Tripura — The Land

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Tripura, the ancient home of the Bodos, is situated between 20°56’ north and 24°32’ north and 91°10’ east and 92°21’ east. It is almost completely surrounded by Bangladesh on three sides, having a tenuous link with the rest of the country through the Cachar district of Assam. It has an international frontier of 1,000 kilometres towards the west, south, and north-east. Towards the north and east are the districts of Cachar and Mizo Hills in Assam. Its only access to the rest of the country is through a narrow strip of 30 kilometres into the Cachar district of Assam, the rest of the 160 kilometres frontier to Assam being through the high hill ranges of Mizo Hills.

The whole region from Assam to the Arakans, including Tripura, is traversed by a series of folds running approximately north to south which give rise to parallel hill ranges separated by broad synclinal valleys. Topographically the entire territory can be broadly classified into hill ranges, plain lands including valleys, and river basins. The hill ranges broadly run north to south losing altitude till they merge into the plains of Bangladesh. They gradually increase in height from west to east. They send out lateral ranges or offshoots which closely approach others sent out from the successive main ranges.

These divide the territory into broad parallel valleys, the area of which consists of low undulating tilas. The floors of the valleys also rise in succession from west to east, co respective of the drainage of the country. Tortuous streams with innumerable small tributaries flow from these ranges through these valleys into the plains of Bangladesh where they mingle and merge with the waters of the Padma and the Ganges.

The six principal hill ranges in Tripura are the Jampui, Sakhan, the Longtharai Atharamura, the Sardang, the Baramura-DevtaMur and Atharamura ranges. The Jampui range is situated in Dharamnagar subdivision and is 74 kilometres in length. One of its peaks, the Betling Sib (1000 m), is the highest altitude found in Tripura. This range is mainly inhabited by the Lushais and the Reangs, the Lushais having their villages on the top of the ridge and the Reangs on both the slopes. The top villages have now been connected by a jeepable road which will connect with Damcherra Phuldungsei. These villages in their turn are connected with Reang villages on the slopes and in the valleys by narrow tracts constructed by the local people themselves with the help of the government. The Sakhan range forms the boundary of the Dharamnagar and Kailashahar subdivision and its northern part is known as the Unakuti. The length of this range is 58 kilometres and that of Unakuti 20 kilometres. Its highest peak is the Sakhan (840 m) on which the Lushais have made a delightful village.

This range like others is also solely occupied by the tribals amongst whom are the Darlongs who are of the Kuki clan. The Longtharai range forms the boundary of Kailashahar and Kamalpur subdivisions and is about 48 kilometres long. Its highest peak is Longtharai (515 m).
There are many rivers in the state which rise from these hill ranges and, after being fed by innumerable small cherras, flow through the valleys into the mighty rivers of East Bengal. They are fed only by rain water, most of them drying up during the winter and swelling dangerously during the monsoons, causing destructive floods. The Lungai, Juri and Deo rivers rise from Jampui range. They are respectively 98 kilometres, 79 kilometres and 132 kilometres in length. The Longai runs north between Jampui and Mizo Hills and then enters Assam near Damcherra.

The upper portion of the river is known as Saisilui, Tulianpui and Sai Lutlai. It has many tributaries of which the more important ones are Kalagang, Manachhara, Damcharra on the left bank and Boaraibui and Gabaicharra on the right. The Juri meets the Ragna of Dharamnagar and flows along the western boundary of that subdivision towards Bangladesh.

The Deo runs northward from Jampui towards Kumarghat where it meets the Manu river forming an arc behind it. This is a ferocious river during the rains and causes great erosion on its banks. The Manu, known as Chaumanu in its upper portion, rises from the Sakhan range and meets innumerable small streams as it flows southward towards Kumarghat till finally it passes into Bangladesh by the side of Kailashahar town after a course of 167 kilometres. This also usually overflows its banks during the rainy seasons causing heavy floods.

The Dhalai and the Khowai rivers have their source in the Longtharai range, the latter being called Maricherra in its upper portion. They are 117 kilometres and 166 kilometres in length respectively. The Khowai river flows towards the north-western direction up to Teliamura and then turns north till it enters Bangladesh near Khowai town. The source of Hawra river is the Baramura range and it runs for a length into Bangladesh. A sharp shower of a few hours is enough to bring this river in spate at which time it threatens the Agartala town.

The historic Gumati river is probably the most important in Tripura. The ancient capital of Tripura was situated at Udaipur which is washed by its waters. It flows almost along the centre of the state dividing it into two equal parts. It is navigable for small country rafts and barges and serves to open up the huge hinterland of Amarpur to river trade. Many towns were flourishing along its banks in ancient days as is evidenced by the ruins at Udaipur, Maharani and Amarpur. It rises from the range connecting Longtharai and Atharamura. Raimacherra flows from the confluence of Kalyansingh and Malyansingh near Kanti Charan Para in the eastern part of Amarpur subdivision till it meets the Thermanadi near Duchaibari. The Therma then flows from north to south and after some distance assumes the name of Gumati and runs in a singularly serpentine course up to the Dumbur fall of Amarpur subdivision. The length of the Gumati is about 133 kilometres. It is a big river and runs across Amarpur, Udaipur and Sonamura subdivisions and then flows towards Bangladesh by the side of Sonamura town.

Geology

Tripura was covered by the sea during the earlier part of the Tertiary period. The shore line was said to be running in a wide arc from Garo to Mikir hills, the sea continuously receiving sediments formed by the denudation of soil from the shore. The drying up of the sea in the Oligocene period was followed by earth
movements as a result of which the shore line resumed its original position during the Miocene period due to subsidence. The water, however, became shallow receiving sediments all the time. Extensive swampy and boggy areas are still found in Tripura, especially in the south. Towards the end of this period there were intensive earth movements resulting in the formation of high hills. 
The present form that we find in this territory is entirely the result of weathering and erosion by rivers and streams.

Some of the rocks were deposited under shallow water conditions and are of fresh water origin. Some others were deposited under deep and tranquil water conditions and are of marine origin.

**Soil**
The soil of Tripura is sandy loam to loamy sand, clay loam to pure clay or lateritic. It is grey to brown in colour. Large tracts of soil is alluvium consisting of sand, silt and clay, pure sand being exclusively confined to the river beds. Except the sandy loam, all other varieties of soils become very sticky even after a shower, but they dry up very quickly.

**Mineral Resources**
The mineral resources of Tripura are meagre, apart from the clay found near Agartala, which is being used locally- Traces of lignite, coal, limestones and ochre have been reported, but the quality is poor and reserves too low to be of any commercial value. There is, however, a good possibility of striking oil in Tripura as the formations in which oil is found in Assam and Bangladesh occupy much of the territory here; it is optimistically stated in some knowledgeable circles that Tripura is floating on oil. Gas has already been found in test drilling.
The exposure of workable building material laterite have been found near Bagpasha, Silbari, Pabiacherra and Sindhukumarpara. Sandstones which can be suitably used as a road metal are found in the Gagracherra area and near Gorar Tila. The conglomerate beds from Bahuricherra quarry and near Atharamura range are also suitable for use as road metal.
Lignite deposits were traced at a place in Quarercherra branch of Ratikraicherra in continuation of the lignite deposits of Ujan Thangna. Some lignite has also been noticed near Hiracherra Tea Estate in Dhatuacherra and Indolacherra, near Natingcherraa Tea Estate.
Superficial nodules of ochre have been found in a dark grey clay seam in a valley below Bindapa-tilla hill in Belonia.

**Petroleum**
The rocks in Tripura are similar to the Burma strata where petroleum has been found. The Oil and Natural Gas Commission has carried out a detailed survey and they have found that the strata running into Tripura is the same as in nearby areas of Bangladesh where huge reserve of natural gas has been recently discovered. Test drilling has been taken up. It is reasonably certain that natural gas will be found here in commercial quantities and there may be sufficient reserves of oil to run a refinery of 3 million tonnes capacity in the course of time if the expectations of the experts are fulfilled. It is likely that the economy of
Tripura in future, like that of Kuwait, will be interlinked with its oil and natural gas resources.

**Forests**

Over 95 per cent of the territory of Tripura was covered with luxurious forests about 50 years ago. It was this fact that got the princely State of Tripura the name of Hill Tipperah. But now, due to the extensive immigration of both tribal and non-tribal people from Bangladesh and due to the practice of *jhum* cultivation, unregulated and unrestricted fellings, grazing and repeated fires, much of these valuable forests have been destroyed and replaced with a vegetable cover like bamboo and savannah over extensive areas.

**Wildlife**

Not too long back, it is said, elephants used to graze in the fields where now the imposing structure of the Secretariat stands at Agartala. About 10 years ago a District Collector shot a huge tusker a few yards from the M.B.B. College. At present, however, due to deforestation and extension of agricultural lands, wild life has become scarce. But, in many of the forest areas like the Jampui, the Sakhan, Gandacherra, Raima, etc., herds of elephants are still found. Other varieties of wild life found in Tripura are tigers, leopards, samber, barking deers, wild pigs, and monkeys. Wild buffaloes and bison also exist, but they are on the verge of extinction.

**Climate and Rainfall**

Tripura is situated within the south-west monsoon belt. Usually the heaviest rain is between May and October, more than 90 per cent of the annual rainfall being received during these months. However, there is intermittent rain throughout the year, not a single month passing without rain. The average rainfall over the past 50 years has been over 250 centimetres.

Mosquitoes are very common in the valleys and also in the hills except in Jampui and Sakhan. The valleys are usually hot and humid though in the winter they tend to become exceedingly cold due to a thick mist over it. The sun succeeds in piercing it by 11.00 a.m. and 2 or 3 hours later again vanishes behind the hills. Probably the coldest place in the plains of Tripura is Anand Bazar, located as it is between the Jampui and Sakhan hills.

The weather on the other hill ranges, apart from the Jampui and Sakhan hills, is not very pleasant. These hills are full of mosquitoes, flies and parasites of all sorts. Jampui hills, however, are very pleasant during the winter, a chilly breeze blowing across the hill top. It can easily be converted into a health resort in case transport facilities can be developed. (Reproduced from the book entitled, “Tripura” authored by Shri Omesh Saigal first published in 1978.)

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