

CHAPTER - XII

THE AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL AND THE REACTION OF THE TRIBALS

The State of Tripura was a princely state prior to its integration with India in 1949. As the tiny state lies just contiguous to the then East Pakistan, the state was almost swamped by Bengali Refugees. Both economically and culturally, the tribal people of the state of Tripura are much weaker and backward as compared with the people belonging to Bengali community. Realising that the continued influx of the Bengalees in Tripura might jeopardise the interest of the tribals, Maharaja, as early as in 1943 A.D. passed a Tribal Reserve Order demarcating an area of about 1950 sq. miles as Tribal Reserve Areas for the tribal people. In this context justice Ibotombi Singh points out -

1. "The order was more violated than observed the tribal people of Tripura raised their voice & in defence of maintaining tribal compact areas as Tribal Reserve and demand was pressed from time to time".¹

In 1960 the then Chief Commissioner of Tripura suggested the Dhebar Commission which was set up to go into

1. Judgement of the Case Autonomous District Council, Gauhati High Court, Agartala Bench, Civil Rule No. 66/1979.

the problems of tribal people of India for demarcating reserve area for the tribals of Tripura which might be brought under the 5th Schedule to the Constitution. Dhebar Commission, however recommended formation of Tribal Development Blocks in such tribal compact area on an experimental basis in the first instant and if it was not workable 5th Schedule might be tried. The Administrative Reforms Commission under Shri K. Hanumanthiya also examined the questions of reservation of tribal compact areas in the interest of tribal minority. It also suggested that it might be possible to demarcate a tribal compact area and to have a council established in the states like Manipur and Tripura with limited power in their hands. The policy was not implemented. Meanwhile, lakhs of Bengalee refugees entered the state unabated.

Some measures were taken to ameliorate the conditions of the tribals. Provisions were made in the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act 1960 and subsequent amendment in 1974 prohibiting alienation of lands to the non-tribals but they were non-effective.

Two features of these measures caused dissatisfaction. First, the choice of the end of 1968 as the cut-off point, this virtually legalised transfers that had taken place before 1.1.1969. Secondly, the progress of restoration has been

lamentably tardy. It received some impetus when the Communist Government assumed in office in 1978 but has again languished thereafter. Out of nearly 100000 petitions received only 4300 had been disposed of in the petitioners' favour and just 7700 acres of land had been actually restored upto 31.3.1980.

The law requiring the restoration of alienated land creates another problem. It leads to the dispossession of a number of non-tribal peasants (including Bengali Scheduled Castes) who have cultivated these lands for many years after they were uprooted in East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh). This second uprooting is bound to cause resentment and hardship.

A major bone of contention relates to the tribals' desire for a greater share in their own governance. The Left Front Government of Tripura which promised such an autonomous council was keen to create such council. The state Assembly passed the autonomous district council Act 1979, which provided practically all the safeguards and powers to the tribal communities of the State as would have been available under Schedule VI.

The powers of the District Council are given in (31) of the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council Act 1979.²

2. The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Act 1979. Tripura Act No. 12 of 1979, Tripura Government, pp. 3-13.

Some important powers are given below :-

- (a) The allotment, occupation or use or the set apart of land, other than any land which is a reserved forest or used for the purpose of agriculture or grazing or for any other purposes likely to promote the interest of the inhabitants of any village, locality or town.
- (b) The management of any forest not being a reserved forest.
- (c) The use of any canal or water course for the purpose of agriculture.
- (d) The regulation of the practice of joom or other forms of shifting cultivation.
- (e) The village or town committees or council.
- (f) Any other matters relating to village or town administration including village or town police and public health and sanitation.

The Council has power to make bye laws regarding -

- (1) inheritance of property of persons belonging to Scheduled Tribes.
- (ii) Marriage and divorce where any of the parties to the marriage belongs to scheduled tribes.
- (iii) Social customs of people belonging to scheduled tribes.

It has also power to establish primary schools and "may prescribe the language and the manner in which primary education shall be imparted in the primary school in the District".

Powers were given to the District Council to make regulation for the control of money lending and trading by non-tribals.

"35(1) The District Council may make regulation for the regulation and control of money lending or trading within the District.

(2) In particular and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing power, such regulations may -

(a) prescribe that no one except the holder of a licence issued in that behalf shall carry on the business of money lending,

(b) prescribe the maximum rate of interest which may be charged or be recovered by a money lender,

(c) provide for the maintenance of accounts by money lenders and the inspection of such accounts by officers appointed in that behalf by the District Council,

(d) prescribe that no persons who is not a member or scheduled tribe resident in the district shall carry on wholesale or retail business in any commodity except under a licence issued in that behalf by the District Council".

Autonomous District Council comprising a compact tribal area where the population is predominantly tribal. In 462 moujas included within the tribal areas a specified in the first schedule to the Act, the population of the tribal would be about 71.37 percent of the total population.

Bengali population raised various objection to this proposal.³

1) Tripura's 3/4th land area shall remain reserved for 1/4th of the population and 1/4th of land area will be reserved for 3/4th of the population

(ii) If this Council comes into effect the tribal area will remain intact and it would be possible to tract from Dharmanagar to Sabroon. But the areas outside the tribal zone will be separate and not connected. Places like Dharmanagar, Kailasahar, Kamalpur, Khowai, Amarpur and Sabroon will remain unconnected with Agartala, the Capital .

(iii) The non-tribals will be second grade citizens because they cannot buy any tribal land, will surrender all land bought from the tribals and cannot do any trade in the Tribal District.

3. A application under Article 226 of the constitution of India for the issue of writ or writs for declaration of the Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council Act 1979, as unconstitutional and void civil rule 66/1979.

Amra Bangali and another - Petitioner
State of Tripura and others - Respondent.

Fearing that the creation of the Tribal District Council would irrevocably divide the state on communal lines, especially of the non-tribals living within the jurisdiction of the proposed District Council, the non-tribals, opposed the new legislation. They contended that tribal uplift could better be achieved without these measures. They challenged the Act in the Gauhati High Court.

In the writ petition against Autonomous District Council, Sri Copal Chandra Das argued the following :⁴

"That the said act will do more harm to the tribal people of Tripura, apart from creating avoidable tensions in the minds of non-tribal population. Not only that the bulk of population of Tripura belongs to the category of rural poor living far below the poverty line and the attempt to create a dichotomy between the tribals and non-tribals or ethnic lines as representing two antagonistic interests, smacks of narrow and partisan outlook which is incompatible with the tradition, culture and history of the people of Tripura."

The petition further notes "that traceable history of the people of Tripura establishes its glorious past of a peaceful life in perfect harmony of tribal and non-tribal population and at no point of time they ever entertained and/or exhibited any parochial sentiment to create an impression that the interests of tribal and non-tribal population are mutually exclusive to the extent of being antagonistic".

The petitioner blames communists and imperialists for such a design. A long quotation is extracted from the petition to show the nature of sentiment among a section of Bengali-speaking population.

"That your petitioner is constrained to submit that irresponsible utterances by some of their senior leaders of C.P.I. (M) which is the ruling party in Tripura to-day, including some of its Ministers, alleging that the very existence of the tribals was at stake due to influx of Bengali refugees from across the border have had harmful implication in as much as they tended to create impressions that interests of tribal and non-tribal population are mutually exclusive to the extent of being antagonistic. Your petitioner is alarmed at such uncontrolled articulation of parochial sentiments which are bound to produce adverse reactions in the mind of non-tribal population, the over-whelming majority of whom are admittedly poor and remain yet to be rehabilitated properly.

That in view of enactments of the said Act your petitioner has grave misgivings that taking advantage of the majority in the State Assembly, the said C.P.I. (M) is known to vitiate the process of legislation to further the partisan aims of the

4. Civil Rule No. 66/1973

Gopal Chandra Das - Petitioner
State of Tripura - Respondent

said party, which was sought to be achieved by the leaders of the C.P.I. (M) by unleashing a reign of terror in the hills of Tripura in the early years of independence of the country. Your petitioner's fears are confirmed by the inspired reports that the accounts of the aforesaid reign of terror and describing it as "National Defence Struggle" in fulfilment of "National and International duties" published in two consecutive issues of "Tripura To-day" a fortnightly organ of the Government of Tripura which made its appearance after the installation of the present Left Front Government led by the C.P.I. (M). It is inconceivable that a ruling party Swearing allegiance to the Constitution could have permitted an official organ to glorify such sardid acts of violence committed by a small section of the tribals for the purpose of overthrowing the lawful government in those difficult and fateful years immediately after the merger of this former princely state with the Indian Union

"That to-day with insurgencies reigning in some of the neighbouring states and the danger of war looming large over the countries so close to the border of this country, such unconcealed attempts at fomenting regional sub-nationalism based on ethnic affinities cannot but look ominous. A conspiracy was hatched not long ago by the lackeys of imperialist circles to separate the tribal areas of North-East India into one single tribal territory taking into it the former unadministered regions of Burma, to be administered under a Mandate

Commission of the United Nations on the plea that these tribal areas racially and culturally have nothing in common with the rest of India. One cannot be sure that the ghost of diabolical scheme sponsored by the lackeys of imperialists has been finally buried in the graveyard of history It is the narrow selfish interests of the ruling class of exploiters in tribal society which have found expression through the demand for establishment of autonomous District Council..... The ultimate solution of the problem of tribal areas, lay in development and not isolating. What is needed a vigorous policy to implement the various schemes aimed at development and welfare of scheduled tribes....."⁵

The long quotation shows that a section of population was against the creation of Tribal District Council. The Left Front Government traced the development of ideas of the autonomous council still earlier and it is not a new idea at all. On 10th September 1955, Tripura Rajya Gana Mukti Parishad, the oldest and the most representative organisation of the tribals of Tripura in their Memorandum to Pandit Nehru said - "In the present scramble for land it is not possible for the tribals particularly for tribal joomias to secure land on personal initiative. Therefore, in the areas inhabited by tribal people, all khas lands should be reserved exclusively for rehabilitation of tribals." On the 19th March 1956,

5. Gopal Chandra Das versus State of Tripura (ibid)

Sri Dasarath Deb, Communist M.P. from Tripura raised the same demand in Lok Sabha when he said - "The government land in tribal compact areas must be kept reserved for tribals alone". In 1960, Dhebar Commission was set up to go into the problems of tribal people of India. Before that Commission Sri N.M. Patnaik, the then Chief Commissioner of Tripura, in his note suggested that a particular area might be demarcated as a Reserved Area for the tribals and that area might be brought under the 5th Schedule of the Constitution. Dhebar Commission in their report recommended formation of "Tribal Development Block" in such tribal compact areas as an experimental basis. Under Sri K. Manuamthia the Administrative Reforms Commission also examined this question of reservation of tribal compact areas in the interest of tribal minorities. They also suggested that in states like Manipur and Tripura, it might be possible to demarcate a tribal compact area and to have a Council established with limited powers in their hands.

It was in this background that the Left Front Government in their Election Manifesto of 1977, promised to the people of Tripura, that if they voted to power, they would urge upon the Central Government to introduce "Autonomous Council for the Tribals". According to Left Front Memorandum "None except the vested interest, the money lenders and land grabbers had anything to say against the long waited act as it did not contain anything that could hamper the legitimate and lawful interests

of the Bengalees or other non-tribals, inhabiting either in the proposed District Council Areas or outside it. The tribal areas specified in the Tribal Autonomous District Council Act comprise the areas where the population is predominantly tribal. In the 462 Mouzas included within the tribal areas specified in the First schedule to the Act, the population of tribal will be 75 percent of the total tribal population in the State".

In may 1980, a two Judge Bench upheld the view of the Act, but struck down section 35(2) (relating to the power of the Autonomous District Council to regulate money lending and trading by non-tribals). There was a dissenting note on the validity of section 5 of the Act which requires that no less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 28 seats from territorial constituencies of the Autonomous District Council should be reserved for Scheduled Tribes. (In view of the dissenting judgement the case has now gone to a third Bench of the Court).

Meanwhile, the state government began preparation for the election to the Autonomous District Council, which were fixed for the 13th July, 1980. Active preparation by political parties to contest the election added a new political dimension to the problem, the Committee was informed by a number of people representing different interests that in view of the uncertain electoral fortunes, the extremists elements deliberately tried to create a situation of conflict and tension.

* The election of TADC was held on 3.1.1982. The Left Front Alliance secured a three-fourth majority. It won 21 seats, conceding seven seats to the TUJS in the 28 members District council. The congress party did not participate in the election.

By and large, the views expressed before the Dinesh Singh Committee were sharply divided between those of the left front parties and those of others. The former sought to blame the tribal extremists and Amra Bengali, while the latter indicated the C.P.I. (M) and its cadres. An extract from the Report of Dinesh Singh Committee may show the nature of the problem and tension prevailing.

"Prolonged agitation in Assam over the foreigners' issue also had a fell out in Tripura, Representatives of TUJS participated in the North Eastern Regional Students' Union meeting at Dibrugarh (Assam) and in a session of the Executive Committee of the Forum of the Hill Regional Parties of the North Eastern Region at Shillong..... They started a demand for the deportatation of foreigners who had come to Tripura after 1949 - when Tripura joined the Indian Union.

"Some of the groups that met the Committee in Tripura ascribed the outbreak of violence to the state government's failure to handle the situation firmly, because it was over-eager to avoid a confrontation with the TUJS on the eve of elections. The withdrawal of a criminal case against an extremist leader and the Chief Minister's parleys with him were interpreted as an attempt to appease the TUJS and induce an electoral understanding with them.

"Some went to the length of alleging that the C.P.I.(M) so unsure of success in the election that it covertly incited violence with the dual objectives of having the elections postponed and blaming the TUJS for the postponement. To establish their points, they said that the disturbances had taken place in the areas where the C.P.I. (M) had an overwhelming majority in the earlier election and where village panchayets were controlled by their cadres, that there had been no trouble in the areas where the TUJS were particularly influential ; C.P.I. (M) members responsible for the trouble had not been arrested. The Chief Minister refuted these allegations emphatically. His party wanted the election to be held on schedule and his administration had fully prepared for them he said. It was the Amra Bāngali and some other elements he added that opposed the election. The Chief Minister said he had initiated talk with the extremist leader and even withdrawn a criminal case against him, in an effort to prevent the extremist from indulging in violence during the election period".⁶

From the above it is clear how tension had heightened and approached flash point by the end of May 1980 in the context of the forthcoming Tribal District Council election. Parochial issues were highlighted and grievances genuine and imaginary were exaggerated. This had its inevitable repercussion on the non-tribal who were, in any case opposed to the formation of

6. Report of the Committee of Tripura, Dinesh Singh Report No. F.1(5) - Secy/RE/80/600-056, August 1, 1980.

an Autonomous District Council. Polarisation between the two communities was thus complete. The Bazar Bundh programme, launched by TUJS from the 1st June made matters worse. It was in this inflammable atmosphere of suspicion and hatred that a minor incident at Lembucherra (West District) on the 6th June 1980 provided the spark which started the conflagration. At Mandai, Maherani, Ompi, Anarour and other areas of West and South District both non-tribals and tribals lost their lives and their property in orgies of senseless killing and destruction. Significantly, the outbreak of violence in some places was preceded by desertion by some tribal personnel of the State police and other government departments.

The State Government gave the following statistics to the Committee, known as Dinesh Singh Committee.⁷

Table 12:1

1.	No. of deaths	539
	i) Non-Tribal	327
	ii) Tribal	69
	iii) Unidentified	145
	iv) Policemen	2
2.	No. of injured	
	i) Non-Tribal	535
	ii) Tribal	66

7. Dinesh Singh Committee Report (ibid)

3. No. of persons arrested	1621
4. No. of firearms seized	132
5. No. of police station affected	19
6. No. of village affected	156
7. No. of hamlets affected	519
8. No. of Panchayets affected	150 (out of total 689)
9. No. of refugee camps	138 (Tribal 45)
10. No. of refugees in camps.	189919 (Tribal-40160)
11. No. of refugees who left the camp	117789 (Tribal-17473)
12. Population affected	Tribals - 144549 Others - 227499 Total - 372048
13. Cultivable land affected	186947.52 acres
14. No. of huts gutted	34661 (Tribal-11025)
15. No. of missing	1811 (Tribal - 443)
16. Loss of property	Tribal - Rs. 4,43,53,727 Non-Tribal - Rs. 16,43,78,757 Total - Rs. 20,91,636 014

For Tripura, refugee problem is immense. In all about 3 lakhs refugees entered relief camps at one time or another after the June disturbances. Considered against Tripura's total population of about 16 lakhs, the refugee figure is staggering, particularly because the turmoil left the North District untroubled. The North District has about 4 lakhs

people, so that the refugees in the other two districts numbered out of every 4 persons in their population.

Rehabilitation of the Tripura refugees was complicated by -

- (a) the fact that a very large numbers of refugees' home have been damaged or destroyed,
- (b) the death of the breadwinner in a number of families,
- (c) the sense of insecurity that pervades the disturbed areas.

The real solution to the problems of Tripura lies in the speedy development of the economically backward state, in the light of its resources and needs and in a manner that ensures equitable distribution of the gains of development.

Besides land alienation, the most crucial factor underlying the conflict is the widening gap between the tribals and the non-tribals.

CASE STUDIES

In this section we shall present some case studies of the tribes of Tripura which are the area of our investigation. We have given only ten case studies as representative of the tribal households of the tribal community. Our purpose is to present certain typical families which will serve as a background to the problem of the tribal community. We consider that in order to understand the present condition of tribal society, we should present in details a personal profile of the typical tribal families.

Selection of the villages :

First we selected two villages Vati Fatikcherra and Kamalghat, both the villages are situated in the Sadar Sub-Division of West Tripura district of Tripura State. We selected the village because in the month of June, 1980 a communal disturbances broke out throughout the whole state of Tripura with the exception of North-Tripura district. In this disturbance many people of both the communities i.e. tribals and non-tribals were killed. A large number of people were wounded. Such a type of rioting and arson occurred for the first time in this tiny State of Tripura.

Lembucherra is only 3 km. away from Kamalghat. Kamalghat is a village of mixed population, where 75% of the total population is tribal and the rest 25% is non-tribal mainly Bengali. Other villages we have selected in a random basis.

While conducting our field investigation in the villages of Tripura we had the good fortune of receiving active help and co-operation from all quarters. We received warm welcome and all villagers young and old helped us immensely. When we asked the questions the tribal answered the question smilingly. In this context, it may be mentioned that a tribal student of M.B.S. College Sree Arjun Deb Barman worked with us as an interpreter. Without his sincere labour and co-operation it would not have been possible for us to move over the villages. This is more so because the tribal village of Vati Fatikcherra have

not yet forgotten the bitter memories of their conflict with the Bengalees. We stayed for a few days in house of Shree Balendra Deb Barman. He accommodated us in a newly built room in his house. All the houses of the locality were burnt during the period of disturbance and five tribal people were killed in this village. We tried to understand the cause and consequences of the disturbance. At the same time we tried to draw a picture of tribal economic and social condition.

1. Balendra Deb Barman of Kamalghat.

Sri Balendra Deb Barman belongs to the Tripuri community which is the largest tribal community of Tripura, he is an old man aged about 75 years. He reported that his grandfather Kamal Deb Barman came first in this area and started joom cultivation. Before 1947 the population of this area was very scarce, there was no recognised road connecting Agartala the capital. The people used to walk through the forest. They used to practice shifting cultivation on the hill slopes, had no individual ownership of land. Some sort of community ownership of land of the forest land was in vogue. At present he holds a small plot of land where pineapples are planted. His family fully depend on the market for cereals. Sree Deb Barman reported that during the life time of his

father all the sons lived jointly and this family pattern existed even after the death of his father. All the brothers lived jointly upto 1973. In 1974, Sree Deb Barman said as the family became large, the brothers were separated. Sree Deb Barman said that his father had only one wife. He has four brothers and two sisters. One of his brother is a primary school teacher, another brother is a class-IV employee under the State Government Office. Two brothers including himself collected forest materials i.e. bamboo, wood, straw etc. sale these in the local market. They lead a very auster life, always struggling for their existence.

He reported that the main source of income of his father was from the collection of forest products.

Sree Deb Barman has one wife, and had five children - one of them died at the age of 4 and three others are adults and one is a minor, and one daughter who is married lives with her husband at Agartala town. His second and third sons are respectively a primary school teacher and class-IV employee under the State Government.

He is short of cash cronicallly and has to depend on the local money lender to meet his demand for ready cash even at an exorbitant rate of interest. He said that when loan was in cash and repayment was in kind, the produces were always

under-valued. A major part of the joom crop particularly cotton, jute and mesta, are completely taken away by money lenders at a throw away prices as an adjustment of the loan advanced. But he was reluctant in taking any loan from the Government agencies, as according to him one has to face many difficulties for getting loans from the Government. First of all, one has to pass through an elaborate official procedure in submitting one's application form for getting a loan. Secondly, sanctioning of loan from Government takes a lot of time, and even then it may not be granted at the proper time.

He is not a member of the co-operative society. He does not hold any insurance policy.

His family consumes generally rice, pulse, potatoes and vegetables. Tea is seldom taken. They also take pork chicken and mutton. He reported that almost 95% of the items of consumption are purchased from the local market. They prepare wine (lunga) in their own house and both males and females are addicted to drink. Males and females are also found to take great pleasure in smoking through indigenous hubble bubble. The former is made of bamboo and the latter made of mud.

He reported that the characteristics of this Tipra village like all other tribal villages of that territory was the village council which was headed by a leader known

as Choudhury. This office is not hereditary but the Choudhury is elected by the members of the council. In respect of a family squabble and inter-village disputes which are referred to the village council for decision, the judgement of Choudhury is final and binding on all and the Choudhury before he gives his decision, usually consults the council members.

Sree Deb Barman encourages folk songs and dance among the members of his community, which is a part and parcel of the tribal life.

Sree Deb Barman reported to the investigator that the C.P.I. (M) the ruling party was not sincere enough in upholding the tribal interest because it was afraid of losing support of the majority community i.e. non-tribals.

The Left Government's decision to restore all illegally transferred tribal land since 1969 has failed to satisfy him. He alleged that the illegal transfer of tribal land continues unabated. He told that the C.P.I. (M) continued to speak for the tribals, but allowed its ideology to degenerate into communal feuds. A section of tribals whose expectations had been roused but not fulfilled by the communists formed the Tripura Upajati Yuba Samity - to realise their demands.

2. Harimohan Reang :

Tripura is the home of 19 tribes, among them Reang tribe according to 1971 census occupied the second position numerically. The first place being occupied by Tripuri. According to the 1931 Census Report of Thakur Soumendra Deb Barman, the Reangs after migration from Chittagong Hill Tracts (Now Bangladesh) settled first in Amarpur and Belonia Sub-Division of South Tripura in large number, but now they are scattered all over the State.

Harimohan Reang a man aged about 45 years lives in the village of Kalsi under Belonia sub-division. We had to walk about 15 km. to reach the village from the last Bus point of Udaipur. Sree Reang lived on a higher altitudes and prefer to live on the top of hills. The reasons for choosing the top of the hills is mainly due to the fact that they mainly depend on joom cultivation. The joom cultivation is easier from the top of the hills.

They generally occupy hilly regions and sometimes narrow strips of valley between hillocks, locally known as Lunga for their habitation, they follow the same procedure and considerations for joom (shifting cultivation) like those of Tripuris i.e. easy availability of water, food and protection of life and property. They live in group of 3 to 10 and each settlement is known as 'Paraha' (village) which is named after the name of a influential leader (Sardar).

He reported that all huts in a Reang settlement are meant for residential purposes and there is no dormitory, club or separate council house in the village.

The Reang houses we have seen known as Tong built on bamboo platform Machang and erected on piles 4 to 5 ft. in height. The roof of these huts are built by a special type of grass, locally these grass are known as Chhan grass, the walls are made of bamboo splits. These are generally rectangular in shape 18' x 14' in length and breadth 6' in height. The ground plan is rectangular and very simple and in front of the pile hut Tong the bamboo platform Machang is covered with portico, which is used for receiving guests and friends and for weaving by their female folk.

He reported us that main pursuits of the Reangs are not confined to one but many of which joom cultivation and hunting are most important. Joom provides cereals, mustards, chilly and other vegetables, while hunting provide them with meat. Their food is very simple, they usually take two meals in a day once in the noon after completion of their daily routine of their field work and the other just after dusk. Throughout the year gathering and collection of roots and creepers which is generally done by their women folk from nearby forests and hills. The collection of yields varieties

of edible creepers, roots fruits and vegetables of which mention may be made of Thabolong a kind of potato, Mia bamboo shoot. Erum and Thaiflung jackfruit.

During the period of any crisis they are to live exclusively on jackfruits and jungle potato. The main items of their food are, however, Nai (rice), dry fish (verma) and meat of various animals such as pig (wak), goat (pan), fowl (Thunga) etc. They prepare their curry in a piece of bamboo (chonga) and even boil their rice in it. In other words Chonga plays a great role in their day to day life. In their preparation of food they do not use spices other than salt (som) and chillies (Thancha) but their way of life changing very rapidly.

He told us that the life of the Reang is a long and bitter struggle for existence in most adverse circumstances. They residing in hilly and isolated regions of the State. Being the hilly region nature is not bountiful. Every activity has to be primarily directed towards raising of food from either by cultivation or gathering the forest produce. Agriculture determines the village site. Most of the festivals are meant for pleasure to thank the clan God and village mother are supreme to ensure benevolence of the earth so that crops may be plentiful. One turns to other pursuits only as a last resort.

It is true that in 85 to 90 percent agricultural produce does not suffice for the whole year for the food purposes. At least for three months the Reangs has to depend on the forest produce or hunting and trapping. There are no clear cut notion of individual ownership of the land among the Reangs.

He told us that before jooming the Reangs select some suitable slopes of hillocks which are situated at the outskirts of their habitation or sometimes 7 to 8 km. away from their dwelling places. After the selection of the spot during the month of December, January all the members of the particular 'Paraha' to which they belong go to the selected spot and build a few two roofed pile huts 'joom-ghar' the roof which is usually thatched with sungrass or leaves of trees and the walls are made of bamboo. They follow the practice of jooming on the basis of social co-operation and all the members of the 'Paraha' to which they belong, participate and help the family which undertook the joom cultivation in the particular spot.

Before the start of joom cultivation, however, they worship the Goddess of Jungle Burasa on the spot, because they believe this goddess, if appeased can bless them with good crop and save them from natural calamities and catastrophies. At the time of worship they sacrifice animals and birds. The

trees which were cut at the spot selected for joom cultivation are then allowed to remain exposed to sun and air for a few months. In the month of March-April they give fire to the dried up trees and bamboos and burn them to ashes, which are then spread automatically by wind over the whole length and breadth of the land. At the advent of the first shower joom cultivation is started by making small holes with the help of hatchet (Takkal) wherein seeds of paddy, mustard, cotton, maize and chilli are put together by a communal feast.

Marriage in their society is arranged through negotiation made by guardians of both the parties. What really happens is that a boy after selecting a girl conveys the news to his friends. They in turn convey the same to the guardian or parents of the boy. The parents then approach the girl's parents through a go between. The proposal is always accompanied by a few bottles of wine and pig. The Reangs allow great freedom of intercourse between the sexes. Very rarely, a Reang girl go astray and leave her clan.

Acceptance of bottles of wine and pig means the acceptance of the proposal. But the decision is given only after the daughter has agreed and given consent to it. Thus in a Reang society the marriage depends completely on the Girl's discretion.

Sree Reang is not received any formal education. He is trained in their traditional customs by the elderly members of the family. Practical training is usually imparted by them to the young boys and girls. During the practical training they learnt about different technique of cultivation, dance and songs, etiquette and manners. Every female member learn techniques of weaving in loin loom and these are taught by the elderly women. Now-a-days Govt. is taking every possible steps to provide educational facilities to those tribals along with the other people of the territory.

He told us that the settlement of the Hindu refugees among them led to the development of new social and economic activities of his society. Agriculture is a great force for creating a new social situation.

When we asked about the last disturbance of 80's, he complained that though the refugees constituted the majority of the population, not much had been done in the past either by the centre or the past State Governments. For their economic rehabilitation - they had been practically left to their own fate. But the economic interest of the tribals, neglected so long could not also be ignored any more. Neither could they be dislodged from their lands. As the availability of cultivable land in Tripura, a sensitive border state, is extremely limited. He suggested that the proper rehabilitation of the refugees could be possible only through setting up a network

of small scale industries. He further mentioned that but for this, the State needed a peaceful political atmosphere violence of the kind indulged in by 'Amra Bangali' can only further embitter the situation.

3. Baikunta Mog :

Sree Baikunta Mog is a resident of Bairagi Dhepa a village situated under East Brahmacherra Gaon Sabha, three sides of this village is circled by Atharamura Hill Range. This village is situated about 53 km. away from Agartala the capital of Tripura State. No metal road exist in this village the only village road being a 'Kachha' or mud built one.

Baikunta Mog is an illiterate daily worker of this village. He is an young man aged about 25 years. At first he did not want to answer our questions. Being persuaded by a villager of his own community he at last agreed to talk.

He did anything to make both ends meet. Sometimes he worked in the forest as a casual labour and sometimes worked in the house of a land owner. He said that if he could procure two meals a day he considered that day to be a 'day of feast'.

Enquired about his income, he said that he could not tell us exactly the amount of income earned by him in any year, but supposed his income to be roughly Rs. 80/- per month.

He said that he could not tell the amount of land owned by his father, for his father died when he was only a minor child. But as far as he had heard, he could say his father too, was a daily labour like him.

He told that the question of taking loan did not arise at all in his case, for nobody would give him loan.

He liked to marry, but was unable to do so he could not pay the wine, pig and cash. He expected that somebody would keep him in his house and in lieu of his labour in that house he would be able to marry the daughter of the house.

He is resigned completely to his fate for the amelioration of his poverty.

4. Kuchhiram Jamatia :

Kuchhiram Jamatia of East Bagafa is a share cropper. He used to cultivate 3 acres of land upto 1979. In 1980 when the major portion of land was acquired by the Government for construction of a B.S.F. camp, Sri Jamatia was dispossessed of his holdings. He became a landless day labourer.

But Sri Jamatia has recently got 5 kanies of vested land from the Government.

Although a marginal land owner, Jamatia tries to get maximum return from his land. He reported that as some of the

tribal were reaping large profits from pineapple plantation he converted nearly 1/4th of his land into pineapple plantation in the year 1980. He expected to improve his economic condition by it. He was yet to earn income from pineapple.

He is a literate cultivator, aged about 50 having six family members to feed. These include his wife, one daughter and three sons all grown up.

He reported that he wanted to improve his economic condition but as his sons could not get job anywhere, he could not properly maintain his family. All of the three sons, however, help him in his income generating activities like cultivation.

Sri Jamatia an optimist cultivator had been found to reiterate his hope of improving the economic lot of his family within a very short period.

At present he reported that he could hardly satisfy the entire consumption needs of his family. He had not been able to give marriage to his only daughter due to lack of necessary funds. He said that unlike the days of his forefathers, he was not to charge from the groom any bride price. On the contrary, he hoped to give his daughter dowry.

He did not think that in matters of illness etc. Achai's (village priest) had anything to do. On the other hand, he thought their activities should be confined to the areas of worshipping gods and goddess.

He told us that even educated and enlightened Bengali's who may deplore communal politics and denounce atrocities on backward tribes, never care to practice in personal life what they preach in public. Such hypocrisy is not confined to educated Bengalees only, but rampant among all sections, of the Bengalees, particularly among the elite in society, irrespective of caste creed or religion.

5. Khagen Neatia :

Teliamura is situated nearly 45 km. away from Agartala on Agartala-Assam road. It is a commercial centre as all the transport between Agartala and Dharmanagar, the only railway station of Tripura, must pass through this place.

Sri Neatia came to the village in the year 1979 from Khowai sub-division of West Tripura district. He said that due to flood at Khowai by Khowai river, his land was fully covered with sand and thus he came to Teliamura for his brother Haren who was a share cropper, advised him to come to this place.

Sri Noatia said that he had always cultivated along with Haren, the land of Haricharan as share cropper, Haricharan is a tribal land owner Tripuri by tribe.

He is illiterate, living with his wife and one minor son.

He cultivates paddy and occasionally jute in his field and has never tried for getting either seeds or fertilizer from any source.

He reported that the average yield of paddy is 8 mounds per acre. In 1979, he got nearly 4 mounds of jute from his one kand of land. In the year of our investigation, (1980 February-March) he not grown jute in his field because of ill health.

He reported further that if he could cultivate his land properly he would be in a position to maintain his family somehow. But due to ill health he cannot do it.

He often went to the Govt. Health Centre but at the same time put his faith on Achai (village priest). He said that Achai required large amount of money for appeasing the evil spirits, which he considered to be the main reason for his prolonged illness and bad health. He thought that his wife will also fall prey to the evil eyes soon. But his financial position did not allow him to seek the benevolent

activities of Achai and hence he had to go to the Government Health Centre most unwillingly.

Sri Noatia further said that for the family expenditure, he often borrowed. He had borrowed 8 mounds of rice from a Bengali Mahajan Suresh Babu (Saha) of his area in the previous year for which he is now required to pay 16 mounds but this amount had not been fully repaid. He thought of borrowing again from that lender this year too and this seemed to be inevitable for him i.e. June-July, 1981.

His wife had reared two hens. The eggs were sometimes sold in the market. The family earned Rs. 4-45 from the sale of eggs per year.

Sri Noatia's only son even then went to the nearby primary school and read in Class-I. But he had grave doubts whether he would be able to let his son continue his studies as he required a helping hand in cultivation. He hoped that his son would be able to help him in that respect in due time.

Sri Noatia was quite aware of the fact that improved seeds and fertilisers improve the quality of crop yields. But he thought it useless for him to think of applying them in his land as his pecuniary condition would never allow him to do so.

He had heard that banks advanced loans to cultivators, but he reported that he dared not go to the bank as he feared that if he failed to repay in due time he might lose his land.

He thought that small disputes among co-villagers should be settled by Gaon Pradhans. He had no idea about family planning method and did not think that man should go against the wishes of god.

Moreover, he did not think any necessity of altering their old custom and practices with regard marriages religious ceremonies etc.

For his poverty, he thought that his bad luck was solely responsible.

He thought that the tribals are angry because their land has been taken away by the Bengalis. He thinks that land belongs to the tribals of Tripura but the Bengali Mahajans have forcibly taken away their land.

6. Purna Hari Deb Barman

Purna Hari Deb Barman aged about 47 years is a resident of Kanalghat - a village situated 14 km. away from Agartala in Mohanpur Block of Sadar Sub-Division under West Tripura District. It is located on the right side of Agartala-Sinna road.

Sri Deb Barman is an owner cultivator, cultivating only 6 kanies of land (about 2.4 acres). He reported that his forefathers were owner of big landed property, the exact amount of which is not known to him. He said that

tribals especially those who were affluent because of owning of vast amount of land, used to marry more than one wife and consequently the landed property after the death of the owner split up among the inheritors in small parcels.

He told also that during his father's time a large number of refugees from East Pakistan (Bangladesh) entered into their village, he failed to report the actual number and year of this influx.

When we asked him how their land were transferred to Bengali refugees he failed to answer. But he reported that sometimes they have accepted loan from the Bengali Mahajans and the Mahajans first get the land and afterwards the Mahajans transferred the land to the Bengali refugees. He declined to say anything about their Bengali neighbours. But it appeared that they were not opening their mind before us because we (investigator) also belong to the Bengali community.

He produced paddy and jute in his land. But Purnahari has decreased the amount of land under paddy cultivation intentionally. He thinks that if the crop is large enough to maintain his family, it is alright. He expects that the production of paddy would be sufficient to provide yearly food to the three adult and two minor members of the family.

He reported that his yearly income is sufficient to meet his annual consumption expenditure as well as to meet the expenses connected with agricultural activities.

In addition to paddy and jute, he also raised maize for self consumption. He has also planned to raise maize in one kani of land in 1981 and to maintain a kitchen garden for self consumption.

He is literate and has close contact with the developing agencies under the Block Development Office. His source of information is not only his village folk but also other persons with whom he comes into contact on account of his frequent visit to distant market places.

He consults a doctor during ailment and is always ready to visit the primary health centre, if required.

He has ~~in~~ two pair of bullocks for ploughing the field and often gives them as loan to the neighbouring cultivators who pays paddy in return.

He takes all kinds of meat, excepting beef. His income can fetch him two meals daily throughout the year.

He told us that previously the main occupation of the tribal people was k joom (shifting cultivation). But at present due to the increase in population vacant land is

not available. As a result tribals are increasingly depending on the plough cultivation and are searching for alternative occupation.

We enquired about the cause of last disturbance, he told us that some people may differ with him but according to him the 'politics' is the main reason of the disturbance. We requested him to explain the point. He told that the weaker sections of both the Bengali community and the tribal community suffered much. Both the communities are not yet free from the fear psychosis. He cited an example. A few days ago some cow lifters came from Bangladesh ostensibly to steal some cows from the village. This is a regular feature in many bordering Tripura villages. But the tribal people of the village thought otherwise. They thought that again the Bengalees were after them for some reason or other and they got panicked to such extent that they started to run here and there for shelter. This goes to show how much insecured the tribal of the village think themselves to be. (The period of investigation June-July, 1981).

Sri Deb Berman thinks that one can improve his lot by one's hard labour. He believes that family should be as small as possible.

7. Budhiram Halam :

Budhiram aged about 20 years. He is an unemployed Higher Secondary passed young man. He is the resident of Jantranapara, the village is situated 23 km. south of Teliamura and 25 km. north of Amarpur. The village is situated just in the middle of Teliamura-Amarpur road.

There are 24 families in this village, total population 181. Among them 91 are males and 90 females. Of the total 24 families, 22 belong to the tribal community and rest 2 families are Bengalis.

We have not seen any health centre or hospital in the village nor is there any ration shop. There is only a primary school in this village. Chakmaghat is the only marketing centre in this region. Due to meagre communication system the villagers are compelled to sell their products in the village. The purchasers are mainly outside Bengali Mahajans who purchased the village products at a very cheap rate.

There is no facility for drinking water in the village. The water of Dhanleahacherra is the only source of drinking water. The main livelihood of the tribals is the collection of firewood from the forest and selling them at Chakmaghat and cultivation.

Sree Halan reported that when Tripura merged with India, they had enough land to maintain their family. His father died in the year 1978, practically without receiving any medical care. For medicine and cure of their ailments the villagers solely depend on village Kabiraj and quack doctors.

We were interested to know how they lost their land. He told us that he heard from his father that after the merger with India refugees from the neighbouring districts of East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) started to come just like waves after waves. As a result the prices of every commodity began to rise. The tribals felt helpless to adjust themselves with the changing economic and sociological situation. Due to fast increase of the prices of every commodity they found it difficult to meet their daily ends. At this juncture they used to take loan from the Bengali Mahajans at a very exorbitant rate of interest. Sometimes the tribals took money with a receipt and sometimes without. But they failed to pay the principal as well as the interest.

Their burden of loan in this way became heavy and they were compelled to give up their land to the Bengali Mahajans. These Mahajans also did not cultivate this land, he sold it to other Bengali refugees cultivators.

He said that the State Government sanctioned some loan to the villagers to purchase bullocks and seeds. But he did not get any help, because he had no land. He told us that this help is very meagre, in comparison to need. A few months ago 'Food for Work' was introduced in this village and this help substantially improved the economic condition of the villagers. But at the time of our investigation (March-April), 1981 this work was stopped.

We asked about his employment. He replied that after passing Higher Secondary Examination, he got interview for once but failed to qualify for a post of Primary School teacher. He expressed his dissatisfaction about the quota and reservation policy of the Government. He told us that if the quota and reservation of employment was maintained properly no question of unemployment should arise among the tribals. We have observed during the period of investigation in the village that the socio-economic condition of the people was so bad that the hardship and misery of the villagers were to be seen to be believed.

8. Sambhu Chakma

Sambhu Chakma of Kanchanpur aged about 75 years is an owner cultivator, whose youngest son on his behalf cultivates the land. He has three sons of the ages of 50, 45 and 30 years and two daughters who are married and live with their husbands. The youngest son, Akhil Chakma, now lives with his father and all the other sons live separately.

But all the sons used to live together. Akhil reported that due to economic pressure the joint family has broken.

Akhil has to maintain three adult and one minor members of his family. and hence, in addition to cultivation of his own land, he also cultivates 3 acres of land of a Bengali land owner as a share cropper. The Bengali land owner resides in Agartala. He told us that a few years ago this land belonged to a tribal of the locality. The Mahajan purchased the land from the widow of the tribal named Sambhu Deb Barman.

Akhil said that his other brothers were cultivating lands as share croppers. But subsequently they got the possession of those lands, as the Government declared those land as vested.

Akhil mainly cultivates paddy, maize and jute. He also grows chilly and maintains a kitchen garden. A major portion of these produce are meant for self consumption. He never keeps his land fallow.

He owns a pair of bullocks for cultivation. He applies cowdung. He is quite aware that utilization of chemical fertilisers and improved varieties of seeds would increase the yield per acre. But he complained that he did not get any financial help from any quarters - public or private. He reported that in the year 1979 he went to the

Block Development Office for fertiliser, but he was told to come on some other day again, and hence he did not go.

He reported that wild animals like elephants, monkey hores, rats and birds like swallows often do much harm to crops in every year, but he cannot give details of exact amount of loss of crops due to this.

He often borrowed in cash and kind from his Bengali Mahajan land owner. He could not tell us how much he would require to borrow in 1981 (year of investigation). But he said as the family lived from hand to mouth, he has to borrow for meeting the minimum needs of his family. He often borrows cash from a local tribal money lender, but he repays in kind.

For reasons not very clear to him, he prefers to borrow from the local money lenders than from the Government.

He often went to the nearby market (Kanchanpur hut) for selling some of the products produced in his kitchen garden. He reported that although he has no marketable surplus, he is sometimes required to sell paddy under hard economic pressure.

Akhil said that he rarely purchases the main items of food from the market.

Akhil is illiterate and so also his father. He has not sent his son to any school. He said that the local primary

school is situated nearly two miles away from his house. In answering our questions as to whether he would have sent his son to any school if it was situated very near to his house, he maintains that if the son got education he might not be interested in cultivation.

To upgrade economic condition of persons like him he maintains the Government should help the farmers generously and at liberal terms.

We enquired about the last disturbances and wanted to know his opinion. He told us that though a section of the people believe that land is the major factor in the clash between these two communities, although land was one of the factor of mistrust between the two communities was not the primary reason. There were other reasons also responsible for the disturbances.

9. Raimohan Deb Barman

Raimohan Deb Barman is the son of Bachik Deb Barman aged about 75 years. He resides in Bakarjala village, which is 25 km. away from Agartala town. The village is a tribal village, there are 320 families in the village and only 4 to 5 families are non-tribal Bengali. Average size of the family is 4 to 5. Bakarjala is under Sadar Sub-Division. It has a Police Station, high school and a health centre.

The Speaker of the Tripura Legislative Assembly also resides in this village. Most of the villagers' main profession is cultivation.

We asked about the name of the village. He told us that he had heard there was a man in this village called Takha which means 'crow' he was very ugly to look at but was very clever and strong. According to his name the village is called Takarjala.

He told us that his father owned nearly 20 kanis of cultivable land, he has only 8 kanis of land. He got no other means of earning. His family consists of four daughters and two sons. Two daughters are married in the nearby village Gabordi. Both the sons-in-laws are also cultivators. His elder son works with him in their cultivable land and his second son reads in Takarjala High School in Class-VII.

He told us that he was interested to give his son proper education but also mentioned that it would be difficult to maintain his son's study due to his bad monetary condition. We enquired about Government help. He told us that being tribal they got some help from the Government, but that assistance was insufficient at the same time untimely. When they received the grant it did not serve any purpose.

We enquired at the life time of his father, he got 20 kanis of land, and now he got only 8 kanis of land. How did it happen ?

He told us that after the merger of Tripura with Indian Union, a large number of refugees came to this land and some refugees settled in and around the Takarjala village also. He told us that most of the villagers settled in and around Takarjala market area. These refugees opened various kinds of shops.

He told us that among all the shops he liked best the tea stalls where he could spend a long time with great pleasure. In course of time he used to eat there on credit. After a few months he found the tea seller charging him a large sum as his debt. He failed to pay the debt and gave some land to the Bengali owner of the tea stall, in this way he lost 10 kanis of land. Another 2 kanis he sold to a tribal land lord of his village at the time of his father's 'sradhomela' (funeral function).

We asked about the reason of last disturbances. At first he was not interested to answer those questions. Lastly, he told us that their area was not disturbed in any way. He told us that peaceful co-existence will bring peace to their society, fighting will be harmful for both the communities. It appeared that he was not satisfied with the working of the Government. He denied to say anything, more about the disturbances of June, 1980.

10. Madan Koloi :

Baishamoonipara is situated on the west bank of Chhangong cherra 4 km. away of Aspi under Amarpur Sub-division of South Tripura. One must cross the chhangongcherra if he wants to go Baishamoonipara from Aspi.

We went to investigate in this village and met one Madan Koloi aged about 35 years. He was an well built young man with a Mongolian type of face. We introduced ourselves to him and requested him to answer our queries. He asked us that what purpose would be served by this questioning and answering. We replied that we want to know the tribal people, their culture and habits, this would help us to acquaint them with us.

We asked him about the villagers. He told us that there were 65 families in this village comprising a population of nearly 500. All the families belonged to the Koloi community, only 4 families belonged to the non-tribal community.

He has three sons and a daughter. His elder son reads in Class-V and younger one in Class-III. Other sons and daughters are minor. He got 3 kani of cultivable land. He told us that plough cultivation is in vogue in their community. But it is not sufficient to maintain their family with that product. So they also did the joom cultivation with the plough cultivation.

According to him the older generation of tribals have always voted the communists. But the younger generation supports the TUJS. According to him some of the younger people have embraced christianity. According to him the influence of TUJS is spreading in the area. He thinks that unless the communists do something for the tribals, the younger people will go to the side of the TUJS.

According to him the tribals are illiterate and therefore cannot compete with the Bengalis in the job market. This is one of the reason for the younger people to be supporters of TUJS because they have neither jobs nor land. He thinks that this communal problem will continue for sometime in Tripura.