CHAPTER – 2
GEOGRAPHY, VEGETATION, CLIMATE
AND PEOPLE OF TRIPURA
In total, Tripura is the land of Bengali, Manipuri, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and 19 tribes. Constitutionally the tribal communities of Tripura are numerated to be 19. Out of the 19 tribes, only the Tripuris are found to be inhabited all over the state. The Tripuri community is divided into two groups, viz, the old (puran) and the new (Nutan or Noatia). Though the former is taken to be separate ethnic group by many writers, the Noatia...
community belongs to puran Tripura group. The close proximity of socio-cultural traits of
the old and new affirms that then belong to same stock. Other than Tripuris the rest are not
found to live all over the area of the state. The main tribal groups of the state are Tripuri
(Hindu by religion), Nutan Tripuri (Hindu by religion), Jamatia (Hindu by religion), Reangs
(Hindu, but now a greater section comprises Christian converts), Chakmas (Buddhist by
religion), Halams (Christian converts), Garos (Christian converts), Kukis (Christian
converts), Lushais (Christian converts), Moghs (Buddhist), Munda (Hindu by origin, now
embraced christianity), Oraons (originally animist, now embraced Christianity), Santals
(Hindu), and Uchais (Originally Hindu).112

Rabindranath Tagore on his visit gave vent to his feelings saying “-------------- the
wood of Tripura have sent out invitation to their floral through their courier of the south
wind and I have come here as friend ------------” The state of Tripura a land locked hilly
state in the North Eastern India is surrounded on the North, West and South by Bangladesh.
It is accessible to the rest of the country only through the Karimganj district of Assam and
Aizawl district of Mizoram. In a beautiful climatic condition (Temperature : summer-max.
36.6°C, min.17.9°C, winter max . 28.9°C, min 7.7°C and average annual Rain fall – 2100
mm., where highest rain fall – 2855 mm. recorded at Kamalpur & lowest – 1811 mm. at
Sonamura) Tripura welcomes the rest of the world with its population of 31,91,203 (2001
census: Male-16,42,225 and Female-15,56,978)with the density per square kilometer – 305
persons. Sixty percent of the total area is covered by hills and forests, pollution free
ecofriendly environment and pleasant weather of this panoramic tiny state is inhabited
largely by 19 tribes, Bengali and Manipuri etc. communities. There are four seasons in the
state, viz., Summer, Rain, Winter, Spring. The Monsoon generally begins around April and
continues up to August or September. The estimated population (1st October, 2006) as published in the Diary of Govt. of Tripura is 34,32,000 (Male- 17,59,000 and Female- 16,73,000). The state extends between 22°56' and 24°32’ N latitudes and 90°09’ and 92°10’E longitudes. Its maximum stretch measures about 184 km. from North to South and about 113 km. from East to West. With an area of 10,492 sq.km. or 0.32% of the total geographical area of India, Tripura is the third smallest state of the country. It has an international land frontier with Bangladesh of about 839 km., which constitutes nearly 84% of the total perimeter of the state. On the other hand, the land frontier with Karimganj district of Assam is only 53 km. and that with Mizoram is 109 km. Administratively, the state is divided into four districts and further in 14 sub-divisions. The Districts are Dhalai, North Tripura, South Tripura and West Tripura. The headquarters of these four districts are Ambasa, Kailashahar, Udaipur and Agartala respectively. With an area about 2,997 sq km. the West Tripura is the largest of the state.113,114

Tripura has a long historic past, a unique tribal culture and a fascinating folk-lore. The history of Tripura can be studied from the Rajmala chronicles of the Tripura kings and writings of other Mohammedan historians. There are references of Tripura even in Mahabharata and Purans. The origin of the name Tripura is a highly debated issue. According to Rajmala, Tripura was once ruled by king Tripur after whom the state has been named. This opinion has been challenged by many historians and scholars as well. They claim that the king Tripura was an imaginary figure and no historical basis can be ascribed to this fact. Some writers have observed that the name Tripura derives from the Goddess Tripura sundari- the presiding deity of the land. Hunter in his book- “A statistical account of Bengal” – observed that the name Tripura was probably given to the state in honour of
the temple at Udaipur which was dedicated either to Tripuradana, “The sungod”, or to Tripureswari, “the mistress of the three worlds.” The idea has also been supported by Browne. But this appears to be incorrect in the sense that the state had been known as Tripura even before the installation of the deity which occurred during the rule of Maharaja Dhanyamanikya in the first half of the sixteenth century. Another opinion is that the name Tripura originated from the two words “Tui” meaning water and “pra” meaning near. Together it conveys the meaning of Tripura as a land adjoining the water. This version seems to be relevant as the hill people of Tripura still call the state as Tipra and not Tripura. Some scholars hold the opinion that the name Tripura was a Sanskritised version of Tripura a hill tribe to whom the then ruling family belonged.\(^{115}\)

The history of Tripura dates back to the Mahabharata, the Purans and pillar inscription of emperor Ashoka. There are no historical records available of Tripura except Rajmala which is the chronicle history of the rulers of Tripura. According to it, early rulers were known by the surname “Fa” meaning “father”. There is a reference of rulers of Bengal helping Tripura kings in the fourteenth century. Kings of Tripura had to face frequent Mughal invasions with varying successes. They defeated the Mohammedan sultans of Bengal in several battles. The nineteenth century marked the beginning of the modern era in Tripura when king Maharaja Birchandra Manikya Bahadur modeled his administrative set-up on the British India pattern and brought in various reforms. His successor ruled over Tripura till 1947 when it was annexed to the Indian Union on August 13, 1947 though the final integration was effected on October 13, 1947 as a part of “C” category state. The Tripura Territorial Council, a body of elected representatives of the people was first formed on August 15, 1957 under the provision of the Territorial Act, 1956, Tripura became a
centrally administered Union Territory of India on 1st July 1963 and on the 21st January, 1972, it attained the states of a full fledged state and Late Sri Shachindra Lal Singh was the first Chief Minister of the state.\textsuperscript{114}

The magnitude of the interest in studying the art and practice of using forest products in day to day affairs of the tribal communities may be transpired if we look at the recent trends and developments in “Ethnobotany” or “Ethnobiology”. In other words, the roots, tubers and leaves discovered and used by the traditional societies are now appearing as the effective sources of food for growing population and also proving to be an important source of potentially therapeutic drugs. Thus, the ‘Ethnobotanical approach’ strongly suggests to ‘study the relationship between plants and people’.\textsuperscript{3}

The agricultural production during the 2005-2006 as per data presented in the Diary(2007) of Govt. of Tripura, was recorded as Rice- 6,07,780 mt., Wheat- 5,259 mt., Sugar cane- 50,420 mt., Cotton- 1,610 Bale(= 170 kg), Jute- 5,410 Bale(= 180 kg), Mesta- 8,522 Bale(= 180 kg), Pulses- 5,608 mt, total Oil seed- 1,990 mt, Potato- 66,471 mt, Mango- 12,340 mt, Pineapple- 1,06,406 mt, Orange- 18,150 mt, Jackfruit- 2,56,280 mt, Coconut- 2997 mt, Summer vegetable- 1,43,241 mt and other Winter vegetables- 1,45,912 mt. Cropping intensity was 176.6% and Jhum productivity 996 kg/ha. Total forest area was reported 6,294.3 sq. km.

Available evidences suggests that, besides other, plenty of potential jhum land and abundant forest resources of Tripura had been the major causes of migratory flows of tribal population here. Since then, the forest areas of Tripura have been occupied and dominated by its different tribal communities. Their dependence on forest was not only due to the fact that their jhum fields were with in the areas of forest land but the early people lived in that
dense forest and survived by the complementarily of the forest. Moreover, forest in the life of the tribal people has been performing a more pervasive role. Their social and cultural ways of life also turn round the forest with intense emotional attachment and strong feelings of ownership over forest.³

It requires no mention that sizeable number of the tribals have been practicing jhum as the major economic activity in their way of life. But jhum produces fail to meet their needs throughout the year. Even pastoral activity do not contribute much to meet the shortfall of the jhum cultivation. The average annual income of the tribal jhumias on the whole is very low which hardly can provide even a meager subsistence to the extent of keeping body and soul together. As a result they are and have been dependant upon forest and gathering forest resources to supplement their livelihood throughout the year in general and during lean months of the year in particular. In other words, perhaps low economic return have been compelling the large number of tribals since the early times to use forest products as their food. As a result, many of them are still continuing fully or partially, for a long, in this primitive state of way of living where except jhuming and gathering from forest no other technology prevails as such.³

Extraction of forest products that fulfill the multifarious requirements of the ethnic people along with their demand for food depends mostly on the types of forest available to them. According to the geographical distribution of plants, the forest occupied territory of Tripura can mainly be divided into evergreen forest and moist deciduous forest. Moist deciduous forest can again be subdivided into moist deciduous Sal forest and moist deciduous mixed forest, characterized by the presence or absence of Sal tree respectively. But there are also patches of grasslands, swamp vegetation, riverine forest, bamboo and
garjan forests scattered all over the state. All these vegetations have come under either Seral or Edaphic forests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Climatic Types</th>
<th>Seral Types</th>
<th>Subsidary Edaphic Types</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Evergreen Forest</td>
<td>1. Swamp vegetation</td>
<td>1. Bamboo forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Moist deciduous forest</td>
<td>2. Riverine forests</td>
<td>2. Cane brakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Sal</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Garjan forest</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Mixed</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Grassland</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Savannah</td>
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Forest types and different subdivisions, where they are found:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of the forest</th>
<th>Areas of the state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evergreen forests</td>
<td>Dharmanagar and Kailasahar sub-divisions, Jampui ranges bordering the Mizo district, portions of Belonia and Subroom sub-divisions, a portion of Sadar sub-division including Teliamura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moist deciduous Sal forest</td>
<td>Belonia, Udaipur, Sonamura and Sadar sub-divisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moist deciduous mixed forest</td>
<td>It covers large areas in Sadar, Amarpur, Sonamura, Udaipur sub-divisions and in places where depletion of evergreen forest has occurred</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sixty percent of total area of Tripura is Hilly terrain, 60% Forest, 52.76% Forest cover, 39% Reserve forest, 25% Net Shown area, Irrigation 13% of Cropped area. Reserved forest works out 3588.183 km², unclassified Government forest is 2195.473 km², while proposed reserved forest is 509.025 km², Thus the total forest area is 6292.618 km² in the whole state. As availability of the forest produces, as it has been already mentioned, depends upon the types of the vegetation, therefore, the habit of the use of forest resources is determined by the abundance of resources from forest where tribals are inhabiting. It appears from the table that, on the whole, Tripura is not under a mono type forest and thus, the same type of forest resources are not available all over the state. Because of continual shifting cultivation in the major areas of forest of Tripura ‘the climax forest of the jhum areas have been disappeared’ and, consequently the useful food plants also might have suffered damage. Moreover, the successive jhuming operation has ‘resulted in formation of vast expanses of bamboo forest’. These bamboo jungles in fact represent the large share in supplementing the foods of the tribals. Now, the question is ‘who knows what will come after bamboo forest’ for supplementing the food requirement if wanton destruction of forest accompanied by cleaning by bamboo jungle for jhum continues. This question perhaps poses when ‘symbiotic relationship’ that exists between man and forest erodes and it is forgotten that ‘forest is a community or a society of a living beings, of which tree is the biggest. There are big trees, small trees of different species, bushes, grasses, herbs, insects, birds and animals – all members of this big family, each dependant on the other. Forest people, of course, one of them’.

**Major Hill ranges:** Tripura comprises picturesque hills, green valleys with the symphony of splashing water and dense forests. The mountain mass that has beautified the landscape
of the state thrusts South from the Eastern Himalayan region of Asia between the Brahmaputra and the Chindwin – Irawady river systems. The hills of Tripura rise in a succession of ranges running mainly from the North to the South, each successive ridge to the East rising higher as the spur approaches the main mountain mass. Five major and two minor ranges of hills all around from North-West to South-East and separated from each other by beautiful valleys make the hilly terrain of Tripura. The major hill ranges from West to the East are: Boramura, Atharomura, Longtorai, Sakhantang, Jampui. The highest peak of the state is Betalangshiv, Which is about 3600 ft. succession of Jampui hill range.

**Major Tributaries of Tripura:** Tripura is full of rivers, tributaries and streams. Most of the places, areas or villages are named after rivers and tributaries. Some of the important rivers of the state are the Gumot, the Khowai, the Manu, the Haorah and the Mohuri. Many myths, legends and folk tales also surrounded by these rivers. Among these, the Gumot is the biggest river and considered as the most sacred by the people of Tripura. It is considered to be as holy as Ganga of North India.