

Preface

I developed an interest in tribal studies when I was a student of anthropology in the University of North Bengal in the early eighties. I thought of studying a relatively unknown tribe in Tripura since that was incidentally my home state. From the little information that was available on the tribes of Tripura I got to know that the Molsoms were one of the erstwhile *jhumia* tribes and the members of this tribe were taking to settled cultivation fast. This was one of the tribes which was in close interaction with the non-tribals in the plains of Tripura at the economic, social, cultural, and political fields, and I thought it would constitute a good research problem to do an explorative, ethnographic study of the social and cultural life of the Molsoms and the changes they were experiencing. In 1987 I joined the tribal welfare department of the state in the month of September as an official (Junior Research Officer). And after that my relationship with the Molsoms no longer remained that of a subject-object relationship. I had to draw an insight of the tribal life and their mind-set in order to frame policies and implement them to resolve some of their social problems. I could not but feel concerned about their hardships, their backwardness, and problems. My role thus turned out to be like that of a participant researcher. This means I had to interfere in mobilising them for the sake of successful implementation of the development policies meant for them.

I began my study in the middle of the eighties and it took me about 15 years to complete this project. This inordinate delay demands an explanation. In the later part of the eighties the tribal insurgency was

intensified in the state and it was highly risky to venture into the tribal bastions in the remote areas of the state. I therefore had to wait for long years to complete the remaining part of my fieldwork. Secondly, following the conditions of my service I was not able to manage enough time to sit down and concentrate in writing the thesis. Thirdly, I was badly entangled in sorting out some of my critical family problems which took my concentration away from the present work. Inspite of this long delay I have tried to update the information used in this thesis and, I am sure, it will not sound outdated.

At every stage of the present study I received help and cooperation from many persons some of whom deserve special mention. Prof. Sharit Bhowmik of Bombay University, who happened to be my teacher at North Bengal University, provided the initial impetus for undertaking the present study. I express my deep sense of gratitude to him. Dr. Sanjay K. Roy, Head, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of North Bengal, my Supervisor, helped me with his valuable suggestions and encouragement. Discussions on the subject with him have encouraged me to include many of my experiences and data in this dissertation which I would have ignored otherwise. I convey my gratitude and sincere thanks to Dr. Roy without whose guidance it would not have been possible to complete this work.

I am thankful to Mrs. Maitridipa Roy for her encouragement, hospitality and cooperation she had extended during my long stay at their residence at the North Bengal University campus while finalising the dissertation for submission.

I am grateful to my father Sri Rameshchandra Sen, my mother Smt. Usharani and my younger brother Sri Ranendranarayan Sen for their constant encouragement, inspiration and cooperation. As a matter of fact, it would not have been possible to complete this study had not my 86 years old father taken the economic management of our family with his

pension money during my leave period when I was without pay from my service.

I would like to convey my deep gratitude to late Dasharath Dev, the then Chief Minister of Tripura, for his encouragement and kin interest that he had taken in my study. Sri Baidyanath Mazumder, Ex Deputy Chief Minister, Sri Manik Sarkar, the present Chief Minister and Sri Anil Sarkar, the Education Minister of Tripura, have always inspired me in carrying out the present study with all seriousness. I convey my sincere gratitude to all of them.

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While working with the computer I often landed into some complicated problems which could not have been sorted out without the generous and skillful help of ever smiling Shri Jyotsna Kr. Mondal, the Head of the Department of Computer Science and Application, North Bengal University. Shri Mondal has also helped a great deal in getting the photographs scanned. I shall ever remain thankful to him.

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Molsom Bari deserve special thanks for their company in establishing a good rapport with the villagers and for their patient interpretations of symbols attached to Molsom culture.

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