by drowning, the dead body is thrown into rivers or tributaries or streams.
When all the performances are over, the dead body is taken to the cremation ground. The son has to apply fire to the mouth of the deceased. In case, the deceased has no son, the job is done by father or brother. If none of such relations exists then the right of putting the fire will go to any male member of the family. In no case a woman can perform that rite. Women are not even allowed to go to the cremation ground.

One day mourning is observed in case of unnatural death but in case of natural death, there is no fixed period of mourning. It must be for odd number of days, say three, five, seven, nine or eleven etc. After this period, when the relatives hold themselves as polluted, the uttarkhila ceremony is conducted by Gumin or Pahan and the head of the family by worshipping the Buraburi.

Village Organisation

The Oraon is a peace-loving people. They have a well-developed sense of social discipline. They have a village council having four categories of personnel which are as follows:

1. The Rajmoral - Headman
2. The Mantri - Assistant and adviser to Rajmoral
3. Members - Elderly persons
4. Messenger -
The office of the Rajmoral is generally hereditary and for generations it may be held by the members of a particular family. When the Rajmoral dies, his eldest son gets the office of his father. An efficient and influential Oraon is selected as the headman of the village council. The Rajmoral selects the mantri, the second most important person of the village organisation of the Oraons who advises the Rajmoral from time to time. He must be experienced and must have influence over the people. Consulting the Mantri and other elderly persons of the locality, the Rajmoral selects the members whose number is not fixed. The village council selects the messenger who acts as a message-carrier.

When any dispute arises involving land, marriage, cases of love, breach of any rules or norms etc., the Rajmoral and the mantri along with other members of the Council meet to settle the dispute by compromise at first. Failing this the offender may be punished with imposition of fines. The above practices are not observed in toto in Tripura. Now-a-days some tribals take recourse to law courts for getting their disputes settled.
The religion of the Oraons is of a composite nature. Before their arrival in the State of Tripura, they had already passed through various religious movements. One of the most important movements was the Bhagat movement which had been a Hindu movement. These movements have caused considerable changes in their religious life of the Oraons and influenced their primitive magical-religious beliefs. Most of the Oraons have been converted into other religions. Some Oraons however, retained their earlier beliefs and practices modified and influenced by their contact with the neighbouring people of the territory.

The Oraons have not got rid of animism. Any object according to this belief may have its individual soul and free spirits are to be found anywhere and everywhere capable of moving freely.

According to the Oraons Dharam or Bhagwan is believed to be the creator of the universe. He is the Supreme Being, Omnipotent and Omniscient. He resides in the sun. Like the other primitive peoples of the world, they also worship the sun. Many of their rites and rituals are associated with
their belief in the divinity of the sun.

Regarding sun worship by primitive people Frazer observes, "As one of the most conspicuous and powerful objects in the physical world the sun has naturally attracted the attention and obtained the homage of many races, who have personified and worshipped it as a god. Yet the worship of the sun has been by no means so widely diffused among primitive peoples as, on purely abstract grounds, we might at first sight be tempted to suppose. If we were to draw a map of the world showing in colour the regions where sun-worship is known to have prevailed, we might be surprised at the many large blanks in the chart, blanks which would probably be particularly numerous and extensive in countries occupied by the most backward races. In Africa, for example, while sun-worship was a most important element in the religion of ancient Egypt, it is on the whole conspicuously absent among the black races of that continent, though we have noted some evidence of its occurrence in many tribes of Northern Nigeria and in certain tribes of East Africa. The same paucity of sun-worship, or at all events of any trustworthy evidence of its existence, is characteristic of the indigenous Australian, Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian races, who
together occupy a considerable portion of the globe. On the limited diffusion of this form of religion in the world the most learned and far travelled of ethnologists, Adolf Bastian, long ago remarked that sun worship, which people used to go stuffing about to discover everywhere, is found on the contrary only in very exceptional regions, or on lofty tablelands of equatorial latitude."103

Besides Dharam or Bhagwan and Sun apart, the Oraons worship quite a number of other gods and goddesses. They also revere some deities of the Hindu pantheon and also the deities of the Santals. Like most primitive peoples, they also believe that their material welfare rests on the kindness, pleasure and appeasement of gods and goddesses. Their worship of different deities are found associated songs and dances of different kinds.

Dalton observes, "The doctrine of the Oraons is, that man best pleases the gods when he makes merry himself, so that acts of worship and propitiatory sacrifices are always associated with feasting, drinking, dancing and lovemaking."104

---

The womenfolk of the Oraons perform certain exclusive religious rites and they also help the man working in the fields. The comment of Robbert Briffault may be considered relevant in this respect. He observes, "In primitive cultures, the part played by women in religious cult is striking. In the State religion of Dahomey at least as many women as men exercise priestly functions; priestesses undergo a three years' course of initiation; they are called 'Mothers'. Their person is inviolable, and they enjoy great privileges." 105

The Oraons have no temple as that of the Hindus. But they have a particular or a sacred place fixed for the village deities. Some Oraons plant Basil adjacent to the sacred place.

The Oraons have three classes of priests who perform the religious rites and worship of various deities.

(1) The village priest: The priest among the Oraons is known as the Oihai/Pahan. He is the person who officiates as the priest at the time of the worship of the village deities.

(2) The Mati: The magician among the Oraons is known as Mati. He is the witch doctor. He finds out

---

the evil spirits who create disturbances in
the village or to the inhabitants of the village.
He can diagnose the disease and detect as to
which particular deity is involved in the matter
and needs propitiation.

(3) The Gunin: The medicine man among the Oraons is
known as Gunin. He knows the techniques of the
magic art and the methods of treatment of
diseases etc.

Rituals: The Oraons have their own deities who are worshipped
according to their traditional practices.

(1) Dharma or Bhagwan: He is the supreme God. He is
the creator of the universe. They regard this
supreme deity with great reverence.

(2) Devi Mai: Devi Mai is a female deity. She is the
tutelary deity of the Oraons. This deity is
worshipped for the welfare of the village and
its inhabitants.

(3) Gaon Deoti: He is the deity of the village. This
deity is worshipped with a view to averting all
dangers coming from without. He is also worshipped
at the time of marriage.
(4) **Jhakrabtirla**: He is a hill spirit. He is worshipped for success in hunting and for protection of the Oraons from any danger in the hills.

(5) **Buraburi**: These are Ancestor spirits.

(6) **Dakhin Roy**: This deity is held as the god of the tigers.

(7) **Kalu Roy**: This deity is regarded as the god of the crocodiles.

(8) **Badarshaheb**: This deity is regarded as the spirit of the river.

(9) **Banbibi**: She is the lady of the forest.

(10) **Churil & Petni**: These are various kinds of evil spirits.

The Oraons of Tripura have forgotten the names of their traditional deities. Some of them try to remember their past traditions but in vain. Some of the Oraons cannot even remember the name of their supreme deity.

The Oraons have borrowed some of the Hindu deities from the neighbouring castes and communities. Such deities are Kālī, Manasā, Śitalā, Laksāmī, Narayana and Sarasvatī etc.
They try to propitiate the above deities along with this: traditional deities of their own, side by side.

Among the traditional festivals, at present only a few are observed by the Oraons.

1. **Kukkuti Brata or Poultry rite** :- The Oraons observe this rite to have a child and to raise farm production. The birth of the egg and the bringing forth of egg is, therefore, taken as a symbol of fertility.

2. **Sarhul festival** :- This puja is observed to ensure the fertility of the soil. It is celebrated in the month of Chaitra, i.e. March-April.

3. **Kaddi or Khekel Beng** :- This ritual originated from the belief that a tree can induce pregnancy in a woman. The ritual is observed during the month of Bhadra (August-September). The youths and unmarried girls of the community go to the dense forest, lop off some branches of the Kadam tree and bring those back. The branch of the tree is then ceremonially planted and worshipped.
Besides these, there are some other festivals observed by the Oraons. Most important among those are Nawakhani and Soharai etc. There are a few other community festivals observed by the Oraons. They are Gram Puja or Gram banda festival and Kali puja. Every family of the village subscribe to raise an amount of the cost of such community festivals.

The Oraons believe in magic. Faith in magic lies behind the rain-invoking customs seen in different forms among many primitive peoples of the world. The Oraons believe the efficacy of magic. They also believe that different accidents like fall from tree, drowning, thunder-crash and lightning-flash etc. are caused by the influence of spirits and witches, and such calamities can be warded off with the help of magic.

The Oraons also believe that the diseases like cholera, small pox are caused by the actions of evil spirits or due to some form of witchcraft exercised by wizards, sorcerers etc. They perform different rites and rituals with the help of the ojhais to ward off the evil influences and for curing the diseases.
In this connexion Roy Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy remarks, "The Oraon makes a clear distinction between beneficent or public magic and maleficient or private magic. In the practice of maleficient or 'Black Magic', the aid of some familiar spirit is usually availed of to harm men or cattle. Such magicians as well as witches are, feared, despised, shunned and when detected persecuted and punished with heavy fine and sometimes with excommunication or if possible, expulsion from the village .... But anti-social magic is condemned by the tribal conscience and punished by the tribal code."

THE MUNDAS

Genesis and Settlement

The early history of the Mundas and the account of their migration are not very clear. Some scholars think that they along with the Santals entered India from the north-west and had gradually moved eastwards and passing through Pragjyotisha or ancient Assam followed a southerly direction.

Regarding the origin of the Mundas, Risley states "Munda, Mura, Horo-hon, a large Dravidian tribe of Chota Nagpur classed on linguistic grounds as kolarian and closely akin to the Hos and Santals, and probably also to the Kandhs. The name Munda is of Sanskrit origin. It means headman of a village, and is a titular or functional designation used by the members of the tribe, as well as by outsiders, as a distinctive name much in the same way as the Santals call themselves Manjhi, the Bhumij Sardar, and the Khambu of the Darjeeling Hills Jeindar. The general name Kol, which is applied to both Mundas and Oraons, is interpreted by Herr Jelling hans to mean Pig-Killer, but the better opinion seems to be that it is a variant of horo, the Mundari for man."107

In this connection, S.C. Roy states, "We have grounds for inferring that the Mundas and other Kolarian tribes originally lived in the hilly regions along the Aravalli and Vindhyans ranges and gradually spread further to the north and occupied the valleys of the mighty rivers of Northern India. Subsequent admixture with some Dravidian tribes of the south hailing from across the viddhys may have contributed in assimilating their physical characteristics - the shape of the skull, the dimensions of the nose, cheek bones, orbits, forehead and zygomatic arches, the breadth of the pelvis, the colour and texture of the hair, and so forth, with those of the Dravidians proper, the ancestors of the tribes who speak the Tamil, Telegu, Ualayalam, Canarese, Kurukh (Uraon) and other allied languages."^{108}

It is believed that the Mundas came to Tripura from their earlier habitat in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and plantation areas of Assam in the remote past. Thenceforth they had migrated to Tripura as tea garden labourers like some other tribals like the Santals in the earlier part of the twentieth century. From the census report, it is learnt that they were officially enumerated for the first time in 1911 and the number of the Mundas including the Kaurs were then only 253. Gradually other Munda tribals came to Tripura in search of

better avenues of life and the number of Mundas is found to stand at 5347 in the 1971 Census.

The Mundas are settled, sub-division-wise, as follows: Sadar (1341), Khowai (2250), Kamalpur (347), Kailasahar (712), Dharmanagar (373), Udaipur (15), Felonia (282) and Sabroom (27) according to the Census of 1971.

**General Characteristics**

According to 1971 census the Munda is the tenth among the nineteen tribes of the State of Tripura. The Munda population is 5437 consisting of 2763 males and 2584 females and thus shows an increase of about 21.27% over the population of 1961. The educational break up of this number may be of interest. The census of 1971 shows the Mundas are distributed as 215 literates and 5132 illiterates.

Some scholars think that the Mundas occupied northern India when the Aryans began to pour into India through the north-western passes. There are reasons to believe that the Mundas have been residing in India from the very ancient times. The Mundas are mostly agriculturists and a very large number, however, are employed as tea-garden labourers. During the transplanting of paddy and other occasions, help is rendered among their society on a reciprocal basis and payment
is not made. In the traditional village, there is a firm belief in good and bad omens which are observed on all important occasions.

**Growth of Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tribal Population</th>
<th>Population of the Mundas</th>
<th>Percentage of Mundas to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>2731</td>
<td>1.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>4409</td>
<td>1.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>5347</td>
<td>1.19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Mundas are hardy tribes. They are of short stature and physically very fine specimens of humanity. The majority are black brown skinned with Dravidian features. They have long head, thick nose with broad nostrils often being depressed at the root. They have curly hair, thick lips, high cheekbones and wide mouth and face. Both the sexes are quite well built.

The Mundas live on a very simple food. The staple food of the Mundas is boiled rice. They eat different kinds of meat and fish. Among most of the Mundas, beef and pork are a taboo. Their subsidiary food is
The country liquor prepared and brewed from rice and mahua which they term Hanria or Illi plays a very important part in their daily life and in their social system. They use it at short-intervals because their drink is low in alcohol. It also adds valuable vitamins to the poor diet of the tribes. It is also used at the time of worship and on festive occasions.

The dress of the Mundas is not only simple but also insignificant. A male Munda wears a loincloth which they term Botoi leaving the whole body exposed. He puts on a gamcha i.e. coarse towel when he is at home. Those who can afford, put on a dhuti when going out to see a relative or to visit the market. During the winter season, the upper part of the body is covered with a cotton wrapper. The female Munda wears a sari which the Mundas call Paria. This paria is sometime found to be a plain cloth or coloured with different designs. The well-to-do female Munda wears blouse in addition. Children below two years of age and sometimes even five-year old usually remain naked. The Mundas tattoo their girls at a tender age.

Mundari is the original language of the Mundas.
The Mundari language forms a branch of the Kolarian or Munda family of languages. Though the Mundari is the mother tongue of the Mundas, only a few of them can speak this language. Some speak Sadri language; Christian Mundas speak English and the rest speak Bengali. In this connexion, Dr. Grierson observes, "Mundari literally means the language of the Mundas ....... with regard to Sub-dialects Mundari can be compared with Santali. The difference is mainly to be found in the vocabulary borrowed from Aryan neighbours, and in the grammatical modifications occasioned by the neighbouring Aryan forms of speech." 109

Here is reproduced some words out of their dialect:

Moon - Chanduk   Water - Dak
House - Orak      Cow - Gae
Cat - Pusi       Mother - Uma
Father - Apu      good - Bugin

What is your name? - Amak Chikan nutum?
Give this rupee to him - Ne taka am-a-i-me.

Like all other aboriginal tribes, the Mundas are also found divided into a large number of exogamous clans. These are called Kili's. According to Munda tradition, all the members of the same Kili are descended from one ancestor. Though exogamous as regards the kili's, the tribes are endogamous so far as other aboriginal tribes are concerned.

According to Risley, the Mundas are divided into thirteen sub-tribes. Sarat Chandra Roy gives us a long list of thirty-seven sub-tribes. Sarkar recorded two new names of sub-tribes of Mundas which are as follows:

(1) Bhuiya Munda and (2) Chamar Munda. According to Risley, they are Mahili Munda, Kharia Munda, Oraon Munda, Bhuinhar Munda and Manki Munda and so on.

According to S.C. Roy, they are Tutli kili, Mundari kili, SOE Kili, Horo Kili, Nag Kili, Bando Kili, Herenj Kili, Purthi Kili, Orea Kili, Runda Kili, Kandir Kili, Bodra Kili and so on.

---

110 Sarkar, S.S.: Aboriginal races of India, p. 95.
In respect of Kilis, Risley puts, "The Septs or Kills, which are very numerous, are mainly totemistic and the totem is taboo to the members of the sept which bears its name." 113

The Mundas are divided into a number of exogamous clans. Their society is patriarchate in nature. The family is characterised by descent, inheritance and succession reckoned through the male, patrilocal home. The male members of the society enjoy superior status in the family. The opinion of the female members is also, however, given due respect. All the members of the family, in their turn, pay homage to the head of the family. In the traditional villages, some example of polygamous families with one husband and several wives and their children may be met with.

Marriage among the Mundas is strictly exogamous; bride and groom, as a rule, must be belonged to different clans. But now-a-days, they do not follow the rules so scrupulously.

Monogamy is the general rule of the society. Marriage is generally arranged by the parents as a matter of course. Parents feel no hesitation in indulging sexual affairs before their children. Pre-marital mixing is permitted.

Generally pre-marital mixing results in marriages.

The most prevalent marriage type among the Mundas is by negotiation. Both the parents or guardians meet at a certain place and chalk out the details of the marriage. Another kind of marriage is seen which is known as Intrusion marriage. A woman enters the house of a man whom she loves and insists on living there as his wife even against the desire of the family of the husband. In a few cases, marriage by love or elopement is also to be met with. Marriage by service or marriage by force or marriage by purchase is rarely found among the present day Mundas.

Widow re-marriage is allowed in the Munda society. Child marriage is not met with among them. Divorce is quite frequent; but prior permission is to be taken from the Panchayet for this purpose. Divorce can be initiated by the husband or the wife. Generally it is effected owing to the following reasons: (1) quarrelsome proclivity (2) Evil nature (3) Idleness (4) Barrenness, (5) Lunancy.

Final decision on the divorce is taken by the Panchayet. If the husband is at fault he loses his bride price.

The Mundas cremate their dead bodies. When a Munda dies, the dead body is rubbed with oil and turmeric and then
dressed in a new cloth. Then some other religious rites
are performed. When all performances
are over, the dead body is placed on
a charpoy and the bearers slowly move towards the cremation
ground.

When the body is brought to the cremation ground
where a pyre is kept ready, the body is placed with its head
to the south. A son of the deceased sets fire to the mouth
of the body by lighting straw. In case, the deceased has no
son, the right of setting fire would go to a nephew, or a
brother in order.

After the dead body is cremated, some female rela-
tives of the deceased spray water over the ashes and collect
the bones of the dead. These bones are then washed with water
and tied up in a piece of cloth. These collected bones are
then put in a pot and are hung on a peepal tree in the village
and the person who had set fire to the pyre has to offer
water for ten days. After the expiry of ten days the funeral
rite or Daskarma is observed according to the status and the
ability of the person concerned.

Village Organisation

The village organisation of the Mundas looks after
minor socio-religious and socio-political affairs. They have
a long tradition of managing their affairs of the village through Panchayats. In the remote past, the Panchayats were the only means through which disputes of the villages were settled. The power of the Panchayet was not confined to social matters alone, it was the mouth piece of the entire society. The following types of disputes were generally dealt with by the Panchayat of the Mundas. (1) Theft, (2) Assault, (3) Murder, (4) Cases of divorce, (5) other minor cases arising out of love affairs and breach of social rules and norms.

Beating and fines were imposed upon the persons found guilty for minor offences. For adultery, the punishment was higher than that of the minor offences. Excommunication was prescribed for breaching the social rules and norms of tribal endogamy.

At present, the tribal solidarity is weakening because of lack of command of the tribal village leaders. Mundas now-a-days often take recourse to law courts for getting their conflicts settled and the judgment of the Panchayats has been dispensed with.

Religious Life

The Mundas are animists. But S.C. Roy states, "The designation of 'Animism' now commonly applied to their
(Mundas) religion appears to us to be inaccurate, if not actually a misnomer. Their supreme deity is called Sing Bonga. They worship their supreme deity Sing Bonga before each religious ceremony. Dalton opines in respect of the religious beliefs of the Mundas. "The religion of the Mundari possesses a Shamanistic rather than a Fetish character."

Different authorities think that the religion of the Mundas is mixed with that of the Hindus in respect of different rites and rituals. The Mundas offer water to the bones of the deceased after bath and before taking his meal. This practice is a clear imitation of the custom of the Hindus. A post-funeral rite equivalent to the Sradh ceremony of the Hindus is performed by the Mundas. This would indicate that the Mundas are slowly being merged with the Hindus.

The Mundas believe in re-birth and in the transmigration of soul. The soul after leaving a body, on death is reborn as a man or as an animal in consequent to the good or bad deeds done in his or her previous life. The Mundas have firm belief in good or bad omens and such omens are believed to have considerable bearing in every move of one's life.

115 Dalton, E.T.: Descriptive Ethology of Bengal, p.185.
The Mundas also cherish a confirmed belief in magic. Spirits are held responsible for all diseases. No medicine can cure the diseases caused by witchcraft. According to them, spirit is not a quality inherent in a man's or woman's body, but it is acquired by deep meditation, labour and courage. The Mundas believe that there is a fixed date on which a particular person would be afflicted with a particular disease. According to them, the evil spirits are to be propitiated by sacrifices. In the recent past, some persons of the Munda community of Tripura have embraced Christianity.

The Mundas worship their supreme deity, Sing Bonga before every important religious occasions. Besides Sing Bonga, they also worship the spirits of their deceased ancestors and the presiding deities of their villages. The deities are worshipped by the Pahan or the village priest.

The following deities are propitiated at different times during the year.

1. **Sing Bonga** - He is worshipped and his blessings they invoke in all ceremonies. In serious calamities, he is specially worshipped and a white fowl is sacrificed.
He is a village god. He is worshipped for the welfare of the village.

He is worshipped for good harvest.

He is worshipped for hunting excursion.

He is worshipped in order to secure his blessings in every affair of life.

He is a house god. He is worshipped for the welfare of the house.

These are evil spirits. They are worshipped in order to be protected from violent or unnatural death.

They are also spirits. They are worshipped to ward off mischievous influences.

This spirit is propitiated for the welfare of the married woman.

Besides the deities mentioned above, they also worship various kinds of inferior deities for the welfare of
The Mundas also observe various festivals at different times of the year. The following festivals deserve mention.


Of these numerous traditional festivals, at present only a few are observed by the Mundas.

Belief in Witchcraft is widely prevalent among all the Mundas. Different kinds of afflictions are believed to be caused by the evil spirits. The witch doctor is known among the Mundas as Sokha, Mati and Bhagat who have some benevolent powers. They can find out the work of the witch and protect the person from the evil influence of the malevolent spirit or the witch. They utter some incantations and quietly swaying the client’s body. He can name the particular evil spirit who is troubling the patient. Then necessary propitiations are done in order to appease the evil spirits.

Besides some malevolent spirits, they also believe in some neutral spirits. Such spirits do not do harm to any person until and unless they are provoked by
somebody. Unnatural deaths are believed to be caused by evil spirits. The witch doctor can tell the name of the evil spirits and prevent the evil influences of such spirits to operate.

The Mundas are great believers in the power of the evil eye. The witch doctors are capable of warding off the same and cure the diseases.

THE KHASIS

Genesis and Settlement

Most of the Khasi today live in the district of Khasi & Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills in Assam and in the region between the north Cachar Hills and the Barail Range which intervene between the Surma and the Brahmaputra Valley. It is very difficult to trace from where they came there in the remote time. Different scholars give us different views in respect of their original home.

According to their physical appearance and facial features, they are supposed to be connected with the Chinese and Burmese. Some Scholars think that they may be grouped under Proto-Mongoloid owing to their fair-complexion, flat nose, small eyes, thick ankles and medium height.

The Khasis have brought certain customs and traits
of culture to Tripura from their old abodes. The most interesting of the ancient customs of the Khasis is the erection of the memorial columns, in upright and flat stones or monoliths above their tombs. This custom is also practised by the Ho-Mundas in India, and is also found in different parts of the world. The instances of gathering uncalcinated bones and keeping these in cromleeh or cairn or what they call Mawshieng (bone stone) has been quite common among the Khasis. Traces of stones with human remains have been discovered in various parts of Assam.

Different authors think that the Khasis came from the East. P.R.T. Gurdon observed that many resemblances and affinities had been found between the Khasis and the peoples of the Far East especially the Mon-Khmers. H. Lyngodoh located the original home of the Khasis in Western China and from there like other aboriginal tribes they immigrated to Indo-China, Cambodia, Burma and other regions in South-East Asia.

While analysing the dialects of the Khasis, Grierson noted that they belong to the Hill Tribes of the mountainous regions of China. He further stated that their abodes were between Whykhong and Yangsikiang river valley. From there, the Khasis gradually moved down stream and started moving to different directions. Rev. H. Robert and Shadwell are of the opinion that the Khasis originally belonged to Burma. For many decades, they had moved towards the south along the Patkoi Pass and lived there.
Many of the Khasis had taken shelter in different parts of Assam. Only a small group of these tribals somehow made their way further to South and finally settled in the fastness of the hills of Tripura.

It has already been stated that the Khasis came to Tripura from Assam in search of better avenue of life. From the Census reports, it may be found that the Khasis came to be noticed first in official enumeration only in 1951, and the number of Khasis were then only 154. It is therefore clear that the Khasis had come to Tripura sometime between 1942 and 1950.

The concentrations of Khasis are to be found in the sub-divisions of Khowai (94), Kamalpur (23) Kailasahar (200) and Dharmanagar (174). These figures have been taken from the census of 1971.

General Characteristics

According to 1971 census, the Khasis come fifteenth among the nineteen tribes of the State of Tripura. The Khasis have a population numbering 491 heads of which 227 are males and 264 are females. This shows an increase of about 40.68% over the population of 1961. The break up of the Khasis as regards literacy may be
of some interest. According to the census of 1971 the Khasis are distributed as 34 literates and 491 illiterates.

The khasis have brought certain peculiar customs and traits of culture from their ancient abode to Tripura. The custom of putting up upright and flat or monolith memorial stones above the tombs happen to be one of the most significant practices among the khasis.

The Khasis have a high sense of morality and law and order. They take serious view in respect of law breakers because they do not want any crime to be committed by the members of the society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the Khasis</th>
<th>Percentage of the Khasis to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>0.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>0.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>0.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the khasis have a quite fair or light yellowish brown complexion. His lips are thick and ears are usually found to be rather prominent. They

Ethnic characters

They have flat nose. In the old days, they were comparatively tall and often possessed very fine
physique and had a good built. Now-a-days in Tripura they are usually of medium height. They have broad head, small eyes and thick ankles. In anthropological classification they are considered to be of Mongoloid stock but they have adopted, the Austric or Proto-Austroloid way of life.

The staple food of the khasis is rice. Varieties of meat such as beef, mutton, pig, chicken, deer and bear constitute their favourite dish. They eat various kinds of fish both dry and fresh. Wild plants are used as salad. The only drink of khasis is Ka vad pudka. This drink is known in three kinds, such as Ladhier, Ladem and Lad Thang. They brew their own liquor. They prepare wine from fermented or decomposed rice, millet or extracts of mahua.

The khasis are usually quite modest in habits of dress. The male khasi wears a dhoti and a wrapper. He also wears a turban. But now-a-days Pants and shirts are being worn by some of the Khasis. The female khasi generally puts on a black skirt reaching up to the ankles or the lower garment which they term as Salniong or Desa (Iusem) and wears a blouse as the upper garment. She uses a tapmoh i.e. head and chin cover. The children generally use frocks or small shirts made of mill-made cloth.
The language of the khasi belongs to a group of the Mon-khamer speech. J.R. Logan is of the opinion that there is close relationship between dialects of Khasi and those of the Mon-khamer-Palaung which prevail in Burma and Indo-China. The Language of this group is connected with the languages spoken by the Santals, the Mundas and the Kurkus. He further opines that the Khasis and other Mon-khamer tribes have no resemblance in physical features to those of the Mundras.  

According to Grierson "The greater part of the words used in Khasi appear to be native to that tongue, though there may have been borrowings and "inter-changes with its Tibeto-Burman neighbours. ..... Many words have been borrowed from Bengali, Hindustani and English, being required to express ideas and instruments of civilization and culture acquired from outside; but the language has considerable power of abstraction and has proved adequate to the expression of very complex relations of thought."  

Below is reproduced some words out of their dialect:  

Father - Ukpa Fire - Ra ding  
Gold - Ka k sia r Dog - Uksew  

Social Organisation

The Khasis have their clan system. The history of most of the clans of the Khasis is buried in legends, myths and mythological stories. Most Sub-Tribes of the clans had developed during the time of migration of the tribe from the East. The following list of clans given here may not be quite comprehensive; some are territorial clans named after a particular leader or place or village to which the group originally belonged. Though the Khasis can not say any more how the names actually came into being. After some enquiry it has been possible for us to locate thirty five of their clans from various sources. These clans are as follows:

The family among the Khasis is matriarchal in nature. The mother is regarded as the head of the family and she has the sole authority over all members of the family. She is the pivot in all affairs of the family such as religious, sacrificial, social, marital and other celebrations. Her house is called Ka Iingseng. On her death, the youngest daughter inherits the property and she is called Ka Nongri Iing. The mother may give some portion of the property to other daughters out of love and affection. Though the mother of the household is the real owner of the property yet the opinion of the father is respected by the members of the family. The most important duty of the father is to bring up of his children.

Owing to its matriarchal character woman is everywhere found dominant in the khasi society. For this aggressiveness of woman their marital bonds rarely last for long. Wife can divorce her husband on the slightest pretext. On the other hand, the husband is also allowed to marry a second time.

The Khasi society is divided into a number of exogamous clans and no marriage can be solemnised within the
They can take a wife only from a different clan. Though the monogamous type of marriage is prevalent among the Khasis yet polygamy is also not unknown. They cannot marry two sisters at the same time. But they can marry the wife's sister if the wife is dead. The daughter of a maternal uncle cannot be married.

The most widely practised procedure for marriage among the Khasis is negotiation. Representatives of either of the parties first approaches the other party. Christian khasis do not follow the old way of arranging marriage, they observe the Christian's custom regarding marriage ceremonies. In a few cases, marriage by love or elopement is also found. When the lovers fall for each other, they report the matter to their respective guardians who consequently observe the customs and start negotiation between each other. Adultery or extra-marital sex relation is strictly forbidden among the tribals. This sort of sex-relation is looked upon as a serious offence by the society.

Divorce is recognised by the society. It is generally allowed when there is a severe disagreement among the couples. No ceremony accompanies divorce. It is performed in the presence of the elderly members of the village council.
The widow or the widower is forbidden to marry again within a year of the death of the partner.

Funeral Rites

Like other primitive tribes, the Khasis burn their dead. Before burning, the dead body is washed with hot water. When such bathing is over, the dead body is placed on a mat and covered with a white shroud. The dead body is preserved for some days and during its preservation, animal sacrifice and offerings of rice, curry and country liquor are given as oblation to the dead.

Prayers are read with due solemnity. All these religious performances are done, so that the soul of the deceased can safely proceed on his journey towards the destination. After the cremation, like many other tribes, they too collect the bones and ashes from the pyre. These are then wrapped in a white piece of new cloth and taken to the home of the deceased after having been washed three times.

The living relatives, particularly the wife wears the bones of the deceased round their neck. Finally such bones are buried. Rites governing bone-burial function
continue for three days. It may continue for some more days in particular cases.

Village Organisation

The Khasis govern themselves through their elected representatives, who are responsible to their respective village councils. The social authority in the Khasi village is exercised ordinarily by a headman called Sardar. He is assisted by a number of elected elderly persons of the village. According to custom, he is the chief executive of the village. He is assisted by seven Metabors. His function is to collect rents and to allot land amongst the villagers. Another official is known as Lyngdols. He has jurisdiction over the various units of the village. He is assisted by some Basans. The Sardars with the assembly decides all matters of a social, religious, legal and quasi-legal nature arising in the village. They are the dispensers of justice and custodians of the traditional customs, and manners. As such, they dispose of the civil and criminal cases of the villages. The khasis prefer arbitration by the elderly persons of the village. The Khasis are very few in number in Tripura. The above systems of village council are not found here.
Religious Life

From religious point of view, the Khasis may also be considered basically animists. Gurdon states about their religion "The religion of the Khasis may be described as animism or spirit-worship, or rather, the propitiation of spirits both good and evil on certain occasions, principally in times of trouble. The propitiation of these spirits is carried out either by priests (lyngdohs), or by old men well versed in the arts of necromancy and as the lyngdoh or wise mandeals with good as well as evil spirits, and, as often as not with the good spirits of ancestors, the propitiation of these spirits may be said to partake of the nature of Shamanism." Jenkins also admits the same idea. He states, "The religion of the Khasis is Demonology, the worship of demons or evil spirits."

According to the Khasis, U. Blei Nangthaw is the creator of the universe. At first, he is worshipped. They also believe that U. Blei Nangthaw brought forth the forefather of the Khasis into existence.

U. Blei Nangthaw is the chief deity of the Khasis. They worship their supreme deity with reverence and awe.

118 Gurdon, P.R.T.; The Khasis p. 105
119 Jenkins, W.M.; Life and work in Khasis p.16.
They also worship a few other gods who have been revered from primitive period. The concept of transmigration is not known to the Khasis. To them death is the ultimate end of life.

Ancestor worship is intended for causing the appeasement of the deceased ancestors with offerings and other material presents. Such ancestor worship was initially associated with funeral rites and the erection of magaliths. Some of the Khasis regard their father with divine reverence. The stone lifting ceremony is backed by another superstition. The Khasis believe that through stone-lifting ceremony they can hold back the petrified souls of the deceased. In some lonely recess of the hills they place the stones in memory of the deceased. By this process they ascertain the whereabouts of a departed soul. If the stone gleams it will mean that the soul is hale and hearty.

Gurdon states, "It was the custom in former days to make offerings of food upon the flat tablestones to the spirits of the deceased ancestors and this is still the case in places in the interior of the district. This practice, however may be said to be largely dying out, it being commonly the custom now to make the offerings in the house, either annually or at times when it is thought necessary, to invoke the aid of the departed. Such acts of devotion may well be said to partake of the nature of worship. As has been the case in other countries and amongst
other people, it is possible, that the khasi gods of today are merely the spirits of glorified deceased ancestors transfigured as has happened with some of the gods of the shin to Pantheon of Japan. 120

The Khasis also believe that the stones possess life-essence. Therefore, it can bring good to their household affairs.

The Christian missionaries have converted some of the Khasis. Though Khasis observe Christian rites and accept the Christian teaching. Yet they have not been able to forget all the traditional beliefs, rites and rituals. They also observe the traditional culturaltribal usages and customs side by side with the Christian practices.

The Khasis believe in some deities which are as follows:

(1) U Blei Muluk : the god of the kingdom
(2) U Blei Umlong : the god of water
(3) U Blei Longspah : the god of wealth
(4) U Blei Ryngkew : the god of village
(5) U Phan U Kyrpad : the titular deity.

Rituals

He looks after the village during epidemic and other misfortunes. He helps families to prosper.

The Khasis worship some evil spirits also

They are :

120 Gordon, P.R.T.: The Khasis p. 110.
(1) Ka Rih  --- the demon of Malaria fever.
(2) Ka Khaim  --- the demon of Cholera.
(3) Ka Duba  --- the demon of small pox.

The Khasis, in addition, worship some Hill spirits. Such hill spirits are called U siem Niang, Thylliew, Thynrei, Sapa etc.

All the festivities as above are conducted by the priests of the Khasis. A Khasi priest is known as Lyndoh or Langdoh.

The Khasis propitiate different deities at different times of the year for the well-being of the household and to ward off the influence of evil spirits. They sacrifice pigs, fowls, cocks and goats and offer country liquor for the propitiation of these spirits.

Like other tribals, the Khasis too believe in magic. Belief in the influence of evil spirits is widespread. The Lyndoh, that is the priest of the Khasis, not only conducts the Pujas but also practises watchcraft to exercise the evil spirits seizing or getting hold of a man or a woman.

The evil spirits may cause cholera, malaria fever and small pox and other afflictions. They offer goat, pig and rooster to these spirits. The evil spirits are believed to take delight in receiving rooster as sacrificial offerings.
The term 'Lepcha' has been derived from the Nepali word 'Lapche' which has been modified by the British as 'Lepcha'. There are some legends about the origin of the term 'Lepcha'. The following happens to be the most interesting among those and is worthy of consideration.

There is a kind of fish in Nepal known as 'Lapche' which is considered to be very meek and humble. The Lepchas are also an humble and peace loving people by temperament. That is why the Nepalis call them 'Lapche'.

The Lepchas belong to the Mongoloid racial stock. They had probably migrated through the North Eastern Pass of the mighty Himalayas and entered into Sikkim during the remote past. According to their dialect, the land occupied by them was known as Ne-lyang which means 'the land of Caves'. At a later date, they came to call this land as 'Renjong' or 'Denjong' which means the land of rice.

The Lepchas had no settled life for long and were nomadic in character. They used to wonder about in dense forests in quest of food and cared little for their future. They lived a carefree happy life, used to eat, drink, sing
and dance, spending all they would earn. That is why they were nick-named as "Menthergya" meaning improvident ones, who did not think of the tomorrows.

In Sikkim, the Lepchas lived happily for several generations. There they had to face various pressures coming from Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. The language, manners and customs of the peoples of Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal influenced those of the Lepchas at different times.

Sikkim, it thus transpires, was the favourite land of the Lepchas from the remote past. But they could not continue to live there in bulk. As a result, a large number of Lepchas took refuge long ago in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The place where the Lepchas took shelter was a thick forest. Gradually they became experts as tea garden workers.

During my survey, I came to learn that the Lepchas came over to Tripura about forty years ago as tea garden labourers. They were brought by the tea garden owners because of their proficiency in tea-gathering and garden work. However, only a few members of this tribe did settle in this state and they have virtually no influence upon the general trends of affairs here.
The concentrations of the Lepchas are to be found in the sub-divisions of Sadar (6), Dharmanagar (169) and Belonia (2) according to the Census of 1971.

**General characteristics.**

According to 1971 census, the Lepcha are placed sixteenth among the nineteen tribes of the State of Tripura. Their population is 177 and this consists of 10 males and 167 females. This shows an increase of about 2428.57% over the population of 1961. The educational break up of the Lepchas may be of interest. The census of 1971 shows the Lepchas are distributed 10 literates and 167 illiterates.

The Lepchas belong to the Mongoloid racial stock. Some Lepchas have however married outside their own stock. The orthodox Lepchas, however, do not support such marriages but modern education and environment aided by economic conditions tend to favour such integration.

The growth of population among the Lepchhas and their ratio to the total population of the state may be tabulated as follows:-
In appearance, the Lepchas bear close resemblance to other tribals belong to Mongoloid group. Their complexion varies from yellowish brown to light yellow. He has a broad head, a flat and broad face, prominent cheekbone and their nose varies from mesorrhine to platyrhine which is further depressed at the root. His eyes are slightly oblique with epicanthic fold. The male Lepcha is rarely endowed with any beard. The females usually tend long hair, and take much care of their physical beauty. Generally both the males and the females are of short stature and a pleasant smile is always to be seen on their lips.

The principal crop and staple food of the Lepchas is rice. They are very fond of Pork and beef. They consume other kinds of meat like that of goats, sheep and poultry birds. Their subsidiary food consists of all kinds of vegetables, fish and various
kinds of roots and plants. They prepare and brew their own requirement of drink which is known 'chee'. It is essential in all their social and religious ceremonies. They do not smoke tobacco and never take betel leaf.

The dress of the male Lepcha is locally known as Dompra and that of the female is Domdyam. Now-a-days the male Lepchas wear shorts and shirts. If anybody can afford, he uses shoes. The Lepchas have a dress known as Pagl which is used on religious occasions. It is a long cotton vesture thrown round the body, leaving the arms free. This dress touches as far down as the knees and is tied round the waist. It is generally red and yellow in colour. As far as the female is concerned, she wears a piece of cotton cloth flung round the waist and for the upper part of the body she wears a blouse as they term Tugo. During the rains, they use Thaktop. It is made of leaves attached between two thin frames of bamboo. When they work in the field they use Sambu which is made of bamboo mat.

The Lepcha dialect belongs to Tibeto-Himalayan group of the Tibeto-Chinese family. The presence of pronominal verbal formation suggests a Kolarian (Mundari) influence on the language. According to Grierson, "Rong has an indigenous
literature, and the Sikkim Raja Chakdor Namgye (born 1686) designed an alphabet for the use of his subjects. Rong literature comprises Buddhistic and other religious books, law books, etc. Very little has as yet been made known about it. Parts of the scriptures have also been translated into the language".

Neethivanan states, "Almost every Lepcha is a bilingual and he has preserved his language in spite of so many languages surrounding it and it should be called Lepcha themselves this term to Rong".

Below is reproduced some words out of their dialect.

Dog - Kuzi
Father - Abo
Skin - Atun
Key - demik

Butter - Mor
Forest - Pazok
Wife - Ayi
Night - Sunap

Let him come in - Hadom dit Kon
Donot go there - Ubi manul ne.

Social Organisation

The Lepchas are sub-divided into ten patrilineal

---

Exogamous clans. The names of the clans are derived from the names of ten brothers, who are supposed to have been the fore-fathers of the Lepchas. These names are as follows:

1. Olongmu
2. Fukrumu
3. Gerlokmu
4. Songpumu or Momusong pumu
5. Yoksomu
6. Simbumu or Simukmu
7. Tamsangmu
8. Zeribumu or Eribumu
9. Itonmu

Besides the above clans, there are a few more sub-clans. The names of these sub-clans are as follows:

1. Kecherchurmu
2. Sabzam
3. Munchangmu
4. Simikmu
5. Sheripucha
6. Sumthgmu
7. Limbumu
8. Sumutmu.

The family among the Lepchas is patriarchal in nature. Generally monogamous types of family, i.e., one man and one wife, is found among the Lepchas. Polygamous types of family, are not met with among them. The earning member of the household is the husband and the wife has the duty to look after the domestic affairs of the family. The opinion of the mother is, however, respected by other members of the family.
Generally a Lepcha does not take a girl from his own clan. They can take a girl only from a different clan. A man of one clan cannot marry a girl within his own clan.

Marriage

Monogamy is the general practice in the society. Though polygamy also has social sanction, yet it is rarely practised among them. Marriage by negotiation is the general rule of the society where the groom has to serve with all sorts of manual labour and household duties in the bride's house for about three years. At present the Lepchas do not follow this custom any more. Marriage by love and elopement is also prevalent amongst the modern Lepchas. The Christian Lepchas do not follow the Adivasi's manners and customs regarding marriage and the Buddhist Lepchas maintain the old customs of their own tribe roughly.

Cases of child marriage are not found among the Lepchas. Widow re-marriage is also rarely found. Divorce may be effected by the husband or the wife when adultery is proved on the part of anyone of them. Prior approval has, however, to be taken from the village council in respect of divorce.

Like other tribes who still profess animism, the Lepchas too bury their dead. Christian Lepchas also bury the
dead body and practise the Christian religious rites. But the Buddhist Lepchas bury their dead in accordance with the religious creed of Buddhism in the centre of the house. On such occasion, the priest is called in, who chants certain prayers upon the body of the deceased. The dead body is then washed with hot water and dressed in new cloth.

The dead body may be preserved for a day or two for the relatives so that they may pay a last visit to their beloved, or till the advent of an auspicious time. Afterwards a bamboo bed is made and the dead body is placed upon it while the priests recite certain other prayers. Then some persons carry the dead body over their shoulders to the cremation ground or the burial ground.

After cremation or burial of the dead body, some other rites are performed by the priests. There is no hard and fast rule for the pollution period, and it may continue till the ashes are immersed. After the purification, the rite is over and the family becomes ceremonially pure. At the conclusion of the mourning some priests and relatives are invited and a feast is arranged.

Village Organisation

The Lepchas have their Panchayet, which is locally known as Panchas. The Panchayet is composed of elderly persons.
of the village. They sit together and take decisions in respect of minor disputes of the village which are usually amicably compromised by the Panchas. Cases of theft, robbery and murder are not generally found amongst these peace-loving people. Their village head man is known as Tassa of Paynyom. He may be illiterate but must be an intelligent and elderly person. They pay more respect to an illiterate old man than to a highly educated young man of the modern age.

They have some rules and norms which the members of the Society must abide by. The Tassa or Paynyom always consults other members of Panchas regarding all important matters in connexion with the village councils of this type are however non-existent in Tripura.

**Religious Life.**

The primitive Lepchas professed no particular religion. They believed that God is benevolent. They however, acknowledge the existence of good and evil spirits. The good spirit does not do any wrong whether anybody pay any homage to him or not. That is why they respectfully acknowledge the existence of good spirits. The trouble is with the evil spirits. All sickness, misfortunes and accidents are attributed to the evil spirits who are propitiated with necessary offerings.
The Lepchas believe that Ramdar is the Almighty being. He is the supreme. He is omnipotent. He does good to all people irrespective of any caste or creed. They further believe that they have come from the union of Forongthung and Nazong-Nyu who were brother and sister but lived like husband and wife in the Kunchen Jungtia. So they pay homage to Forongthung and Nazong-Nyu as god and goddess with reverence. They pay homage to Kunchenjungha as the chief elemental deity.

They further believe that there are two souls e.g. Apil and Mak-Nyam. Apil can live in the world but cannot go to the heaven or hell but Mak-Nyak has the capability of roaming about.

The Lepchas have a wide variety of tales and legends. They pay homage to the serpent king whom they call Mur-myobu. They think that their serpent king led the waters from Ta-lyada to Tong dek or the region underneath the earth.

After the advent of Tibetan Lama among them in Sikim some Lepchas were converted into Buddhism. This however did not free them from all their traditional beliefs in animism and also in evil spirits. But they practise the Buddhistic rites and rituals and they consider Lord Buddha as their Supreme Being.
Due to missionary efforts, some Lepchas have been converted into Christianity. Even though the Christian Lepchas have subscribed to the religion brought by the western people, survivals of primal beliefs still linger in their subconscious mind.

The Lepchas observe a number of festivals throughout the whole year. The important festivals observed by them may be enumerated as follows:

Rituals
(1) Mong Bree Meno (2) Mong Bree Josing
(3) Navang Gee (4) Khichari Mean (5) Cher Memo
(6) Chhu Chhu grum.

During these festivals, they worship the deities and sacrifice chickens, cocks and offer bananas, eggs and country liquor to the respective deities.

They also worship quite a variety of evil spirits. These are Songrong Mong, Dat Mong, Sumo Mong, Ma-zon, Shom Moongh Mamoo, Gabu Pano, Sunde Mong, Dent Mong, Ramdoo Mong, Ram-zon Pano, Tasu-Mong etc.

The Lepchas have a few functionaries who perform the rites and rituals connected with their religion.

(1) Bonthing: He is the priest who profess animistic religion. He performs animistic rites.
(2) Mon: - She is the female counterpart of Bongthing. She is also called Bonbous. She knows a few mantras and is approached for the treatment of diseases. She can also perform the duties of the Bongthing.

(3) Lama: - A monk according to Tibetan Buddhism is called Lama. He takes active part in the religious functions of the Buddhist Lepchas. The eldest male member of a family may become a Lama. Smoking is forbidden to the Lamas.

(4) Birjas: - He is a priest doctor. He professes mendicancy, transact with evil spirits and performs witchcraft.

The Lepchas have firm belief in Magic. They believe that evil is responsible for all sorts of accidents, sickness and other diseases etc. They believe in the art of magic and witchcraft which are effications in warding off of evils of all sorts.

The witch doctor i.e. the Boojas has a very important place in the Lepcha Society. Whenever a person is affected with some disease the particular priest is called in. He is asked to find out the cause of the disease. He is also requested to propitiate the particular spirit who has become angry and caused the disease.
To priests usually appease the evil spirits by reading incantations and sacrificing fowl, cock and offering egg and country liquor.

THE BHILS

Genesis and Settlement

It is very difficult to trace the origin of the word 'Bhil'. Numerous efforts have been made by the anthropologists to determine the origin of the word 'Bhil' but none could reach any definite conclusion.

Origin
It is commonly believed that their name has been derived from a Dravidian word for a bow which is the characteristic weapon of the Bhils.

Russell and Hiralal states, "the name Bhil seems to occur for the first time about A.D. 600. It is supposed to be derived from the Dravidian word for a bow, which is the characteristic weapon of the tribe. It has been suggested that the Bhils are the Pygmies referred to by Ktesias (400 B.C) and the Phyllite of Ptolemy (A.D. 150). The Bhils are recognised as the oldest inhabitants of Southern Rajaputana and parts of Gujrat, and are usually spoken of in conjunction with Kolis". 123

Venkatachar opines that the Bhils are a pre-Dravidian race and some other scholars think that the Bhils are Proto-Mediterranean in origin.

Ranvir Prakash, a scholar writing about Tribal Economy in Central India, thought that the Dravidians were a Mediterranean race who had migrated to India through the South West and had made movements towards the South. He states in this connection it would be reasonable to suppose that Gujrat was on the way of immigrant Dravidians in their march towards the Deccan and the South.

Owing to their close contact with the Rajputs, the traditional beliefs and cultural traits of the Rajputs had come to be mixed up with those of the Bhils. In course of time the Bhils made matrimonial relationship with the Rajputs and began to borrow the rites, rituals, social behaviours, customs of the Rajputs. This had resulted in the growth of different sub-tribes of the Bhils such as the Bhilalas, Patilas etc. The sub tribes Ujle (pure) and Mele (impure) however do not intermarry. Russell and Hiralal authorities on Tribal peoples of Central India state thus regarding the home of the Bhils "The home of Bhils is the country comprised in the hill ranges of Khandesh, central India and Rajputana, West from the Satpuras to the sea in Gujrat".

---

124 As quoted by Ranvir Prakash Saxena in his Tribal Economy in Central India p.12 from census of India, 1931-Central Indian agency, Report p.239.

125 Russell, R.V. and Hiralal, Rai Bahadur, The Tribes and castes of the Central Provinces of India p.278.
In course of time the Bhils were compelled to migrate to the central high lands and made their abodes in the remote interior of the hills and also difficult regions thereof where they ultimately had to make their abodes and continued to live peacefully.

In India, the Bhils form the third largest group of tribes, after the Gonds and the Santals. They are now found spread over the Central uplands of the Indian peninsula.

The Bhils constitute one of the migrant tribes who came to Tripura in the recent past as tea garden labourers like such other tribal people as the Santals etc. The number of Bhils in Tripura is, however, quite few. They have settled down in different parts of the territory taking various jobs. According to census reports, the number of Bhils was only 41 in 1951 and the number stands as 169 according to the census of 1971.

The concentrations of the Bhils are to be found in the subdivisions of Kamalpur (51), Dharianagar (51) and Belonia (67) according to the census of 1971.
General Characteristics

According to 1971 census the Bhils numerically stand the seventeenth among the nineteen recognised tribes of the State of Tripura. The Bhil population is 169 comprising 112 males and 57 females. This shows an increase of about 144.93% over the population of 1961. The break up of this number from the point of literacy may be of interest. According to the census of 1971, the Bhils are distributed as 24 literates and 145 illiterates.

The Bhils call upon their friends and neighbours to help them in repairing their houses. This practice works, because due to the joint efforts, the work is finished in good time. In economic activities, where the entire village is involved, the Panchayet is supreme and absolute. None can go against the rules of this Panchayat usually there is never a clash between two families of the village. Generally the Bhils observe exogamy and have all the emotional attitudes connected with it.

The growth of population among the Bhils may be tabulated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total tribal population</th>
<th>Population of the tribe</th>
<th>Percentage of the Bhils to total tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>237,958</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>360,070</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>450,544</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Bhils have fairly well-developed bodies. Their complexion is generally brown. Some Bhils are found to be of fair complexion. They have attractive faces, long heads, broad massive jaws, broad foreheads, leptorrhine nose and thin lips. The Bhil dons a moustache and shaves his beard. Bhil women are fair and gracefully build. In anthropological classification the Bhills are placed under pre-Dravidian racial group.

The staple food of the Bhil is jowar (Sorghum vulgate) and makka (seamays) but in Tripura they are accustomed to eating rice. Bread is taken with salt and chillies. They also eat fruits with bread. They also eat meat. In times of distress they eat different kinds of leaves, roots and tubers after boiling. To the agriculturist Bhil, the food consists of whatever he produces in his field.

When a Bhil works in the field or forest or when he resides at home, he generally wears a lenghot which only covers the reproductive organ leaving the other parts exposed. When he visits the market, he wraps a picholi (a piece of long cloth) round the waist which does not go below the knee and wears a
colourful collarless coat known as Jhuldi and a short turban known as Paghadi. A Bhil woman wears a skirt known as the ghagra. This ghagra is folded in front and passed between the legs and fixed at the back leaving major part of the thighs open. The breasts are covered with a short kanchil with open back. An orhna is fixed on the head. Generally a married girl puts on an orhna. The children below the age of five or six usually move about naked.

The Bhil dialects form a continuous chain between Rajasthani and Gujarati and Khandeshi and Marathi. Hutton says that the Bhil has no Indo-Aryan tongue and opines that most likely, it replaced an old Dravidian tongue. Thompson says that about six per cent of Bhil words are Non-Aryans. Dr. Grierson observes in this connection as follows:

"Whatever their (Bhil's) original speech may have been, there can be no doubt that at present day they speak an Aryan dialect closely related to Gujarati and Rajasthani." Bhil language is overladden with Gujarati and to some extent Marathi words.

Here is reproduced some words out of their dialect:-

Water - Poni  
Devil - Bhut  

Wife - Bairi  
Cow - Tahi  

Bird - Pakhi  
Go - Ja  

Star - Taro  
God - Bhagwan  

What is your name ? - Tamaru hu nam ?  
Walk before me - May more hed.  

Social Organisation  

There are thirty sub-tribes among the Bhils.  
Some territorial tribes are named after a particular 
village or a place to which the 
sub-tribes may be enumerated as follows :-

(1) Ambuda  (2) Arthi  (3) Chopadsa  (4) Dedria  
(5) Dendia  (6) Dogaria  (7) Godsa  (8) Hemalkhodya  
(9) Henglya  (10) Hogaisa  (11) Jamansa  (12) Janglu  
(13) Kathisa  (14) Khorgya  (15) Kooriji  (16) Kotin  
(17) Malsa  (18) Mathwadia  (19) Moakhya  (20) Mokhdya  
(21) Nalwasa  (22) Olnibar  (23) Padvi  (24) Pankholyo  
(25) Rajbarya  (26) Rawot  (27) Soksa  (28) Tankhodya  
(29) Tannasa  (30) Tirya  (31) Vadsa  (32) Vavsa  
(33) Nandariwala  (34) Vegusa  (35) Vodgama  (36) Volvi.
The family of the Bhils is known as Vaisilu. It consists of a man, his wife and his children. The father is the head of the family and is the master of the household. The mother has also a position of importance. She is the backbone of the family. The father gets the children married. Property is divided amongst the brothers. Regarding the family among the Bhils Russell and Hiralal observed this, "A man must not marry in his own sept nor in the families of his mothers and grandmothers. The union of first cousins is thus prohibited, nor can girls be exchanged in marriage between two families. A wife's sister may also not be married during the wife's life time".128

The Bhils can not marry in their own clan nor are they allowed to marry any other than a member of their own tribe. So the Bhils are endogamous while the clan is exogamous. Adult marriage is found as a rule among the Bhils. Several types of marriages are found amongst them. The most popular marriage amongst the Bhils is known as Lagan, Mandwa and Lugda-ladi. The former is a Hinduised form of religious marriage where two parties meet at the house of the bride and chalk out the details of bride's price. The latter type is known as

128 Russel, R.V.; and Hiralal, Rai Bahadur,; The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India, p.287.
an abbreviated form of the conventional marriage where bride's price is negotiated as in the orthodox form. The other type of marriage is Ashharana or Uchajana. It is known as marriage by intrusion or marriage by love. The girl enters the house of the would-be husband by the back door and silently starts doing the works of the household. The other type of marriage is Bhaga Karlejana or marriage by abduction or capture. This type of marriage takes place after elopement with mutual consent. When a Bhil has a daughter, he prefers to keep his son-in-law in his own house with the consent of the son-in-law's father. This type of marriage is known as Gharjamai or matrilocal marriage.

Child marriage is prevalent among the rich Bhils. Widow re-marriage is called at Natra. The widows are not allowed to take the children by her previous husband to her new house. Divorce is prevalent among the Bhils and rather may be considered common.

The mode of disposal of dead among the Bhils is by cremation. In case of dead from leprosy, pox and snake-bite, the bodies are buried. The dead bodies of young babies are generally disposed of by burial.
Like other aborigines, the Bhils also observe certain rites associated with death. When the performances of such rites are over, the dead body is brought to the cremation ground. A pyre is prepared and the deceased is placed lying on the back with its head southward. The son has to set fire in the mouth of the deceased. In the absence of a son, the job has to be performed by some near male relation of the deceased.

The unburnt bones of the dead are collected after cremation and kept in an earthen pot and finally bones are buried near the house.

They also place various offerings in the name of the dead. On the third day after the cremation, they place on the cremation ground oblations consisting of bread, water, country liquor and tobacco etc. After the pollution period of eleven days, the purification is solemnised. To pacify the dead, the Bhils give a feast known as 'Nuktas'.

**Village Organisation**

The village acts as a unit in respect of many activities of the tribes. The Bhils have Panchayets which are formed of different categories of the personnel. The
personnels are as follows :-

(1) Vasawo - the Headman, (2) Punjaro - the priest of the Pujas (3) Madvi or Badvo - the witch doctor (4) Badhan - the minister, (5) Vartanioor kotwal - touring assistant and messenger (6) Gori - grazing cattle. (7) Dumaldhar - a sort of a zaminder of the village.

The vasawo is the headman of the village. His office is hereditary and for generations the office may be held by a particular family. When a Vasawo dies, his eldest son succeeds to the Vasawo ship. Again when some puja to the gods are to be held on holydays the Punjaro performs the puja and recites the prayer. Madvi or Badvo is the priest of the Bhil theology and mythology. He is also a doctor capable of talking all witches and evil spirits. The Pradhan is the second pillar of the village of the Bhils. The Pradhan has a hereditary office. He is the authority of minor affairs of the village. The Vartanio or Kotwal carries the commands of the Vasawo and conveys the messages of the village. His office is also hereditary. The Gori has to graze cattle and in return some remuneration is given to him. He is an untouchable. The Dumaldhar has to collect rent from the village people. His services are utilised in times of war and in killing ferocious animals etc.
All the old men of the village meet at the village Panchayet and help the personnel of the same in all matters. The Panchayet exerts its influence over the people of its jurisdiction in cases of disputes between persons of either sex involved in assault, conflict in respect of lands, disputes on the occasion of marriage and breach of any norms and rules of the village.

**Religious Life**

Judging from their religious beliefs, the Bhils by and large, may be called Animists. But a close contact with the Hindus has resulted in their adoption of many Hindu gods and goddesses. Though they have borrowed Hindu gods and goddess yet the Brahmin, the priest of the Hindus is not paid any special respect by the Bhils. They have their own priests known as Badwa, Punjaro and Kotwal.

Though the Bhils have been in long contact with the Hindus and despite of their preference for the Hindu gods and goddesses their mental attitude has remained essentially animistic.

The Bhils believe in the existence of evil spirits, which are believed to live in trees, rocks and hills.
The spirits are capable of doing both cruel and beneficient acts. The Bhils pay homage to the high hills as being the abodes of evil spirits which must be propitiated during sickness and drought or any other calamities. In this connexion, Russell and Hiralal state, "They (The Bhils) wear charms and amulets to keep off evil spirits, the charms are generally pieces of blue string with seven knots in them, which their witch finder or Badwa ties, reciting an incantation on each; the knot were sometimes covered with metal to keep them undefiled and the charms were tied on at the Holi, Dasahra and some other festival." 129

The Bhils believe that Fakirs (Muslim mendicants) are expert in magic. So they worship tombs of the muslim saints. Respect paid to muslim Saints is common feature of the Bhil tradition.

Like other hill tribes, the Bhils are also found greatly influenced by superstitious beliefs. These superstitions are manifested in their rites, rituals and social behaviours. They do not build temples for their gods and goddesses as done by the Hindus. On the contrary, they fix up a separate piece of land for a particular worship.

129 Russell, R.V. and Hiralal Rai Bahadur.: The Tribes and castes of the Central provinces of India p. 290.
The Bhils have numerous traditional deities of which the following are the most important.

(1) Babadeo - He is the supreme deity of the Bhils. He is the village tutelary deity. This deity is worshipped for the welfare of the village and its inhabitants. He is called Baradeo.

(2) Dungarya dev - He is a Hill god
(3) Shivarya dev - He is a Boundary god.
(4) Wagh dev - He is a Tiger god
(5) Nag dev - He is a Serpent god

Besides the worship of the above deities they also worship deities called Mhasoba, Khandoba, Rahioba, Mari, Asra and Moon etc.

They also have borrowed some of the Hindu gods and goddesses. Such gods worshipped by the Bhils are Mahadeva, Ganesa and Kali.

They sacrifice fowls, goats, buffaloes and offer eggs, fruits and country liquor to the deities at the time of worship.
They have also adopted various Hindu festivals. They observe Holi as their chief festival. During this function, they dance, sing and drink.

They also observe Dassera and Diwali which are borrowed from the Hindus.

The Bhils have three kinds of priests who worship the various deities.

(1) Badwa: He is the chief priest of the Bhils. He has a vast knowledge of magical formulas which are required in healing the sick.

(2) Pujaaro: He enjoys a second place among the priests of the Bhils. He known some incantations which are required for the treatment of diseases.

(3) Kotwal: He is the third intermediary between the Bhils and the spirits. If any Bhil dies, all the functions are performed by the Kotwal.
The belief in magic and witchcraft amongst the Bhils is widespread. If anybody is attacked with any disease without any clear cause, the priest is asked to exercise the spirit. The priest finds out the cause of the disease and names the particular evil influence which is at work.

Their belief in evil spirits and witchcrafts and the deterrent power against such spirits held by the witch doctors guide many of the social practices of the Bhils. They also believe that leprosy and madness occur owing to the following deeds of the individuals, namely:-(1) to giving of false evidence (2) stealing of any articles, (3) indulgence in incest.

The Bhils take recourse to magic in order to deal with the evil spirits through some rites and rituals. These rites are to be performed by the Badwa and Puajaro. They are specialists in the art of magic and witchcraft. The Badwa has his special formulae for dealing with the evil spirits by magical practices.