
UNIT 3 TRIBES OF TRIPURA

Structure

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall learn about the tribal communities of Tripura. After introducing the tribal scenario in the State, we shall discuss the geographical location, socio-economic life, beliefs and customs of the major tribes of the State. The unit will also discuss in brief other minor tribes found in the State. By the end of this unit, you should be able to know:

- Briefly the tribal scenario in the State;
- The geographical distribution of the tribes in the State;
- The socio-economic life of the tribes in the State; and
- The beliefs and customs among the tribes in the State.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Tripura is a small hilly State situated in the north-eastern part of India. During the British rule, the whole geographical area of Tripura was known as Hill Tipperah. It covers an area of 10,491 sq. km. and is situated between 22° 5' and 24° 32' north latitudes and 91° 10' and 92° 21' east longitudes. A land-locked State, Tripura shares international border of 832 kms long with Bangladesh's district of Comilla on the west, Sylhet district on the north, Noakhalli and Chittagong Hill Tracts on the south and Chittagong Hill Tracts on the east. With mainland India, Tripura is bounded by the Cachar district of Assam on the north-east and the Mizo hills of Mizoram on the east.

Agriculture is the mainstay of Tripura's economy. Rice is the major crop in the State. The rubber plantation in the State has proved to be quite successful and has a promising future. Shifting or Jhum cultivation is still resorted to by the tribals of the State. Weaving, which is the oldest and most developed cottage industry of the State, is still practised by the people.

The total population of Tripura according to 2011 census is 36,73,917. Of these 11,66,813 persons belong to scheduled tribes which constitute only 31.1 per cent of the total population. The rest of the population of Tripura consists mainly of Bengali settlers. There are 19 scheduled tribes in Tripura. They are Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Halam, Noatia, Mog, Kuki Darlong, Garo, Munda, Lushai, Oraon, Santal,

Uchai, Khasi, Bhil, Lepcha, Bhutia and Chaimal. Among these, the major tribes are Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Halam and Noatia. Some of the minor tribes migrated to the State quite recently. All these tribes, barring Garo and Khasi, are patriarchal by authority and patri-lineal by descent. Most of these tribes are strongly united through village organizations, cooperation and fellow feeling among their members, collective worship of Gods and Goddesses, shifting cultivation in a band, etc.

Love marriage, marriages by elopement with previous understanding and negotiated marriages are prevalent among the tribals. The communities either cremate their dead or bury them. Most of the tribes have the custom of disposing of the bones in water. Ancestor worship is quite common. There are four predominant religions, namely, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. Most of the tribals have their own customs and beliefs, which are a curious mixture of Hinduism and traditional religions. Of the many festivals, the one that occupies the pride of place is the worship of *Choddo Devator*. Another remarkable tribal festival is *Ganga Puja*.

The tribals prefer to wear clothes made by them. Their cloth texture is thick. The men wear turbans and a narrow piece of cloth as the lower garment. The upper part of the body normally remains uncovered. The women wear a long piece of cloth as the lower garment, which is called *pachchra*. They cover their breasts with a small piece of cloth called *risha*. The women folk are fond of using ornaments.

Most of the non-tribal communities of Tripura settled in the plains. Their houses have more than one room. They are rectangular with mud walls, a thatched roof and a small courtyard. Kitchens are generally far away from the dining room. The tribal settlements are distributed on hill slopes or on hillocks, and are often surrounded by trees or forests. Their houses are constructed with local materials like wood, bamboo and sun grass. Instead of using mud walls, which get soaked during rains, they build their walls with wattle. Sometimes the houses are raised on platforms of varying heights from the ground.

The tribal men are expert in basket making and the women in weaving clothes. Every tribal house has a weaving set commonly called *Komor-tant*.

3.2 TRIPURI, REANG AND JAMATIA TRIBES

The members of the Tripuri tribe are scattered all over Tripura, though the major concentration is in the West Tripura district. It is estimated that more than one lakh Tripuri live in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chandpur and Kumilla areas in Bangladesh. According to 2011 census, their population in Tripura is 592,255.

Socio-Economic Life

Tripuri tribe is divided into two groups, namely, Puran Tripuri and Deshi Tripuri. The former are said to be the original inhabitants of the State. Their title is Deb Barman. They belong to the Indo-Chinese stock of Tibeto-Burman and Bodo group. The Deshi Tripuri are said to have originated as a result of admixture between the Bengali Hindus and the Tripuri. The Tripuri are sub-divided into 12 *hadda* (groups) according to the type of work which they were entitled to perform in the *Darbar* of the earlier *Maharajas*. These are Bachhal, Siuk, Koatia, Daityasing, Hujurua, Ciltia, Apiya, Chhatratuiya, Deorai or Galim, Subenarayan, Sera and Julai.

Tripuri tribe has a non-vegetarian diet. Rice is the staple food. They are fond of tea and alcoholic drinks. They smoke tobacco and chew betel nut and leaves regularly. Land is the major source of income. Settled cultivation is the traditional occupation of the people.

The Tripuri men excel in bamboo basketry, while their womenfolk are adept at weaving and embroidery.

The Tripuri lineages are patriarchal, and are supposed to regulate marital alliances. Community endogamy and lineage exogamy are the norm. Negotiation, service, mutual consent and elopement are the ways of acquiring a mate. Monogamy is the convention. The women use vermilion and conch shell bangles as signs of their marriage. Dowry in cash and kind is prevalent. During the wedding ceremony, the bride circumambulates the groom seven times and at the end of each round, she bows before the groom and sprinkles some flowers on his head. This is followed by an exchange of garlands. Then the ends of the dresses of the bride and the groom are tied together. They bow before the *Lampra-Owathap* deity and the *Achai* blesses the couple. The post-marital residence is patrilocal. The Tripuri have both nuclear and extended families. Inheritance follows male equigeniture, while succession follows primogeniture.

Beliefs and Customs

The Tripuri profess Hinduism. Some of them have adopted Christianity. *Garia Puja* is one of the oldest religious celebrations of the Tripuri, like all other Kok-Borok speaking groups. *Mailooma* and *Khoolooma* are worshipped as household deities, while *Mataikatar* is the supreme deity. Those who officiate at marriage and death rites normally come from outside the community.

The Tripuri cremate their dead. The eldest son of the deceased lights the pyre first. Then other family members take turns in lighting the pyre. Death mourning lasts for 12 days. Restrictions on food and dress are observed during this period. *Sraddha* ceremony is observed on the 13th day, during which food and drink are offered to the departed soul. The ceremony is performed by the Brahmin priest.

Reang Tribe

Reang, also spelt as Riang, is a well-known tribal community of Tripura. It is believed that the Reang migrated to their present habitat from the Chittagong Hill Tract and are distributed all over Tripura with the maximum concentration being in the south Tripura district. They are also found in Mizoram along the valleys of the rivers Lengai and Teirei in Aizawl district and also in Lunglei and Chingtuipui districts. The Mizo call them *Tuikuk*. They speak Reang language, which has no script. In Tripura, their population according to 2011 census is 188220.

Socio-Economic Life

The Reang women can be easily identified by the silver and other metal ornaments they wear on their neck, wrist and ankle. The necklace (*rombak*) is of a special variety. It begins from the high neck and extends to the thoracic region. The part that hugs the thoracic region consists of several coils arranged systematically one after another.

The staple food of the Reang is rice. *Mowia* (bamboo shoot) is their favourite dish. Both men and women are fond of alcoholic drinks. Smoking loose tobacco through the *maktoi* (bamboo pipe) is common.

Shifting cultivation is the traditional economic source. Rearing of fowl and pigs are a subsidiary source of income. The Reang men excel in weaving baskets while the women are adept at weaving clothes. Most of the baskets and clothes are meant for domestic consumption.

There are several social divisions called *Pangi* (clan) among the Reang. They practise endogamy at the community level. Marriage within the same clan is permitted. Junior sororate is also permitted. The modes of acquiring mates are negotiation, mutual consent and elopement. *Chaudhuri* (chief) normally settles divorce cases. The Reang family is patriarchal by authority, and patrilineal by succession. The parental property is equally divided among all the sons. Wedding ceremony takes place at the bride's residence. It involves the aged and married persons blessing the couple by sprinkling some water on the heads of the couple. The families of the couple share the cost of the wedding feast held at the bride's residence.

Beliefs and Customs

The Reang profess Hinduism. At the family level, they worship *maikhlwongmo* (goddess of wealth) and *Subgrongma* (goddess of prosperity). At the village level, they worship *Toima* (goddess of big river) who is supposed to ensure peace in the community. They avail of the services of the *akchari* (priest) for their rituals. Animal sacrifice and alcohol consumption are important features of their worship. *Buisi puja* is considered to be the main festival of the community. The Reang cremate their dead. Some food is offered in the name of the deceased. The bones of the deceased are disposed of in water.

Jamatia Tribe

The Jamatia live largely in Udaipur and Amarpur sub-divisions of South Tripura district, and Khowai and Sadar sub-divisions of West Tripura district. Their population according to 2011 census is 83,347 living approximately in 600 villages. Ethnologically, they are akin to the Tripuri. They also speak Kokborok.

Socio-economic Life

Marriage is usually held by negotiation (*kagloimani*) where the parents play a major role. It is peculiar to note that the bridegroom is generally junior to the bride. Monogamy is the general rule. Polygamy is rare but permitted in case of barrenness. A widower marries a widow and not an unmarried girl.

The Jamatia have a well constituted three-tier system of village (*luko*), regional (*mayal*) and supreme (*hada*) councils to run the affairs of the community.

The womenfolk tie a *dubra* up to the waist and a *risha* to cover their breasts. Hunting was one of their most important aspects for their livelihood and recreation. They were mainly shifting cultivators but now they also practise wet cultivation.

Beliefs and Customs

In the past, the Jamatia worshipped spirits. Since the last century, many of the Jamatia became Hindus. Both Vaisnavism and Saktism are prevalent among them. They worship Shiva, Durga and other Hindu deities. In addition to these, they also worship their traditional deities like Goddess *Tripura Sundari*. *Ker Puja*, *Rondak*, *Naksu Matai Puja* and *Lampra Puja* are some of the religious festivals of the Jamatia.

Each village has a priest. The priest is called *Ojhai*. He is the religious head and performs the rites of passage in the villages. The dead body is cremated near the river side. They observe the pollution period for 13 days.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Describe briefly the marriage customs of Tripuri tribe of Tripura.

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2) Write about the religious beliefs of the Reang tribe of Tripura.

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3.3 CHAKMA, HALAM AND NOATIA TRIBES

The Chakma migrated to India through the Mizoram and Tripura border. The name ‘Chakma,’ sometimes spelt as Tsakma, Tsak or Jhek, is a Burmese word. They have assimilated some of the Sanskritic cultural traits from the Bengalis of the *Chittagong* plains. Their population according to 2011 census is 79,813.

Socio-Economic Life

The Chakma men wear dhoti and shirt. The women wear a *pinon* (lungi stretching from the waist to the ankles) and a *hadi* (a long narrow piece of cloth covering the breasts). Their ornaments are made of beads and silver. The older men and women wear a *khobang* (white turban).

Rice is the staple food of the people. Though they are Buddhists they eat fish and meat except beef. The men drink *kanji* (rice beer), *mood* (distilled liquor) and chew betel nuts and leaves. The community practises wet rice cultivation and settled cultivation for producing cotton.

The community is endogamous and is divided into various *goza* (clans), which are neither exogamous nor endogamous. Marriages are arranged through negotiations, but marriage through mutual consent is also frequent. When a marriage is finalized, a betrothal ring is given to the bride. The groom’s parents present their intended daughter-in-law with the marriage dress. On arriving at the groom’s house, the bride and the groom sit together on a wooden seat with the *sowala* (a man accompanying the groom) and *sowali* (a woman accompanying the bride) sitting behind them. The *sowala* and *sowali* bind a muslin scarf around the couple. The next day, at the morning meal, the newly married couple come hand in hand and touch the feet of the elders of their families. Divorce is rare and has to be approved by the village council.

The Chakma society is patrilineal and patrilocal. The mode of succession is patrilineal. There is a strong bond between the members of the Chakma community. The women do not inherit the paternal property and have no role in political affairs.

Beliefs and Customs

Besides worshipping Lord Buddha, the Chakma also venerate goddess Laxmi, Lord

Viswakarma and goddess Kali. The Buddhist priest is known as *Bhusoo* or *bhartry*. The monks reside in the monastery and it is the duty of the village to provide them with *swaing* (food) regularly. The Chakma cremate their dead.

The main festivals of the community are the *Buddha Purnima*, *Kartika Purnima* and *Bisu* or *Biku*.

Halam Tribe

The Halam are one of the earliest settlers in Tripura. The Halam are reported to have been ferocious people who used to kill strangers. The Halam settlements are distributed all over Tripura, with the maximum concentration in the South Tripura district. According to 2011 census there are 57,210 Halam in Tripura.

Socio-Economic Life

The Halam follow a non-vegetarian diet but do not eat beef. Rice is the staple food. Smoking loose tobacco is common. *Jukla* (home-made rice beer) is the favourite drink of the Halam. The economic life of the Halam centres around the hills and forests which are abundant in natural resources. The economic activities of the people consist of gathering wild vegetables, roots and tubers, hunting small animals, weaving, basketry and jhum cultivation.

Community endogamy is the norm among the Halam. The most popular modes of acquiring a mate are negotiation and elopement. Monogamy is the general form of marriage. They do not have any marriage symbols. The women put vermilion or any other red colour on the forehead only on the wedding day. The period of voluntary service by the bridegroom is known as *damad utha*. An avoidance relationship has to be observed by a Halam woman with her husband's elder brother. She is also not supposed to utter the names of her husband, his parents and all his elderly relatives. She must not use the corners of the floor where her parents-in-law and elder brothers-in-law usually sleep.

After the father's death, the brothers take up the responsibility of getting their sisters married. The inter-family links are most visible during social occasions, such as marriage, death, etc. Male equigeniture is the general rule with regard to inheritance.

Beliefs and Customs

According to the Halam custom, a pregnant woman is not allowed to touch the body of a deceased. After delivery, a pollution period is observed till the woman completes her forthcoming menstrual cycle. During this period, the woman and her family cannot participate in any religious ceremony. The naming ceremony of the child is observed on the day when the baby's *malai* (naval chord) is detached from the body. The Halam cremate their dead.

The major religion of the the Halam is Hinduism. At the family level, they worship various deities. Goddess *Raxha Kali* is believed to protect the community from calamities. *Ker puja* is the most important festival of the Halam. No outsider is allowed to enter the venue during this *Puja*. All the sacred duties are performed by the *achai* who should be Halam by birth. *Tirthamukh* and the temple of *Mata Tripura Sundari* are considered to be the major pilgrimage centres. Some of the Halam have embraced Christianity and have stopped worshipping their traditional Gods and Goddesses. The Halam are fond of riddles and songs.

Halam tribe consists of several *dafa* (clans). Some of them are Kolo, Kulu or Khulong,

Korbong, Kaipeng, Kaireng, Chadai, Deb, Sakachef, Thangchep, Nabeen, Bongshel, Morchhum, Murdhakang or Murasing, Rangkhoh, Upini, Langai and Langlung.

Noatia Tribe

The Noatia are also one of the earliest settlers in Tripura. Interestingly none of them use word 'Noatia' as their surname because they consider it derogatory as *Notia* in Bengali means 'newcomer.' Instead they use Tripuri or Tripura. They are distributed all over Tripura, with the maximum concentration in south Tripura district. They are also found in Assam and Bangladesh. They speak Kokborok.

Socio-Economic Life

The Noatia have a non-vegetarian diet, but beef is not taken. Rice is the staple food. *Akrang* or dried fish is the favourite item. Homemade alcoholic drinks are preferred. Smoking of loose tobacco and chewing of betel leaves are common. The Noatia have adopted terrace cultivation.

The Noatia have several clans but there is no hierarchy among them. They practise community endogamy and clan exogamy. Junior sororate and junior levirate are also permitted. The modes of acquiring a suitable mate are negotiation and elopement. Monogamy is the norm. There is no marriage symbol. The post-marital residence is patrilocal. Bride price is paid in cash. In case of divorce, it is settled by *Dalpati* (chief).

Birth pollution is observed till the naval chord is detached from the baby's body. The naming ceremony is observed on this day. A ritual called *risasaromani* is observed after the first menstruation. The wedding ceremony is solemnized at the bride's residence. The *achai* sprinkles holy water over the head of the groom and the bride and blesses them to live a long happy married life. The occasion is marked with dancing and drinking. Widows, widowers and divorcees are not allowed to participate in the ceremonies. Most of the Noatia families are nuclear in form. They are patriarchal by authority and patrilineal by succession. Inheritance follows male equigeniture.

Beliefs and Customs

The Noatia profess Hinduism. At the family level they worship deities like Lakshmi for wealth, Ganga for peace and Lampra for food. *Burasa* is worshipped for warding off the evil spirits residing in the village. The *Achai* is their priest. *Ker puja*, *Lampra Puja* and *Garia Puja* are some of the important religious festivals. The community has a repository of folklore and tales. Singing and dancing during festive occasions are common. The Noatia cremate their dead. The eldest son of the deceased lights the pyre. The family observe a mourning period of 13 days. Post-funeral rites are observed on the 13th day.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Briefly describe the customs associated with birth among the members of the Halam tribe.

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3.4 OTHER TRIBES

The characteristic features of some of the other tribes like Bhil, Kuki-Darlong, Mog, Ochoi, Santal, Munda and Oraon are discussed below:

a. Bhil Tribe

A major tribe in Central India, the Bhil migrated to Tripura and inhabited the tea garden areas of the west and north Tripura districts. According to 2011 census, their population is 3105. A bow and arrow are considered their traditional identification marks. They have a non-vegetarian diet. Their staple food items are rice, wheat, maize, pulses and vegetables. They are fond of tea, tobacco, country liquor, betel leaves and *chal baja* (fried rice). The traditional occupation of the Bhil is hunting, food gathering and trapping birds and animals.

The Bhil observe a number of rituals at child birth. The birth of a child is announced by the traditional method of making sound with the husking pedal. Lineage exogamy is the rule of marriage. The most common mode of acquiring a mate is by negotiation. The women use *sankhas* (conch-shell bangles) and *sindur* (vermillion) as symbols of marriage. Monogamy is the usual form of marriage though polygamy and junior sororate are permitted in certain areas. The post-marital residence is mostly patrilocal. The bride price includes a saree, male goat, and bottle of liquor, five kilogram of rice and Rs 12. The saree must have a rupee tied to each of the four corners. The marriage ceremony takes place at the bride's residence, while the consummation takes place in the groom's house. Inheritance is through male equigeniture. The eldest son succeeds the father as the head of the family. The Bhil women participate in agricultural operations, tea cultivation, animal husbandry and fuel collection.

The Bhil profess Hinduism and worship a number of Hindu deities. The entire community worships *Sitala* in the month of *Baisakh* (April- May) to seek protection from epidemics. The season's first fruits, vegetables and rice are offered to the family deity. They participate in regional festivals like *Baruni Gangasnan Mela* and *Brahmakundar Mela*. The Bhil cremate their dead and observe a mourning period, which lasts for 13 days. The priest conducts the rituals. The kinsfolk and relatives of the deceased mark the mourning period by singing *bhajans* and offering fruits.

b. Kuki-Darlong Tribe

According to 2011 census, in Tripura the Kuki population was 10,965. The Kuki are also called Darlong in Tripura. Their main concentration is in Sadar, Khowai, Dharmanagar, Kailshahar, Kmalpur, Udaipur and Amarpur sub-divisions.

The Kuki generally depend on different cereals during different times of the year. Paddy, Maize, Millet etc. are supplemented with roots, tubers, mushrooms and bamboo shoots collected from the jungle. Food gathering is mainly carried out by young women and girls. They feast on deer, squirrels, wild boar, birds, monkeys and other jungle game.

The Kuki, generally, live on the top of the hills in houses built on a bamboo platform 5 to 6 feet high above the ground. Their main occupation is Jhum cultivation. Kuki is an endogamous tribe. When young boys and girls mutually select each other as their mates, their parents send proposal for their marriage through a mediator. Monogamy is the common practice but polygamy is not uncommon.

There are cases of divorce. If a woman divorces her husband, she will refund the full bride price and the children if any, will belong to the husband. The sons inherit the

father's property which is distributed by their father in the presence of witnesses. In case of the death of father, the mother distributes the property equally to her sons.

The Kuki celebrate four annual community festivals called *kut*, which form four different moments in their agricultural practices. They are *Ramzu in* or *Chapchar Kut*, *Kangdai Kut*, *Thlantawi Kut* and *Tharlak* or *Mim Kut*. The Darlong Kuki love music and songs. Their songs are of three types, namely, *lamkhojoy* (ceremonial songs), *Saluzai* (victory songs) and *Halem* (love songs).

The Kuki word for religion is *Sakhua*. They refer to God as "*Pathian*". The village magician or priest is called *Thiampu* or *Puithiam*. They have other deities too such as *Indroi* (family god), *Longtarai* and *Lungtan Pathian*. After the birth of a child, the mother has to observe a purification rite called *Ser Awp* for a period of seven days. Naming of a child is celebrated with gaiety and takes place after a month. They believe in life after death. The soul of a person leaves the body at death, but lingers for about three months around the house. They bury their dead in the courtyard. But those who meet with unnatural death are buried outside the village. Within 3 months of death, they observe the ceremony of feeding. In the past, they hunted human heads in order to offer them to the departed believing that these killed enemies will serve them in the abode of the dead.

c. **Mog (Magh/Mag) Tribe**

The Mog are of Arakanese origin. In Tripura, they reside mainly in Sabroom and Belonia sub-divisions. Their population is 37893 as per 2011 census. Their language has affinity with Arakanese which is similar to Burmese. They have their own script.

The Mog are non-vegetarians. Their staple food is rice. They generally drink rice beer in leisure hours and on ceremonial and festive occasions. Both men and women smoke homemade cigarettes. The major economic resources of the Mog are land. Their primary source of livelihood is jhum cultivation. The women are expert in weaving. The men are expert in making cane and bamboo baskets.

The Mog are divided into eight major exogamous clans or *palemsa*. Monogamy is the rule of marriage. The rule of residence after marriage is patrilocal. Marriage by negotiation, elopement and service are the forms of acquiring a spouse. Marriage takes place in the groom's house. Monks (*Asangfora*) perform rituals and rites for a happy married life and bless the couple. The marriage ceremony is conducted by *Medechora*, a person selected by the groom's parents. The bride price or *dapha* varies from Rs 30 to Rs 500. Besides the bride price, there is *panga pirarae*, a special kind of payment made to the bride's mother for breast-feeding the bride in her childhood. They have nuclear families. They are a patrilineal society. It is interesting to note that dormitory system still exists in some villages. It is locally known as *Sabosa-Gong*.

After the birth of a child, a hen is sacrificed on the bank of the river to appease the river God. They observe pollution period of one month after the birth of the child. After three months, the child is brought to the *keyang*, or the temple, to receive divine blessings.

The religion of the majority of the Mog is Buddhism. They worship *Phora* or Buddha as their supreme god. They consider the *Keyang*, or the temple, as the major sacred centre. The *Asangtora* is their sacred specialist. The important festivals of the Mog are *Maghi Purnima*, Phalguni Purnima, Chaitra Sankranti, *Kachung* and Baisakhi Purnima. They also celebrate Boat Festival, Water Festival and Buha Chakra.

The Mog cremate their dead. The family of the deceased observes pollution for seven days and during this period the family members are not supposed to eat food cooked in oil or ghee. The Magh are fond of dancing, music and drama, which are performed during most of their ceremonies.

d. Uchoi Tribe

The Uchoi are mainly distributed in the Bilonia and Amarapur sub-divisions of the South Tripura district. In North Tripura, they live in Dharmanagar sub-division. They are immigrants from Arakan (Myanmar) to Chittagong and thereafter to Tripura. Their population according to 2011 census is 2447.

The Uchoi are rice-eaters. They relish eating bamboo shoots. They practise Jhum cultivation. Their subsidiary occupations include weaving and bamboo work. They depend on the forest for a variety of natural resources - bamboo, wood, edible tubers, fruits and vegetables. They also hunt small animals and catch fish in the streams in the forests.

The Uchoi are not allowed to marry among relatives nor from inter-community. They acquire mates through negotiation, mutual consent and service. Monogamy is the general form of marriage. The amount for bride price is fixed at Rs 120. The post-marital residence is patrilocal. Marriage takes place at the bride's residence. Both sides arrange feasts on the occasion. Child marriage is not allowed. Adultery is a great offence. Widow and widower re-marriages are allowed. Divorce is permissible. They have twelve clans (*panji*). Nuclear family is common. Extended families are also found among them. They are patriarchal by authority, patrilineal by succession and patronymic by descent. Thus property is inherited along the male line. The families work together in the fields.

The Uchoi bury their dead except the Hindus and the Buddhists. Before the burial, a five or ten paisa coin is placed in the grave that signifies that the land has been purchased for peaceful and permanent habitation of the soul of the deceased.

The Uchoi have a repository of art, music and dance. The women participate in the singing and dancing on festive occasions. The men play the drums.

e. Santal, Munda and Oraon Tribes

The Santal, Munda and Oraon inhabit the forest areas of Khowai, Kamalpur and Sadar sub-divisions of Tripura. They migrated to Tripura from North Bengal and Bihar. Actually they had come to Sylhet to work in the tea gardens. Some of them came to Tripura and settled there. According to 2011 census, there are 2913 Santal, 14,544 Munda and 12011 Oraon tribals in Tripura.

These tribes have their own *Sardars*. They have also councils of *Sardars* known as *Mandal*. The tribes are divided into several exogamous clans and lineages. All the clans have an equal status. Endogamy at the community level, exogamy at the clan and lineage levels, monogamy and adult marriages are the norms. Most marriages are settled through negotiation. Bride price is paid in cash and kind. The post-marital residence is patrilocal. Most families are nuclear in structure and follow patriliney. After the father's death, the eldest son takes over as the head of the family.

Among the Santal, childbirth is announced by making a noise on the roof of the labour room. Naming ceremony is done on the fifth day after birth and is marked by a feast. They profess animism and observe festivals such as *Baha*, *Karam* and *Sarhai*. They

participate in festivals like *Kali puja* and *Durga puja*, which are organized by the neighbouring Hindu communities. They have their own religious shrines and priests to perform the traditional rituals. The Santal cremate their dead. The dead body is given a bath at the cremation ground and covered with new clothes. The eldest son acts as the chief mourner and lights the pyre. The mourning period lasts for five days.

The Munda follow birth pollution for eight days. On the last day a purification ritual is performed with the naming of the child. The Munda are animists. Their major festivals are *Sarhul*, *Sohrai* and *Karam*. They participate in *Kali puja* and *Durga puja*. They believe in evil spirits, and rely on the *ojha* or *bhagat* (sacred specialists). The community has a rich repository of folktales and songs. Both men and women participate in dances. They cremate their dead. The dead body is given a ritual bath with oil and turmeric paste, and covered with new cloth. The eldest son of the deceased lights the pyre.

The Oraon observe birth pollution for six days and all members of the household are supposed to abstain from participating in socio-religious ceremonies during this period. The end of the pollution is marked with the paring of nails, a purificatory bath and the *chhatthi* ritual. The baby's head is shaved and a name is selected on this day itself. The Oraon are considered nature worshippers. Their major festival includes *Sarhul*, *Sohrai*, *Karam* and *Jitia*. They have their own shrine and priests to perform the traditional rituals. They believe in evil spirits and go to the *ojha* who are believed to have the power to cure diseases by removing and appeasing the evil spirits. The Oraon bury their dead. The eldest son of the deceased acts as the chief mourner. After a year the bones of the deceased are collected from the grave and thrown in a nearby *charra* (stream). This ritual is called *harbori*.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Describe the dead rituals among the Santal, Munda and Oraon tribes of Tripura.

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we discussed briefly the tribal scenario in Tripura. The major tribes of Tripura are Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Halam and Noatia. There are also a number of minor tribes. The Tripuri, especially the Puran Tripuri, consider themselves to be the original inhabitants, while the other tribes have migrated to Tripura at different periods. However, the tribal population of Tripura is only 31.1 percent. Each of these tribes has its own distinct cultures, customs, habits, languages, religions and other features although many of their members speak the dominant language in the State, namely, Bengali. As to their religious affiliations, we notice that many of these tribes followed their own traditional religion in the past but later on embraced either Buddhism or Hinduism and at a later stage many of them became Christians. Other religions are also found in Tripura.

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