## TRIBALS OF THE NORTHEAST REGION-II

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The block titled ‘Tribals of the Northeast Region -II’ consists of four units. Major tribal groups that are found in the four states of the Northeast region of India have been discussed in this block namely: Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.

Unit 1 is about the ‘Tribes of Mizoram’. It discusses the Lushai, Pawi, Lakher as well as the Chakma tribes found within Mizoram. A brief description has also been provided about the various customs and traditions of the major tribes of Mizoram. The socio-economic situation among the tribes and the level of educational development has also been provided.

Unit 2 about the ‘Tribes of Nagaland’ introduces the people and the society and talks about the head hunting culture as well as the feasts of merit that take place among the tribal population. The unit also significantly discusses the Nagas encounter with the British, the advent of Christianity and modernization thus bringing about transformation and challenges at the same time.

Unit 3 is about the ‘Tribes of Tripura’ and thus, the unit describes briefly the tribal scenario in the state. It also provides the geographical distribution of the tribes in the State along with the socio-economic life of the tribes. The beliefs and customs among the tribes have also been touched upon in this unit.

Unit 4 is about the ‘Tribes of Sikkim’. The unit attempts to provide information about the various customs and traditions still prevalent among the tribes in Sikkim. It also provides the geographical distribution of the different tribes that are still found in the region. The tribal socio-economic life as well as their beliefs and customs have also been dealt with in this unit.
UNIT 1  TRIBES OF MIZORAM

Structure
1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Lushai Tribe
1.3 Pawi (Lai) Tribe
1.4 Lakher (Mara) Tribe
1.5 Chakma Tribe
1.6 Let Us Sum Up
1.7 Further Readings and References

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The region called North East India which comprises the seven sister states and Sikkim is home to one of the largest concentration of diverse tribal communities in India and Mizoram is one of these predominantly tribal inhabited state. The unit focuses on the contemporary tribal situation of the state of Mizoram. By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Describe the various customs and traditions of the major tribes of Mizoram;
- Know the socio-economic situations among the major tribes of Mizoram; and
- Discuss the level of educational development among the tribes of Mizoram.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Mizoram is a predominantly tribal state located in the southern tip of North East India. The population of Mizoram in 2011 Census has been 10,97,206. Of them, 10,36,115 are Scheduled Tribes (STs) constituting 94.43 per cent of the total population of the state. The state has registered decadal growth of 23.45 per cent of ST population during 2001-2011. The state of Mizoram has fifteen communities notified as STs. The Lushai tribes have the major community constituting 70.9 per cent of the total ST population. Chakma is the next largest ST community in the state; they constitute 9.35 per cent of total ST population. Pawi, Lakher, Kuki, and Hmar are the other tribes having together a sizeable population constituting 16.36 per cent of total ST population in the state.

In Mizoram, majority of the ST population are Christians. In 2011 Census, 90.07 per cent of the ST population has been returned as Christian. The Buddhist at 8.78 per cent constitutes the second largest religious group of STs. Chakma are the main followers of Buddhism.

The tribal population of Mizoram can be broadly classified into Mizo tribes and the non-Mizo tribes. A brief explanation about the word ‘Mizo’ may be relevant here in order to elucidate the nature of tribal affiliations and identification in Mizoram. The term ‘Mizo’ is a combination of two words- mi (people) and zo (highland or hill)-and when they are combined together into a single word it means highlander. However, it is crucial to understand that it connotes only those groups having the same cultural patterns and
common historical past. This indicates that the term Mizo is a generic one which encompasses a number of the sub-tribes of Mizoram who have more or less the same cultural patterns and shared historical past. In this sense, the term Mizo may be understood as a unifying force to bring together the various tribal groups of Mizoram.

A number of sub-tribes are no longer significant because of their adoption of the customs and traditions as well as the dialects of the larger tribes and thereby losing their distinct identities. Some of the major tribes are: Mizo (Lushai), Pawi (Lai), Lakher (Mara) and Chakma.

1.2 LUSHAI TRIBE

The Lushai tribe is the largest of all the Mizo tribes and their inhabited area lies between 21 and 25 degree North latitude and 92 and 94 degree East longitude. The largest concentration of the Lushai is in the districts of Aizawl and Lunglei and a sizable number of them are also found in other districts of northern Mizoram. The word Lushai is a corrupted form of the original word Lusei which was adopted and popularized by the local British administrators. Lushai continued to be the official term but among themselves they prefer Lusei over Lushai. They arrived at present day Mizoram somewhere between the 17th and 18th century along with many of the Mizo sub-tribes from Myanmar.

Under Lusei there are altogether six chief clans and ten commoner clans and under these clans are several sub-clans. Though there were other chiefly clans, the Sailo clan ultimately emerged as the only clan which maintained hereditary chieftainship and ruled almost all the Lushai villages on the eve of British arrival in Mizoram. Immediately after their entry into Mizoram, the Sailo chiefs consolidated their rule and extended their domain and made many non-Lushai clans and sub-tribes as their subject.

The Lushai dialect is known as Duhlian which has today become the lingua franca among all the Mizo sub-tribes due to some reasons such as, it is quite similar with the dialects of the other Mizo sub-tribes; it was adopted by the Christian Missionaries as medium of instruction in schools, churches and in translation works. G.A Grierson put the Lushai dialect within the Kuki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman family.

Prior to the establishment of British colonial rule in Mizoram, a crude hierarchical social arrangement was already in place in the Lushai tribe. Since members of the Sailo clan belong to the ruling clan, they occupied the highest social status in their society and as such all their customs and practices were adopted by the other clans. At the apex was the chief and his immediate family followed by the Upa (adviser or counselor to the chief), Zalen (families belonging to the chiefly clans, who were exempted from paying the prescriptive paddy tribute), next in the social pyramid were the agricultural experts or Ramhual, who were given the privilege of selecting the jhum plot first ahead of all the other families in the typical Mizo village before the arrival of the British. These people were followed by other officials such as the village priests (puithiam), the village blacksmith (thirdeng), who obtained a basket of paddy from each household who had availed his services. At the bottom of the ladder were the common people (hnamchawm) who paid various kinds of tributes/taxes to the village chiefs. There is another group of people called bawi who are situated below the common people and are the private subject of the chiefs who need to buy back their freedom to become free citizens.

The British colonial penetration of erstwhile Lushai Hills (Mizoram) starting from the 1840s and culminating in the establishment and consolidation of their colonial rule in the 1890s had profoundly affected the Lushai tribe as was the case of other Mizo tribes. The efforts of the colonial officials in the Lushai Hills was closely followed by those of
the Christian missionaries, who succeeded in converting not only the Lushai tribe but also almost all the Mizo cognate tribes into Christianity by the 1930s.

Though Christianity brought about an almost total transformation in the Lushai (Mizo) way of life and outlook some customary practices have remained in modified forms. The efforts of the missionaries were successful in eliminating the customs and traditions which they found were not conforming to the Christian teachings through persistent preaching. Thus, zu (rice beer) was replaced by tea as a popular drink among the Lushais (Mizos). Zawlbuk, the traditional institution for dissemination of knowledge and skill among the youth, and a symbol of village solidarity and welfare had been replaced by modern education and the formation of associations like the YMA (Young Mizo Association). Animal sacrifices on ceremonial occasions and for propitiation of the evil spirits, which once were an integral part of Lushai (Mizo) religious belief, are now considered anathema. But such customary practices as the payment of bride-price are still continued and encouraged so are some other customs and community traditions.

The basic unit of the Lushai (Mizo) society is patrilocal joint family with its patrilineal descent and inheritance rules. A father is the head of the family and remains so till death. A Lushai family is composed of parents, their unmarried sons and daughters. The married sons are not expected to remain with their parents except the youngest son who was expected to take care of his parents at old age. The inheritance of family property and succession of office (chieftainship) was ultimogeniture. But after the consolidation of the British administration in Mizoram inheritance among the chief’s family was reversed in favour of primogeniture, but other than the chief’s family ultimogeniture was the common practice. Inheritance by women was not sanctioned by the Lushai customary practices but in the decades following Independence legal provisions were made to qualify women for inheritance of family property.

However, the traditional rule of inheritance to family property has been significantly changed in actual practice today, and it is no longer the exclusive right of the youngest son to inherit family property. Any son who gains the favour of his parents and who is loyal to the family tradition could be chosen as inheritor. The large-scale endorsement of modern economic practices among the Lushais (Mizos) and the resultant accumulation of wealth could cause serious conflicts between brothers especially in the towns.

Marriages in the Lushai society was solemnized only after having agreed on the terms set by the families of the bride and groom through negotiation. In the traditional Lushai society bride-price was paid in terms of mithun. In today’s context, bride-price is paid in cash ranging from Rs.300-Rs.400 and marriages are solemnized in the Church according to Christian rites and rituals. The bride-price is usually distributed among the members of the clan chosen by the bride’s parents for the purpose of reaffirming the relations that had already existed there or to create new relations through it. The amount distributed to each of these members is usually small in amount but it was symbolic enough to show the bond of relationship among the same clan or a symbol of the desire to create such relationships.

At present, marriage among the Lushai (Mizo) retains some of its traditional characteristics, but the distribution of bride-price as a means to reaffirm kinship ties among the clan members has lost much of its relevance and importance. Bride-price and its distribution has become basically a kind of fulfillment of the marriage rituals on traditional lines due to the fact that the amount of bride-price remains constant despite the changing socio-economic conditions.
The Lushai tribe in Mizoram has 95.6 per cent literacy. With male and female literacy at 96.8 per cent and 94.4 per cent respectively, the gender gap in literacy is small. Although, Mizoram is on top in total literacy, in the field of higher education the scenario is not as impressive. Merely 3.9 per cent of the literate population is having educational level graduate and above. Lushai tribe is educationally better off, as it has the highest (4.3%) population having this level.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Lushai (Mizo) economy. They have practiced from time immemorial a method of agriculture called shifting cultivation or slash and burn or jhum cultivation by cutting down the forests on the hill-sides and burning them after properly drying them in the sun. This requires the continuous shifting of land under cultivation as the fertile soil layer at the top would quickly erode after one season. Even today this method is the dominant form of agriculture in Mizoram. In the interior villages agriculture still plays role in the social and economic life of the Lushai tribe (Mizos) but there are significant changes in the way it functions during olden days. In olden days private ownership of land was not possible due to the nature of cultivation rendering social harmony and solidarity at the village. Moreover, the various social and religious activities of the people were inextricably linked with the system of agricultural work and agricultural land. However, today, people are no longer satisfied with the monotonous agricultural works and began to engage in diversifying economic activities.

Following the Mautam famine of 1959, which brought havoc in the erstwhile Lushai Hills (Mizoram), insurgency broke out in 1966, led by the Mizo National Front with the aim to secede from India through arm struggle. The main brunt of the insurgency was borne by the Lushai tribe (Mizos) as it was mainly confined in the middle and northern part of Mizoram, which has the Lushai tribe as the largest group.

Peace finally came with the signing of the memorandum of settlement on 30th June 1986. However, the experiences during the height of insurgency have lasting impact on the Lushais (Mizos) society, particularly the grouping of villages, in which a number of villages were forcibly relocated at certain grouping centres in order to better facilitate counter-insurgency measures by the government of India. The process of grouping disturbed the traditional village harmony which was heavily influenced by homogeneity and attachment to village land. Thus, the shifting of many remote villages to form larger units led to significant changes in the structure of social relations among the Lushais whereby the traditional village homogeneity was replaced by relatively differentiated structure of relationships.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. Why is Mizoram known as a tribal state?

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2. Name some of the major tribes in Mizoram.

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1.3 PAWI (LAI) TRIBE

According to the 2011 Census the Pawi (Lai) population is 51,406 which is about 5 percent of the total population of Mizoram. The Lai or (Pawi) tribes are mainly concentrated in the southern part of Mizoram around Phawngpui (Blue Mountain) although a larger number of them are living across the international border in the Chin State of Myanmar. Lawngtlai District is where the main concentration of the Pawi tribes is found and Lawngtlai town itself is the seat of the Pawi (Lai) Autonomous District Council. Almost, the entire Pawi tribes today are Christians (99.28%) and the level of literacy is also quite high among them. Literacy rate among the Pawi tribes is 91.6 percent.

The entire region of Pawi habitation in Mizoram is on hill ranges. Villages are generally located on the hilltops with heights ranging from 2500 feet to 4000 feet. The entire area enjoys a pleasant climate and is neither very hot during summer nor too cold in winter.

There are a number of Pawi (Lai) clans and sub-clans, but the principal ones are Zathang, Chinzhah, Hlawncheu, Hlawnchhing, Hnialum and Khenglawt. Despite the numerous clans and sub-clans the Pawi tribes have only four main dialects. The four principal dialects are: Khuofo and Thantlang which are generally spoken in Mizoram; Halkha (Haka) and Laizo are spoken in Myanmar alone. Khoufo dialect is spoken in the villages of Bualpui (Ng), Fungkah, Lungpher, Lungtian, Vartek and Rawlbuk, Thlantlang dialect is spoken in the villages of Niawhtlang, Lungzarhtum, Archhuang, Tialdawngilui, Pangrang, Thaltlang, Vawmbuk, Sangau, Pangkhua and Cheural.

Their dialect is classified as belonging to the Tibeto-Burman languages and they do not have their own script. It was only through the efforts of the pioneer missionaries that their dialect was reduced into written form using the Roman script. At present, only a tiny section of the Pawi people living in the interior villages can speak the Lai dialect. The vast majorities of them however, have forgotten their dialect and now speak Duhlian (or Mizo) dialect. This may be due to the fact that during the initial period of missionary interventions in Mizoram, Duhlian (or Mizo) dialect was promoted by the missionaries as the medium of instruction in school and that the Bible was translated only in Duhlian (Mizo) dialect for many decades and thereby forcing the Pawi to learn and adopt Duhlian (Mizo) dialect.

The Pawis of Mizoram, as of today are entirely Christians and Christian rites and ceremonies have replaced almost all the traditional Pawi religious rites and ceremonies. Biakin (church building) is their sacred centre and the pastors and church deacons (elders) are the most influential leaders in their society. They attend church services every Sunday and on some auspicious days. After becoming Christians their most important festival is Christmas, followed by New Year and Easter Sunday.

The Pawis have discarded many of their traditional folkdances and songs during the early phase of Christianity in Mizoram. Today they are reviving many of these dances and festivals through the help and support of the state government and the different cultural organizations that are established for this purpose. Among the important folkdances of the Pawis, Rawkha Tlak is one which is the Lushai equivalent of Cheraw. It is performed only by women, with the help of men who clap several pairs of bamboo
in unison. *Chawnglaizawn* is another dance which was performed during a traditional religious ceremony, but this ceremony has lost its relevance and usage today as a result of the wholesale conversion of the Pawis to Christianity.

With the spread of Christianity and education, many of the customary rites and practices regarding marriage have lost their relevance and are no longer observed. However, like their Lushai neighbor, the Pawis too, retain certain features of their traditional rites and practices even in marriage. The payment of bride price by the groom’s family is still enforced among the Pawis and its amount continues to remain higher than their Lushai counterpart. At present marriage is solemnized in the church in accordance with Christian rites under the supervision of the pastor.

Among the Pawis, the age of marriage ranges between sixteen and eighteen for girls and twenty five for men. In olden days, the age of marriage was slightly lower than what it is today. Marriage by negotiation is the usual form of acquiring life partner. Besides negotiation, marriage by elopement is the other form of marriage which however is accorded lesser importance by the society and the church. This form of marriage however, is resorted to by the Pawi youth in the present scenario in greater number, as the attitude of the society began to soften on this subject.

Among the Pawis, the usual form of marriage is monogamy especially after becoming Christians. Though, polygamy was permitted in the past it was only the chiefs and wealthy men who used to have more than one wives. In the Pawi society the rule of residence after marriage is patrilocal. In case of divorce, depending on its nature bride price is altered, refunded or forfeited. When a wife sought divorce, bride price is refunded, whereas if divorce is sought by the husband the main bride price is generally forfeited, except in case of an established adultery charge.

The residential family pattern of the Pawi is either of nuclear or of extended type. After marriage, the son and his wife remains with the parents until their first child is born. Normally the eldest son continues to live with his parents. At the time of need, all the kin members come forward to render their help.

The Pawi are patrilineal in descent, and trace their relationship through the male line. The eldest son inherited all his parental property including the ancestral home. A daughter had no share in the inheritances of the family property. Presently, however, this practice has become almost redundant as increasing number of parents divide their family properties among their sons and even to their daughters.

The major economic resources of the Pawi is land and forest. The primary economic activity of the tribe is shifting (jhum) cultivation on the hill slopes. Land for shifting cultivation cannot be owned individually and the village council acts as the custodian of such land. The village council distributes plots for shifting cultivation to each household every year by lot.

### 1.4 LAKHER (MARA) TRIBE

The *Lakher (Mara)* people are recognised scheduled tribe in India, native to northeastern India, primarily in the Mara Autonomous District Council of the state of Mizoram, where they form the majority of the population. Significant numbers of Maras are also found living south-eastern part of Myanmar, in Chin State and Rakhine State which border the district. They were earlier known as the *Lakher* by outsiders as their neighbour, the *Lusei* called them by that name, and the new name *Mara* was inserted in List of Scheduled Tribes in Mizoram state in 1978 replacing the old name.
According to the Census of India 2011, the total population of the Lakher (Mara) tribe in Mizoram is 42,855 (4.13% of the total population of Mizoram). At present there are 50 villages and 59 village councils within the Mara Autonomous District. The Lakhers (Maras) were in early period known to the outside world under different tribal names such as Mara, Lakher, Shendu or Shendoo, Maring, Zyu or Zao/Zho, Tlosai, Khongzai, etc. Some writers and historians included them as one of the Mizo tribes/clans. They called themselves “Maras”.

The Lakhers (Maras) occupy the southern portion of Mizoram, the hill tracts situated in the areas of Indo-Myanmar border. In 1922, the whole region occupied by them was divided into different parts among the three districts viz the Lushai hills, the Chin Hills and the Arkan Hill Tracts. From 1924, the Lakhers (Maras) villages which had fallen to the Lushai hills had been administered as part of the district under the Chief Commissioner of Assam. In 1953, the Lakher (Mara) area of the erstwhile Lushai Hills was loosely amalgamated with the Lai area to create an autonomous region under the name “Pawi-Lakher Region” under the Sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution. After the reorganization of North East India in 1972, the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was trifurcated into the Lai (Pawi), Mara (Lakher) and Chakma Autonomous District Council and Saiha is the capital of the Mara (Lakher) Autonomous District Council.

The Lakher (Mara) tribes are an off-shoot of the Kuki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman family. Though nothing definite is known about their original home, their ancestral homeland is believed to have been somewhere in Southern China. They then migrated from there via-Tibet entering the hills of Northern Burma and settled for sometimes in the Chin Hills (Myanmar). Thence, in the latter part of the 17th century, they have migrated to their present location. It is generally believed that they have settled in the land now occupying for about three centuries.

The migration of the Lakhers (Maras) can be traced with some degree of certainty, and the original homeland of at least three of these groups (Tlongsai, Hawthai, and Sabeu) can be posited. The Tlongsai migration began in Leisai (between Leitak and Zaphai). The original homeland of the Hawthai is believed to have been Chira (in Haka). The Sabeu are found in Chapi, but it is believed that they migrated to that location from Thlatla, which is near Haka. Before the advent of British imperial domination, inter-village conflict was the Lakher norm. Individual Lakher (Maras) villages fought against one another and against neighbouring peoples (e.g., the Khumis and Chins).

The relationship between the British and the Lakhers (Maras) was characterized by intermittent conflict, extending from the middle of the nineteenth century to 1924, at which time all the Lakher (Mara) tribes were brought under British control. British rule brought both political and economic stability to the region. Villages enjoyed a period of internal and external security, slavery was eliminated, and a new market for the sale of surplus goods appeared (with a resulting shift from barter to currency as the medium of exchange). This marked the beginning of the demise of the village chief’s power and authority. With the advent of Indian home rule, the political structure of the Lakher (Mara) region was reorganized. An administrative structure was established for the Lushai Hills (to which the Lakher (Mara) Region sends one representative) and a regional council for the Pawi-Lakher region (to which the Lakher Region is permitted to send four delegates). The office of village chief has been eliminated, and the Lakhers (Maras) are gradually being assimilated into the mainstream of Indian life as citizens of Mizoram state.

Each Lakher (Mara) sub-group speaks their own dialect. However, the Tlosai-Siha dialect is used as lingua-franca by all the Lakhers. Only the educated Lakher (Mara)
can speak Lusei (Mizo) language and English, while a few of them understand and speak Hindi. The literacy rate among the Lakhers (Maras) is 81.93% which is quite impressive and contributes significantly to the good standing of Mizoram state in terms of literacy. The Mara Autonomous District Council is the responsible body for the preservation and promotion of the Mara language and as such within the Mara Autonomous District Council jurisdiction, Mara language is used as the medium of instruction in the elementary schools up to class six.

The Lakher (Mara) tribe consists of five principal sub-groups—Tlosaih-Siha, Zyhno, Hawthai, Chapi and Vytu. Each sub-group occupied separate territory since the time of settlement in the present location. Each of this sub-group again consists of many more clans. Prior to the advent of Christianity amongst the Lakher (Mara) the society exhibited a three tier hierarchy. At the top were the abeiphozy or the chief clan, followed by phosozy or patrician clans and at the bottom are the machhiepho or commoner clans. According to N.E. Parry, who authored a book entitled, The Lakkers, there are five chief clans—Hlychho, Choza, Chhachhai (Fachai), Bohia and Nohro—while the phosozy consists of 16 clans and the machhiepho consists of about 66 clans. The clan division was seen as essential due to the fact that bride prices were determined on the status of each clan. However, after becoming Christians, the hierarchical arrangement of the Lakher (Mara) society has lost its relevance to a great degree and almost become redundant today.

The Lakher (Mara) area is mostly rural in character with the exception of a few towns, such as Saiha, the district capital and headquarters of the Mara Autonomous District Council, Tuipang and Kawlchaw. This shows that majority of the Lakhers (Maras) live in the rural area. The Lakher (Mara) villages are characterized by the bond of kinship and close ties among the villagers which developed a sense of community feeling. Each household is bound to participate in certain community work and failure to participate by any family is punished with fine.

The prevalent form of family in the Lakher (Mara) society is nuclear family. After marriage a couple normally tries to set up its own household. The Lakher (Mara) tribe follows patrilocal residence after marriage. Being a patrilineal descent group, the father is the head of the family in the Lakher (Mara) society. Regarding inheritance, the Lakher (Mara) normally followed primogeniture, where the eldest son inherits the family properties. A cordial relationship is maintained among the family members. The parents as well as all the elderly persons in the family receive respect from the younger generation. The children normally respect their parents and the elder brother.

Monogamy is the usual form of marriage among the Lakhers (Maras) even before becoming Christians, though the chiefs and patrician clans practice polygamy. Marriages were customarily arranged and there are two types of marriages—marriage involving the chief clans and that of the other clans. The marriage involving the chief clans were more complicated and much more expensive than the marriage involving ordinary folk. Generally, the bride price among the Lakhers (Maras) is very high and still, those from the chief clans and other higher clans were much more substantial than the commoner clans. At present the bride price of a Lakher (Mara) girl may be approximately estimated to be more than ten thousand rupees (in cash and in kind) while those of their neighbours, such as the Luseis (Mizos) are ranging from rupees three hundred to five hundred (in cash and in kind) only.

The Lakher (Mara) tribe follows patrilineal descent and traditionally, the inheritance of family property usually rests on the eldest son, who not only inherits all of the family
property but also has to pay his father’s debt if there was any. However, the youngest son also has the right to inherit some part of the family property. Sons, other than the eldest and the youngest, have no claim whatsoever on the family property.

With the advent of missionaries in 1907, the Lakhers (Maras) have embraced Christianity and by 1959 the entire Lakher (Mara) population in Mizoram had converted to Christianity, which brought about many significant changes in their society and culture. They ceased their raiding and plundering habits, they were also freed from the various traditional superstitious beliefs and practices and from the sense of oppression by the evil spirits. There were also tremendous changes in the social life of the Lakhers, who are now not only wearing western dresses but also adopted many of the western ethos and value system. However, this does not imply that they discarded their entire customs and traditions; they still retain some of them.

1.5 CHAKMA TRIBE

The Chakmas also known as the Changma are the second largest scheduled tribes in Mizoram constituting 9.35 percent of total scheduled tribe population. Their area of settlement in Mizoram is mainly confined to the south western and western side of the state bordering Tripura state and Bangladesh. The Chakmas have been bestowed with an autonomous district council from 1972 under the Sixth Schedule to the constitution in order to safeguard their culture and traditions. The headquarters of the Chakma Autonomous District Council is Kamalanagar (or Chawngte) in south-western part of Mizoram.

They are certainly a group of more recent immigrants into Mizoram from the Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh. On the basis of their physiognomic features and linguistic affinity, anthropologists and linguists appear to agree that they belong to the Tibeto-Burman group of Mongolian race. They are not a distinct tribal group found only in Mizoram, but a greater number of them are residing in Chittagong hill tract of Bangladesh, Tripura and a small number of them in Arunachal Pradesh as well.

Chakma language (Changma Vaj or Changma Kodha) is an Indo-European language and part of the Southeastern Bengali branch of Eastern Indo-Aryan. Many linguists now consider the modern Chakma language as part of the Southeastern Bengali branch of Eastern Indo-Aryan language. Some authors claimed that they have dropped their original Tibeto-Burman language and adopted a variant of Bengali language.

The Chakmas officially follow the Southern, or Theravada, form of the Buddhism. But, their form of Buddhism has some aspects of Hinduism and traditional religion as they also worship Hindu deities. Lakshmi, for example, is worshipped as the Goddess of the Harvest. Almost every Chakma village has a Buddhist temple (kaang). Buddhist priests or monks, who are called Bhikhus preside at religious festivals and ceremonies. The villagers support their monks with food, gifts, and offerings to Buddha. The presence of traditional religious practices in the form of Buddhism followed by the Chakmas can be inferred from the fact that they offer the sacrifice of goats, chickens, or ducks to calm the spirits that are believed to bring fevers and disease. Even though animal sacrifice is totally against Buddhist beliefs, the Chakma Buddhist priests perform this religious tradition.

The Chakma society is divided into a number of clans (gojas), which are further subdivided into sub-clans (guttis). They follow strict endogamy within their tribe and marriage within the same clans or sub-clans is considered as a serious offence. Parents arrange marriages, although the wishes of sons and daughters are taken into account.

Tribes of Mizoram
bride price is fixed when the two families negotiate the marriage. In recent years, the bride price has been reduced to a symbolic ritual practice with the belief that marriage could be annulled if it is not paid. The marriage ceremony is known as Chumulong and is performed by Buddhist priests. If young people elope, the marriage can be formalized on payment of fines. Polygyny is acceptable but rare and remarriage after the death of a spouse is also allowed.

Chakma families exhibit both nuclear and extended types. Today, the nuclear type of family is increasingly becoming popular. The senior member of the family, such as the father, mother and elder brother and his wife are respected by the younger children and siblings. It is obligatory on the part of the elder brother to take care of the unmarried and dependent younger sisters and brothers, especially after the death of the father.

The rule of inheritance among the Chakmas follows that each son receive equal share. Nowadays, a father who owns a property may give a share not only to each of his sons but also to the daughters at his own discretion. The eldest male son occupies the headship of the family after the death of his father.

In Mizoram, Chakma population is primarily concentrated in rural areas and only 0.8 per cent of them reside in urban areas. This indicates the low level of development among the Chakmas. The capital of the Chakma autonomous district council, Kamalanagar, (Chawngte), is the only recognizable town within the Chakma inhabited area in Mizoram. The traditional and primary occupation is agriculture typified by a mixture of shifting and semi-permanent cultivation. There is no ownership of land, but Chakma custom holds that no one should interfere with fields that indicate signs of activity by someone else already. Some Chakmas have given up their farming lifestyle and have entered the labor market. Those fortunate enough to have the necessary education have gone on to clerical and other white collar jobs. However, the vast majorities of them remains poor and were unable to leave their traditional occupation of farming due to lack of employment opportunity and educational facilities in the Chakma inhabited area. According to the Census of India report 2010, Chakma tribe has registered the lowest literacy of 45.3 per cent, among the tribes of Mizoram male and female literacy among them stood at 56.2 per cent and 33.6 per cent respectively.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. Describe the concept of marriage and divorce among the Pawis?

2. Write briefly the form of family among the Lakhers.

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

The state of Mizoram today is a predominantly tribal state. Most of the tribes of Mizoram belong to the Kuki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman family. The vast majorities of the tribes of Mizoram are cognate tribes and speak language or dialects which are closely related and almost all of them have become Christians which also pave the way for the mutual understanding and cooperation among these tribes despite their antagonism in the pre-Christian days. However, the Chakmas stood out in high relief amongst these tribes because of the fact that they profess Buddhism and the level of educational and other socio-economic performances are still relatively low among the Chakmas.

1.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


UNIT 2 TRIBES OF NAGALAND

Structure
2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 The People and Society
2.3 Tribes in Nagaland and their Festivals
2.4 Status of Women in Naga Society
2.5 The Advent of Christianity and Modernization
2.6 Let Us Sum Up
2.7 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to discuss the following:

- The uniqueness of Naga tribal society; and their customs and traditions;
- The village republic and the village community life; and the significance behind head hunting culture;
- Nagas methods of achieving social recognition; and the Nagas encounter with British force; and
- The status of women in Naga society.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Nagaland is a vibrant state located in the extreme part of North-East India. A home to as many as fourteen Naga major tribes. The virgin terrains of the state are breathtakingly enchanting. It is a land of folklore passed down from one generation to another through word of mouth. Here music is an integral part of life.

The state has a distinct character both in terms of social composition as well as in its developmental history. Nagaland stands out as a land of diverse tribes, system of governance, culture, sheer colour and variety. It also represents sociological and anthropological gold mines because it is still scientifically unexplored.

The state is blessed with rich linguistic tradition with many tribes, each exclusive to itself. They speak variety of Tibeto-Burman languages (sometimes classified as dialects). What is even more remarkable is that even within the language of a particular tribe, there are dialects mutually unintelligible. This makes inter-tribe communication very difficult, especially in rural region. In the circumstances, English has come to serve as the state language while Nagamese, has become the common lingua.

The state is inhibited by 16 tribes such as: Angami, Ao, Chang, Chakhesang, Khiamniungam, Konyak, Lotha (Kyong), Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema (Sumi), Yimchunger, Zeliang, Kuki and Kachari. Each tribe is distinct and unique in character from the others in terms of customs, language and attire. The multiplicity of tribes, within such a limited space could be due to the fact that the Naga ancestors
migrated to the present location in different groups and they remained confined to their ridges and mountains terrain. This subsequently, resulted in their unique characteristic of appearing to be both one people and many tribes displaying both unity and diversity in their customs, traditions, attires and political systems.

Nagaland state came into being on the first of December, 1963. It was officially inaugurated by the then President of India, Dr.S.Radhakrishna as the sixteenth state of the Indian union.

The state is predominantly rural, with 82.26 per cent of the population living in the villages, generally situated on high hilltops or slopes overlooking valleys. Nagaland witnessed the highest growth rate in population over the last decade. This unprecedented growth rate in population is a cause of serious concern to the demographers and policy makers in the state. As per 2011 census, the literacy rate of Nagaland is 80 per cent. Presently, there are 11 districts in Nagaland.

The state of Nagaland, which is mostly hilly territories, is bounded by Assam in the west, Myanmar on the East, Manipur in the south and Arunachal Pradesh and part of Assam on the north. Nagaland covers the area of 16,527 sq.km with a population of 19, 88,636 (2001 census), of which males form 10.42 lakh and female 9.47 lakh.

### Check Your Progress 1

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Write a short note on the inhabitants of Nagaland

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### 2.2 THE PEOPLE AND SOCIETY

Nagaland is entirely a tribal state. The ethnic people of Nagaland are called Nagas who belong to Indo-mongoloid family. However, the term Naga is inclusive of all the Naga tribes inhabiting in different parts of North East states of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and North Western part of Myanmar. Therefore, the term ‘Naga’ also implies the Naga tribes inhabiting in different parts of North East India and Myanmar. However, the present study confines only the Naga tribes of Nagaland.

Nagas belong to the indo-mongoloid family and they speak variety of Tibeto-Burman languages. Nagas were known to the outside world for their past head-hunting culture. Although head hunting is now completely a thing of the past in Nagaland, yet its importance from anthropological aspects and the social impacts on Naga system is so deep that no study on Naga social system can be completed without any discussion on head hunting.

The Nagas are simple, friendly, industrious, straightforward, and sturdy with a high standard of integrity and fear was unknown to the Nagas. They are also well known for their hospitality, and cheerfulness.

The common characteristics of the Naga tribes are their strong will to have and maintain their separate identity, dauntless courage to fight difficulties and face the enemies, a
desire strong enough to have a free life and a bitter disliking for meddling of others in their internal affairs. It was the longing of the indigenous Nagas to have their own separate identity which enabled them to overcome a number of difficulties and problems while searching for a permanent abode. The early Nagas lacked knowledge of script and literature but they followed some sort of mythological tales of their past, origin and development.

Each Naga tribe used to practice its own traditional faith, which consisted of worship of Sun, Moon, the rivers and the streams. Pacification of the spirits dwelling in rocks or boulders or around the village was also a part of traditional ritual. Later on American Christian missionaries introduced Christianity to the Nagas. One can say now that almost the entire population of Nagaland is Christian by faith.

The Village-States

Naga traditional life revolved around the village. The family, clan, khel and village represented the extent of a Naga’s concern, and there was very little inter-village and less inter-tribe interaction. The village was the highest political unit and the similar culture and shared concerns for security gave a broad common framework of meaning and loosely held the members of the tribe together. Because of this, the term village-state is often used in contradistinction with the Greek term ‘village-state’. Not surprisingly, a person’s identity was inseparable with that of his family, clan, khel and village.

Inter-village feuds were very common because the village would avenge any wrong committed against a member by a person from a different village, and any member of the culprit village was a target in seeking vengeance. Within a village, a culture of caring among fellow villagers was assiduously nurtured and the bonds of kinship were usually very strong in the village.

These villages were mostly located on the hill-tops which provided a commanding view over the surrounding areas. The choice for hill-tops was a strategic one and it was a necessity of the time as they had to keep constant vigil over the invading enemies. Naga society as found in its village was a compact and well-knit society where rigid customs and discipline was strictly observed.

Naga village-state was an independent unit and accordingly enjoyed the right of sovereignty. Every village-state pursued an independent foreign policy and implemented in its own customary laws on all walks of life of its citizens. Each village-state had its own defence system. Administration was indigenous and independent. Its economy was local and sufficient. They lived simple, contented and happy life. Everyone had the opportunity to develop his personality according to his ability.

A family obeyed the behest of father, leadership of the society went to the strongest, village welfare was safe under a council of elders and kingship completed the edifices of a village-state. Individual had freedom of speech; every individual enjoyed certain inviolable rights. Society was ruled by rigid customary laws; every village was fiercely independent in spirit; there was no discrimination of any kind but democratic in features and functioning was the village-state of the Nagas.

Community life

One of the most colourful ingredients of the Naga village states is its community life. A Naga individual knows no other life except that of community life. They work in groups, eat in groups and sleep in group. There was no individual cultivating or harvesting, no
individual constructing house. All things were done in group. Also the communist principle of freedom of work for all is close to the Naga community life.

The philosophy of individualism did not have much importance in Naga community life. The individual had no existence apart from the community. The individual had no right to build his own house alone. Every year generally in winter after the harvest, houses were built turn by turn by the public free of cost.

**Naga Clan System**

Unlike western societies, it is very difficult for a Naga to conceive of a situation in which a person has no family members. A Naga child is born not just into a nucleus family but also into a large family—the Clan. For Nagas the clan is an important part of an individual’s self identity, and finds concrete expression in the mutual obligation, clan members owe to each other. The most important features of a Nagas is that they first owe allegiance to the family (Clan), the village, the tribe and lastly to the Naga community.

Most Naga tribes practiced very strict clan exogamy so much that members of the same clan, irrespective of which ever village they come from will consider the same clan as brothers and sisters and marriage within the same clan will be considered as incest. The Nagas also claim the existence of clan counterparts not just in other villages within the same tribe but also in other tribes.

**Head-Hunting Culture**

Head-hunting was practiced in different parts of the world at different periods of time. The practice originated out of the belief that the soul-matter, on which all life depended, was stored in the head of human beings. So, whenever a person was beheaded and his head taken to another village, the soul-matter inside the severed head was also transferred to that village. It was believed that the recipient village would gain prosperity; its population would increase, crops and cattle would multiply. The Iban tribes of Burneo were notorious head-hunters. In Burma, Wa tribe observed a head-hunting season when the soul-matter was obtained to fertilize the crops. In Europe the practice survived till early twentieth century in the Balkan Peninsula. In Africa, the Kagoro tribe of Nigeria indulged in this practice. In its extreme form, the practice degenerated into human sacrifice.

Many westerners without fully understanding the deeper aspects of Nagas head hunting have wrongly assumed head hunting as a merely matter of violence, murder and savage practice. However, to the Nagas, head-hunting was something noble to be admired, a proof of bravery and strength. It was also adopted as a form of patriotic and chauvinistic heroism.

Nagas head hunting was not senseless killing of the enemy but a tradition connected with the tribal principles of pride, heroism, justice, honour and recognition and the victim’s head was a trophy of honour and bravery.

Besides, Nagas had their own beliefs about the value of human enemy heads. They believed that heads of enemies add to the fertility of the soil. Another most important aspect of head hunting was the Naga tradition that a man could not climb the ladder of social recognition till he brought enemy’s head. It was an established custom of taking enemies head to prove the wariorship of the Nagas and also of the tribe.

The practice of head hunting only started to subdue after Christianity was accepted by Nagas. The American missionaries played a vital role in bringing the head hunting culture
to an end by convincing their converts that head hunting is a sin and is against morality. God the creator of man and the Universe will punish those who murder their fellow men. As Nagas embraced Christianity, the practice of head hunting faded into history.

**Feasts of Merit**

Feast ofMerit provided the most significant social status in the Naga society. It is a feast performed by rich people to share their wealth with the whole community, and in return earn status in society and temporal salvation. The rich man then starts his life again like a commoner. This salvation is not a reward after death but abundance and a completeness of life. It was indeed the most important social ceremony in Naga society.

The status of man and his wife in Naga society depended much upon the number of feasts that a man performed. The feasts of merits consisted of a series of feasts—each more costlier than the proceedings one and each higher in status. The Lotha (Kyong) tribe says that one day while the tribe was in Mansoria (Manchuria), God sat on a beam in Mentsuru’s house and gave him instructions to perform the series of feasts for the well being of the family. With the performance of these feasting, it was found that the dignity, status and respectability of a man and his family increased.

The number of feasts and the methods of celebrating them varied from tribe to tribe. In some tribes, the number of feasts even varied from one village to another. These feasts entitled a man and his wife to wear a certain type of dress and to decorate the front porch of their house with curving. For instance, the front porch of the Angami Naga rich men’s houses were adorned with carved beans and painted representations of men and women, shields, mithun, hornbill feathers etc. In effect, the status of man and his wife was portrayed through these representations.

**Morung: The Bachelor Dormitory**

Morung was a dormitory for young unmarried men, recreation clubs, and guardhouses. It was a way of life and an institution that was practiced by not only among the Nagas but the neighbouring tribes such as the Mizos, Garos and the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. For Naga society, Morung was the most important institutional training ground for young men to become a responsible citizen. Some Naga tribes had only boy’s morung. However, some tribes had morungs for both boys and girls.

In traditional Naga society, learning was informal and non-formal: learning by doing and by imitation. Since there was no tribal organization to deal with the needs of the tribe as a whole, each village became solely responsible for its own economic, social, spiritual, and political needs. Such needs required that the young be taught and trained within the village community. Each tribe had different principles and functions of Morung, but broadly, the philosophy of the Morung was service and sacrifice. The young men of the Morung were trained to serve the clan and village and the supreme sacrifice was expected of its members by the society.

In morungs, much of Naga culture—its customs and traditions has been transmitted from one generation to another through the media of folk songs, folk dance, folk tales, oral historical traditions, wood and stone carvings of figures and designs on clothes. For ancient Naga people, the folklore and oral historical traditions have been the primary means of teaching in the village and also within the family. Folk tales and oral historical traditions are more inclusive than folk music in their content, and thus cover more extensive areas. Folk stories contain fewer romantic episodes; they tell more about customs and traditions of the past.
Their trainings in morungs taught them how to maintain decorum in the midst of simplicity, what etiquette to be observed with regard to both the young and the old, how necessary it is to show respect and honour the weaker sex and also show sensibility for the sick and poor.

In present Naga society morung has been replaced by modern educational institutions. The imparting of traditional knowledge and social ethics to a child is now the responsibility of the parents or elderly people at home.

**Nagas Encounter with British**

Since time immemorial the inhabitants of the Naga Hills had been free and independent. Before the arrival of the British in the land of the Nagas, the Nagas society was unknown to the outside world. In the earlier times Ahoms rulers (Assam) had some sort of relations with the Nagas who tried to subjugate the Nagas, but the Nagas never allowed the Ahoms to establish their sovereignty over them. The relationship with Ahoms was short-lived and the Nagas maintained their own systems and values independently.

The advent of British in 1832 changed the world for the Nagas forever. The early British relations with Nagas were one of perpetual conflict. The Nagas did not want any outside intervention in their affairs; therefore, they fought courageously with the British advance parties and caused a big loss to the British. For more than 50 years, the Naga tribesmen violently and bitterly resisted the British force. The fight between the Nagas and British continued till 1880 when the fort of Khonoma finally fell into the hand of British troops. The defeat of the Angami Naga tribe in Khonoma battle marked the end of serious troubles and hostility in the Naga Hills.

After 1880, the British troops dominated many parts of the Naga Hills but the Konyak Naga tribe continued to fight the British till 1939. The British administered in most of the Naga villages but they did not have total control over the Nagas. In fact, the Eastern Nagas remained unconquered by British. Therefore, Eastern Naga territory was called unadministered Area.

Then came the two World Wars, these wars did not affect the Nagas much except for the labour corps of 2000 Nagas which went to France to assist the British troops. The Nagas, however, did not escape the terror and ravages of the Second World War when the Naga areas were turned into a battlefield, with the presence of Japanese and Allied soldiers. Several army commanders and officers recall the valuable assistance and unflinching loyalty of the Nagas to their forces and pay glowing tributes to their gentlemanliness and characteristic hospitality. The bloodiest battle was fought in Kohima between the Japanese and Allied soldiers. Kohima proved to be the waterloo for the Japanese. Many British and Indian soldiers owe their lives to the Nagas for the unending support they received from the Nagas.

History bears the testimony that many old cultures and civilization lost their identities in the mighty wave of subjugation and assimilation by the powerful forces. However, in the case of the Naga society and its cultural as well as social norms and values, it never happened that the Nagas people lost their identity. Even during British rule the Naga society preserved its social norms and values and kept the social identity intact.

### 2.3 TRIBES IN NAGALAND AND THEIR FESTIVALS

There are fourteen major Naga tribes in Nagaland namely: Angami, Ao, Chang,
Tribals of the Northeast Region -II

Chakhesang, Khemungan, Konyak, Lotha (Kyong), Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema (sumi), Yimchunger and Zeliang. All the tribes are noted for their unique character.

**Angami Naga Tribe**

The **Angami** are one of the major Naga tribes of Nagaland. Kohima Village or ‘bara bosti’ is considered the second largest village in Asia. The territory of the Angamis is made up of the present Kohima district which is divided into four regions: The Southern Angami, the Western Angami, the Northern Angami, and the Chakho Angami. The Angami story of the origin of the Naga tribes centres in the Kezami village of Kezakhenoma. The Angami tribe is known for their ecological consciousness use of their watercourses for terraced wet-rice cultivation because of this labour-invested cultivation, land is the important property form among the Angami. Traditionally, property is divided equally among sons with daughters also receiving a share; in modern families it is generally shared among children. Among the Angamis, the youngest male in the family inherits the parental home – Kithoki, which also means he is responsible for their care until they pass away.

**Festival**

The Angamis celebrate SEKRENYI in the month of February. It normally falls on the 25th day of the Angami month of “KEZEI”. The ten-day festival is also called PHOUSANYI by the Angamis. The festival follows a circle of ritual and ceremony, the first being “KIZIE”. The THEKRA HIE is the best part of the festival where the young people of the village sit together and sing traditional songs throughout the day. Jugs of rice-beer and plates of meat are placed before the participants. On the seventh day the young men go for hunting. The most important ceremony falls on the eighth day when the bridge-pulling or gate-pulling is performed or inter-village visits are exchanged. Until the close of the festival no one goes to the fields and all field work ceases during this season of feasting and song.

**Ao Naga Tribe**

The Ao Naga tribe inhibits the district of Mokokchung. They believed that their ancestors emerged from Lungterok (six stones) lying at the top of a spur on the right bank of the Dikhu just opposite of Mokokchung. The stones are located in Chungliyimti, the first Ao tribe village, which is at present located in Sangtam area in Tuensang district of Nagaland. Aos are called Aor, which means ‘those who went away’. This is the direct reference to the migration of the people from the first village established by the Aos called Chugliyimti. Legend has it that the present day Aos migrated from the original villages where they are living today. The Aos have two distinct dialects Chungli and Mongsen. The Aos considered Chungliyimti to be the seat of their civilization and it is from here that its history can be traced but beyond Chungliyimti it is obscure. Tradition claims that it was here that the village organization that is prevalent to this day was initiated and formulated.

As per 2011 census the population of Mokokchung district, which is occupied by Ao tribe was 227,230 with a density of population of 141 per square km, sex ratio of 949 and a literacy of 93.3%, which is the highest in the state.

**Festival**

The Aos observe Moatsu Mong festival after the sowing is done. It provides the Aos a period of recreation after the strenuous job. The festival marked by vigorous songs and
dances merry making and fun, which is observed for three days from 1-3 of May. Aos have another festival called Tsungrem Mong which is celebrated on the eve of harvest. However, nowadays the Aos celebrate from 1st to 3rd August. These festivals provide opportunities to the budding generation and village stalwart to demonstrate their intellectual skill and physical power.

**Chakhsang Naga Tribe**

Chakhsang is one of the prominent tribe in Nagaland which occupies the district of Phek. The word Chekhsang is a combination of three tribes: ‘Cha’ of Chekru, ‘Khe’ of Khezhe and ‘Sang’ of Sangtam. Now Chekhsang consist of two major group “Chokri” and “Khezha” and one minor group “Zhamai” or “Zhavame”.

**Festivals**

In a year, Chakhsang Naga tribe celebrates seven festivals; however, Tsukhenyie and Sukrenyi are the major festivals. Sukrenyi is the most important festival of all the festivals. During the festivals the boys and girls are sanctified through religious ceremonies and rituals. Sukrenyi covers eleven days. Tsukhenyie festival is also an important festival for the Chakhsang Naga tribe. Earlier it was usually celebrated at the end of the 3rd lunar month of March. But now it is celebrated on 16th May. Tsukhenyie is a festival which celebrates the culmination of all leisure activities and a festival for welcoming a new fruitful life and year.

**Chang Naga Tribe**

Chang is one of the Naga tribe inhibiting the Tuensang district of Nagaland. Chang tribe followed Monarchy system of governance but the Chang chief did not have the monopoly of the land as their Sema counterparts. The kingship was hereditary and the king enjoyed free labour and contributions from the subjects in all form of paddy, but he was not an autocratic. In practice the counsellors ran the administration and the function of the chief was more or less ritual. According to oral and traditional story, it is said that their ancestors lived in the place call “Changsang”, which was the first village of Changs tribe. It was believed that right at the center of this village, they constructed a platform called ‘Mullang’. This platform was considered to be the platform of progress and prosperity, which became the public court where all the major issues were conducted and the decisions or judgment delivered from this platform became the final order.

**Festival**

Naknyulum is a very important festival of the Chang Naga tribe, which falls before the harvest. The festival lasts for six days. During this festival, the departed souls are remembered, marriage and sex are prohibited. They decorate their houses and Morung and prayers are offered to the Almighty God for good harvest. At night every house lights fire-brand as sign of jubilation.

**Khiamniungan Naga Tribe**

Khiamniungan tribe inhibits the district of Kiphire which is bordering Myanmar. Kiphire district had been carved out of the present Tuensang district on January 24th 2004 by upgrading the Sub-Division of Kiphire. It is a home to Khiamniungans, Yimchungers, Sangtams, Phom, and Sumis. The original name of Khiamniungan is Kalukanyu which means house of state since they made their houses with flat stones. But in 1950, the name Kalukanyu was changed to Khiamniungan, which means men originated from water.
Festival

Tsokum is one of the important festivals of Khianniungan tribe. It is usually held during the last week of October. This festival is observed for eight days, each day carrying certain meanings.

Konyak Naga Tribe

Konyak tribe is one of the largest tribe in Nagaland. Mon is the home and headquarters of Konyak tribe. Monarchical system was prevalent among the Konyak tribe. The Konyak name for king is called ANG. The Angs (King) of Konyak had under them villages varying from 4-21 paying tributes the great Ang. Each village had one Ang but above them all stood the great Ang who had the power to interfere in the affairs of other Angs under him. The term Ang (King) is found only in Wakching village; the rest of Konyak tribe villages use the term Wang. The Ang or Wang can marry as many wives as his wealth and influence permitted. However, there can be only one Queen whose son alone can inherit Angship or Wangship. The Angs were very powerful and they were regarded as sacred and their word is law.

In upper Konyak areas, there is quite a different type of administration. Here they had a republican type of government. It is said that when the Konyak migrated first to Chui village—the oldest village, they had a big council meet to decide whether they should have Ang system or a democratic system. Those who favoured Angship settled in lower Konyak areas and those who were against it occupied the upper Konyak areas.

Festival

Aoleng Monyu is one of the greatest festivals of the Konyak tribe. The entire Konyak community of Nagaland observes this festival in the first week of Aoleng lee (April). Aoleng lee is observed after completion of the New Year beginning with spring when the riot of flowers in every hue start to bloom. The significance of this festival is to ask the Almighty God to bless them with a bountiful harvest. This festival spreads for 6 days and each day carries a different significance.

Lotha Naga Tribe

Lotha tribe (Kyong) is one of the major tribes in Nagaland. The name Lotha is given by the British. However, Lothas call themselves as Kyong. Aos call them Tzuiner which means ‘power to swim’.

Wokha is the home and headquarter of Lotha (Kyong) tribe. Like most Naga tribes, Lothas (Kyongs) traces their origin in Kezakhenoma. The story goes that the three ancestors brothers came out of a hole near the miraculous stone in Kezokhenoma. In this miraculous stone, if one load of rice is dried, it multiplies into two loads.

From the very beginning, the Lothas system of government was a republican type. What was important and unique was the participation of every individual in the deliberations of any public issue. There was direct democracy, the true and pure democracy in reality and in practice. In Lotha society, the strongest in battle and the greatest performer of feast of merit could become the head of the administration.

Festival

Tokhu Emong is the post harvest festival of Lotha tribe. It is a day of joy, thanksgiving, sharing, reconciliation and strengthening relationship. However, the most impressive
aspect of this festival is that past rancor is forgiven and new ties and bonds of closer intimacy are forged.

Unlike other festivals, Tokhu Emong bans villagers from hunting, fishing, indulging in trade and travelling. However, it does not restrict others from visiting the village but no visitors would be allowed to leave the village till tokhu emong festival is over. In olden days, the festival of Tokhu Emong was held for nine days—each day carrying certain meaning.

Phom Naga Tribe

Phom tribe is one of the Naga tribe inhibiting in Kiphire district which is bordering Myanmar. The district had been carved out of the present Tuensang district on January 24th 2004 by upgrading the Sub-Division of Kiphire. It is home to the Phoms, Yimchungers, Sangtams, Khiamniungan, and Sumis. Phom as one of the major tribe of Nagaland contributes 6.6% to the total population of Nagaland. Phoms are also known by the name Koha, Tamlu and Chimnengnu. It is believed that Phom tribes might have migrated from Burma and settled in Yingnyusang. In the course of migration, Phom separated from Yimchunger, Chang in Langa village which is presently occupied by Yimchunger tribe and with Ao tribe in Jungliyimti.

Festival

Monyu is the biggest festival of the Phom Nagas who have four important major festivals. Monyu is celebrated in April after the sowing for 12 days. Like all the Naga festivals, Monyu festival is for worshipping the supreme spirit whose blessings are sought to protect the crops. The first six days are for community feast, music, dances, and amusement and the remaining days for community and social work. Old things are replaced and cloths are changed for, the New Year begins with spring.

Rengma Naga Tribe

Rengma tribe is one of the smallest Naga tribe in Nagaland. Like most Naga tribes, Rengma tribe also traces their origin in Kezakhenoma. Tseminyu is the home and headquarter of Rengma tribe which is under the district of Kohima. Rengmas are considered to be the best Naga blacksmiths. Rengma tribe is also found in the Mikir hills of Assam.

Festival

Ngada is the most popular festival of the Rengmas, which falls in November. For the Rengmas, Ngada is the mother of all festivals. It is the festival of thanksgiving, merry making and rejoicing. This festival also marked the end of the harvest season. The festival for 9 days, each day carrying certain meanings.

Sangtam Naga Tribe

Sangtam tribe inhibits the district of Tuensang and Kiphire. Kiphire was a sub-division under Tuensang district but now upgraded to a full fledged district head quarter. In Sangtam society right from the beginning, there existed a republican type of government where every individual had equal participation in society. Sangtam tribe like the Ao tribe and Lotha tribe had no love and regard for monarchy type of government. Their headship is chosen on the basis of merit such as head trophy, intellect, influence and wealth.
Festival

The Sangtam tribe has about 12 festivals spreading over the calendar of the year. However, Mongmong is the most important festivals of the Sangtam. Mongmong festival means togetherness and is very cautiously observed every year and stretches over six days, each day carrying certain meanings and significance. The object is to have a good harvest, food grains for which the villagers toiled for the whole year. The predominant them of the festival is the worship of the God of house and the three cooking stones in the fireplace. This festival is observed during the first week of September every year.

Sema (Sumi) Naga Tribe

Sema (Sumi) Nagas are primarily inhabitants of Zuhneboto district of Nagaland. The word ‘Sema’ originates from ‘Sumi’. The Sema (Sumi) tribe also has a dowry system contrary to the Bengal system where the groom pay dowry to the bride’s family. Sema tribe like most Naga tribes traces their origin in Kezakhenoma.

Sema tribe has a political system of an autocratic secular character, having a chieftain being characterized by benevolent disposition. Among the Sema tribe, a village head has been known to acquire the status of chieftain. Chieftainship was hereditary in the family of the man who originally founded the village. The most suitable man became the Chief by force of character. His main function was that of a leader in war.

It was customary for the eldest son of a Sema chief to establish a village of his own out of his father’s estate. In case, the village did not admit to further division, the son could go to another area, clear or conquer that place and establish his authority. Thus the Sema society encouraged expansionist colonization.

Festival

Tuluni is the famous festival of Sema tribe. Like most Naga festivals, Tuluni follows an order, each day for specific activity. In its earlier avatar, the festival begins with Asu Zani or brewing of beer from millets, which was more available and affordable than rice beer. Gifting, maintaining harmony within the community are some of the important aspects of Tuluni festival. The official date of Tuluni festival is 8th of July every year.

Yimchunger Naga Tribe

Yimchunger tribe inhibits in the district of Kiphire which is bordering Myanmar. Kiphire district had been carved out of the present Tuensang district on January 24th 2004 by upgrading the Sub-Division of Kiphire. It is home to Yimchunger tribe and some Naga tribes. Under Yimchunger tribe, there are many sub tribes, such as, Tikhirs, Chirrs and Makuries. According to their traditional stories they emerged from a cave in a place known as Kemephu near Waphur village. It is situated on the south of Shamatore and thus is not far away from Myanmar (Burma) border. They say that their number was great and they did not want any more people to come and so they closed the cave with a huge stone and thus others were left behind. This story probably suggests that they passed through a narrow pass. However, the Yimchungers stayed around that place, Kemephu, and later on went to Yimkhiung village and stayed there for sometime. From there they gradually spread to other places.

Festival

Metemneo is the biggest festival of the Yimchunger Naga tribe of Nagaland. This festival is observed for five days right after the harvest of millet. Each five day is bearing different names Xiz, Sito, Shito, Zhimoto, Chiresok and Siresok. During this festival, the boys and girls get engaged. Gifts are exchanged among those who are already betrothed.
Special prayers and offerings are made when the parents offer six pieces of meat and five for female souls.

**Pochury Naga Tribe**

Pochury tribe was once called Eastern Angami but dissociated themselves from Angami Tribe both socially and politically. The word Pochury is an acronym formed by combining three clans names, namely; Sapo, Kechuri, and Kury. Pochury tribe inhibits district of Phek. Like all other Naga tribes, the Pochury people are known for their rich cultures and tradition. There are varieties of traditional attires and ornaments. The customary laws are unwritten but practiced by all the villages. These laws are binding to members of the society and were passed on from generation to generation by the word of mouth. The elderly people of the village decide and passed judgement on disputes and matter concerning the village.

**Festival**

Nazhu is the greatest festival of the Pochury tribe. This festival falls during the last week of February. Nazhu festival is more about emotional bonding rather than physical relationship. This festival is also about spiritual connection between the living and the dead, and between the people and unseen protector and about building bridges within and outside the family domain. Unlike the other festivals, it entails the sacrifice of a tree named Ashito for good production of harvesting and prosperity.

**Zeliang Naga Tribe**

Zeliang tribe is one of the major tribes in Nagaland. The word Zeliang is a combination of Zemi, Lengmai and Rongmai. Paren district is the home of the Zeliang tribe. Paren came under Kohima district, however, it had been carved out of Kohima district by upgrading the Sub-Division of Paren.

**Festival**

The Hega Festival is one of the most important and the biggest festivals amongst the Zeliang tribe. It is a festival invoking the Almighty to shower His blessing upon the people with riches, luck and courage. It is also festival of joy, rest and get-together. During this festival, young couples are united for their future. The festival begins with variety of programmes and merrymaking.

Chega Gadi is another popular festival of the Zeliang tribe. It is believed that on this day the Almighty showers blessings and good harvest and health. This festival is celebrated in the month of October. The people wait anxiously to see the first new moon and as soon as it is sighted, the Priest of the village (Singkupiu) makes an announcement and people begin necessary preparation for the festival.

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**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Give a brief description of the Phom Naga tribe in Nagaland.

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Tribes of Nagaland
2.4 STATUS OF WOMEN IN NAGA SOCIETY

In the classless, casteless Naga society, women have traditionally enjoyed a high social position, with a pivotal role in both family and community affairs. However, being a patriarchal society with strong warrior tradition, it is considered an honour to be born as a man. Though women are highly respected in the society, they are not traditionally included in decision making process of the clan or the village.

Apart from traditional practices that have generally cared for women and the girl child, the present Nagaland society has been successful in achieving high women literacy, increasing sex ratio, health and entrepreneur development. In this context, it can be said that a Naga woman enjoys more privilege than most other women elsewhere in the country. Majority of Naga women are engaged in agriculture and allied sectors, such as cultivating various kinds of cereals, vegetables etc. Women down the centuries have cultivated the fields, raised families, woven cloths, provided food and marketed local produce. The impact of all these on Naga society from then to now has been significant. They continue to do so, but are also participating in newer areas and in changing environment. Men traditionally paid dowry to the family of the bride at the time of marriage in the form of livestock. This practice is different from most parts of India, where the bride’s family used to pay dowry to the groom’s family. A Naga woman also has the traditional right of divorcing her husband anytime but on valid reason. Rooted in this tradition and governed by a general culture of care, the value of the girl child has continued till today in Naga society.

Incidents of dowry deaths, female infanticides, and neglect of the girl child are absent in Naga culture. However, property is inherited by the male heirs and transmitted through them. The male have the coparcenary rights of ancestral property. Women have no share in such inheritance although acquired properties can be gifted to daughters also. It is widely believed that the daughters after marriage come under the care of the husband’s clan or family. Largely because of this, in practice, no landed property was gifted to women although most of the work on the land was done by womenfolk. In recent times, a few pioneering initiatives, both private and official are being taken to allow women to own land.

In today’s time, Naga women have started entering in every profession, such as teaching, administration, police service, engineering and technology, trading, cottage industries, floriculture, etc. A handful of them have also entered the highly competitive export market. The female literacy of Nagaland is also above the national average. As per 2011 census, the literacy rate of women in Nagaland is 76.09%. The reasons for the growth in literacy include the introduction and subsequent social acceptance of education in the wake of Christian missionaries, who laid equal emphasis on education, irrespective of gender. Even the present school enrolment for girls in Nagaland is higher than the national average. This reflects the potential of Naga women to attain better educational qualifications and hence better economic and social status. However, the lack of vocational education at school and college is a cause of serious concern.

2.5 THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY AND MODERNIZATION

The most important landmark in the history of the Nagas with considerable social, cultural and political ramifications is the arrival of Christian missionaries and the spread of Christianity among the Nagas. The acceptance of Christianity changed the traditional
outlook and living culture of the Nagas. Likewise the missionaries served as an agent in forging a greater “Naga” identity which is a radical departure from the age old set up of warring village republics. The dreaded custom of head hunting slowly declined and disappeared as more and more Nagas embraced Christianity in the early 20th century.

Today, more than 95 per cent of Nagas are Christians. Christianity has changed the Naga society entirely and it bears little semblance to the tribal society that it was a century ago. The Christian missionaries interfered in the social and cultural practices to a far greater extent than the government. The new educational system and religion disrupted the indigenous pattern of life as both the British administration and the Christian missionaries made the Nagas discard their age old social patterns, cultural practices and traditional political setup without providing functional substitutes.

The Naga society is undergoing tremendous transformation. The spread of Christianity, the growth of education and developmental programmes undertaken by the government have unleashed forces which are churning up the Naga tribal society and rapidly changing its complexion and character. The modern set up of detached nuclear families is fast catching up with the Nagas. This is leading to the erosion of the role of the clan and the village as agents of social control.

Education is one of the main reasons which have brought so much transformation in the Naga society. The educational institutions have produced thousands of graduates and post graduates in different streams and disciplines. All these developments are the result of education and economic development of the state.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to understand the tribals of Nagaland whose customs and traditions are unique. In the first part of the section, it addresses Nagaland state as a distinct character both in terms of social composition as well as in its developmental history. The ethnic people of Nagaland are called Nagas who belong to Indo-mongoloid family speaking variety of Tibeto-Burman languages. The unit also explained Nagas as simple, friendly, industrious, straightforward, and sturdy with a high standard of integrity. Fear was unknown to the Nagas.

The second section, explains the Naga village state, which is an independent unit and accordingly enjoyed the right of sovereignty. Every village-state pursued an independent foreign policy and implemented in its own customary laws on all walks of life of its citizens. It further explains community life as the most colourful ingredients of the Naga village states.

In the third section, the unit tried to look at the deeper aspects of head hunting culture. It further clarifies the wrong assumptions made by many westerners about Naga head hunting as a merely matter of violence, murder and savage practice. However, to the Nagas, head-hunting had a much deeper meaning behind, which was something noble to be admired for a proof of bravery, strength and a social status. It also further explains Feast of Merit as the most significant part of Naga society for achieving social recognitions. The unit also tried to elaborate ‘Morung’, which was the most important institutional training ground for young men for becoming a responsible citizen.

In the fourth section, the unit explained the Nagas encounter with the Ahoms and the British. The section is giving a deeper understanding of how Nagas fought courageously with the British advance parties and caused a big loss to the British. For more than 50 years, the Naga tribesmen violently and bitterly resisted the British force.
In the fifth section, the unit explains the different Naga tribes inhabiting Nagaland state. It also gave a brief explanation about the meaning behind the different festivals of the Nagas.

In the sixth section, it touches upon the status of women in Nagaland, where traditionally women enjoyed a high social position, with a pivotal role in both family and community affairs. It further gave an outlook of the modern Naga women who have started entering all professions. The section further explains the advent of Christianity in Nagaland, and its positive impact in the Naga society. And lastly, it touches upon the transformation and challenges.

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UNIT 3 TRIBES OF TRIPURA

Structure
3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Tripuri, Reang and Jamatia Tribes
3.3 Chakma, Halam and Noatia Tribes
3.4 Other Tribes
3.5 Let Us Sum Up
3.6 Further Readings and References

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 22º 5’ and 24º 32’ north latitudes and 91º 10’ and 92º 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, Hujuria, 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 vermillion 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 *maikhlnongmo* (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 Sanskrit 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 vermillion 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 Koloi, Kulu or Khulong,
Korbong, Kaipeng, Kaireng, Chadai, Deb, Sakachef, Thangchep, Nabeen, Bongshel, Morchhum, Murdhakang or Murasing, Rangkhol, 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. *Burasara* is worshipped for warding off the evil spirits residing in the village. The *Achais* is their priest. *Ker pujia, 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.

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**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 Gangasn 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 Amarpur 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 observes festivals such as Baha, Karam and Sarhai. They
Tribals of the Northeast Region -II

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, Sohra*, 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, Sohra*, *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*.

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**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.
3.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


UNIT 4 TRIBES OF SIKKIM

Structure
4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Lepcha Tribe
4.3 Bhutia Tribe
4.4 Magar Tribe
4.5 Tamang Tribe
4.6 Other Nepali Tribes
4.7 Let us sum up
4.8 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will learn about the tribal communities of Sikkim. 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.

After reading through this Unit, you should be able to know:
- Briefly the tribal scenario in the State of Sikkim;
- The geographical distribution of the tribes in the State;
- The socio-economic life of the tribes in the State; and
- The beliefs and customs of the tribes in the State of Sikkim.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A former Kingdom and a fascinating Himalayan Jewel, Sikkim is situated in Eastern Himalayas spreading below Mount Kanchenjunga (8,534 m), the third highest mountain in the world. The various ethnic groups have their own nomenclature for this enchanting land – the Nepalese call it Sukhim or new home, while Tibetans refer to it as Denzong or the valley of rice and to the Lepcha, the original inhabitants of Sikkim, it is Nye-al-Ale or heaven. Lying between 27° to 28° N latitudes and 88° to 89° E longitudes, Sikkim is bounded on the north and north-east by Tibet, on the east by Bhutan, on the west by Nepal and on the south by Darjeeling district of West Bengal. It has an area of 7096 sq. km. The population of Sikkim is 6,10,577 million according to 2011 census and is scattered over 4 districts and 452 villages.

The people of Sikkim are modest and simple by nature. They take much pride in their glorious culture and beliefs. There are three main ethnic groups in Sikkim, namely, the Lepcha, the Bhutia and the Nepalese. Of these, the Lepcha are considered the original inhabitants of the State and the other two groups migrated to the States at different intervals. The Bhutia came from Tibet while the Nepalese migrated from Nepal. According to 2011 census, the Scheduled Tribal population constitutes 33.79 per cent of the total State’s population. Of these 33.72 percent are Bhutia while the Lepcha
constitute 20.7 percent. Even though, the Nepalese were the last to migrate into Sikkim, soon they gained the recognition of being the most dominant group since they comprised approximately 75% of the entire population of Sikkim. The Nepalese are not considered tribals, although some groups among them have been accorded the status of scheduled tribes in recent years. Besides, there are also groups from the plains like the Marwari, the Bihari, the Bengali, the Punjabi and the South Indians, who settled in Sikkim. They are mostly engaged in business and government service.

The three major languages of the State are Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali. Nepali has now become the lingua-franca of the State. Lepcha and Bhutia languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. Besides these three, there are also other languages spoken by minor tribes like Magar, Tamang, Rai and Limbu. However, there are four official languages in the State namely, Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepali and Limbu.

The two major religions of Sikkim are Buddhism and Hinduism. Majority of the Lepcha and the Bhutia are Buddhists, while majority of the Nepalese are Hindus. Besides these two main religions, there are also Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Jains. Buddhism was earlier the State religion of Sikkim.

Shrouded in heavy mist, the guardian deity Kanchenjunga protects the inhabitants of Sikkim. Omnipresent and mystical, Kanchenjunga finally yields to nature’s power and sheds its monsoon veil in autumn. People celebrate it with great pomp and ceremony during the Pang Lhabsol festival. The natives believe that the great God created, from beneath the slope of this sacred mountain, the original man and woman from whom all Sikkimese are descended. Other festivals of Sikkim belong to two distinct religious-cultural groups namely, the Lepcha-Bhutia culture based on Buddhism and the Nepali culture based on Hinduism. The Lepcha-Bhutia Buddhists of Sikkim have five major festivals namely, the Tibetan New Year, the Lhabab-Duchen the Sagadawa, the Pang-Lhabsol, and the Losoong. The Nepalese have three major festivals, namely, the Dasain, the Tihar and the Maghe Sankranti. The first two festivals of the Nepalese are known in the other parts of India as Dussehra and Diwali respectively.

4.2 LEPCHA TRIBE

The Lepcha are the original inhabitants of the Sikkim and Darjeeling hills. They are mostly concentrated in the central part of Sikkim. They lived in Sikkim much before the Bhutia and the Nepalese who migrated to the State but now they have become a minority in their own State and have a reservation allocated to them in the Dzongu region of North Sikkim.

The Lepcha are often referred to as Rong-pa which means ‘ravine people.’ The term ‘Lepcha’ is a mispronunciation of Lap-che, a name given to them by Nepali dwellers. However, the Lepcha like to call themselves Rongkup Rumkup or Rong, which mean respectively ‘the son of the snowy peak’ or ‘the son of God,’ and also as Mutanchi Rong or ‘Mother’s beloved children’.

Religious Beliefs and Social Customs

The original faith of the Lepcha is called Mun-Boongthingism – a sort of Zoroastrian monotheism. It is also called the Bon cult or the Mun religion. The religion is a sort of shamanistic form of worship of the supernatural. The ancient Lepcha worshipped nature in all its various forms like rivers, lakes and mountains. The creation is attributed to It-mo, the ancient mother, and her husband. The father was meant to maintain order after the creation, which was attributed to female deities. The children of It-mo were Nazong-
Tribals of the Northeast Region -II

Ngyu and Takbo-thing. Nazong-Ngyu had a son Tashey-thing who is the most popular male deity. The Lepcha are said to be the progeny of Nazong-Ngyu and her brother husband Takbo-thing. The concept of heaven is Rum-Lyang, a place above the sky, where the Rum or Gods reside. Beneath the earth are said to be water, fire and wind. There is a great number of evil spirits, demons and devils who live on trees, rocks, mountains, etc. The same Gods seem to be both good and bad. The Lepcha also believed in the concept of Mun or Boongthing, who is an intermediary between the Rum and the humans and even the evil spirits. Lepcha sacrifices seem to be directed towards requesting the spirit to go away. Both Boongthing (priest) and Mun (priestess) assisted the people in performing various religious rites. At a later period, the Lepcha gradually absorbed Buddhism under the Lama (Buddhist priest). Thus both the Lama as well as the Boongthing co-existed in the Lepcha religious system. By the 19th century, many of the Lepcha embraced Christianity.

The Lepcha tribal community also has various festivals. One of the major festivals is Namsoong, which is popularly known as Lossong. This festival marks the beginning of the New Year which is usually the time when the farmers rejoice and celebrate their harvest. Pang Lhabsol is another festival which they celebrate to worship Mount Khanchendzonga as the guardian deity who protects the land and looks after the people.

The Lepcha live mostly by trade or agriculture. Their favourite crops are paddy, oranges and cardamom. They are excellent weavers and make fine and excellent tribal cloth. They are also expert in bamboo and cane weaving. Generally, they build their house with woody stems of bamboo, rectangular in shape and 4 or 5 feet above the ground. In their huts, life is very simple. They also have a very close link with nature.

The Lepcha are hospitable, docile, peace loving, sociable and very intelligent. Physically they are well built and fair in appearance. They love sports and games. Their language is Lepcha which falls under the Tibeto-Burman group. They appreciate the importance of education. Thus, there are many highly educated people from their community. Regarding their social set-up, they follow a patri-lineal society.

With regard to marriage, they have a custom of polyandry and a tradition of bride-price. For the Lepcha, marriage amongst men and women of the same clan, Agit or Putso is prohibited. Marriage amongst sons and daughters of sister and brother is a taboo Jyenktak or Namtak. It portends disaster. It is against the nature of humankind. The couple committing such taboo is excommunicated by Boongthing or Mun and expelled from the clan for good. The people of the locality particularly the Lepcha stops any kind of transaction with them. They cannot belong to the Lepcha community anymore.

With regard to funerary rites, there are three alternative methods for the disposal of the dead - cremation, burial or throwing the corpse into rivers. The method they adopt depends on the condition of the deceased and the advice of the Lama. Traditionally, the Lepcha used to bury their dead but with the advent of Buddhism, cremation of the dead has become a common practice. However, muns and boongthings are normally buried facing Mt. Khanchendzonga, the guardian deity of the tribe. When children die they are sometimes left in caves or thrown into a river. If a Lama or a Mun die in the wet season, the body is thrown into a river, depending on the dictates of the Lama. The direction in which the corpse should be removed for disposal is settled by the Lama according to the position in which the person expired and the hour thereof has also to be taken into account. A Lama is summoned immediately after death to help the soul of
the deceased to reach heaven. The dead body is kept in the house for a long time, from one to forty-nine days, according to the decision of the Lama. The death ceremony is called *sanglian*.

Regarding inheritance, the members of a family have the following properties: *Athiu* (ancestral properties) and *Athyul* (self-acquired) properties. *Athiu* is partitioned amongst the members of the family, but *Athyul* property is retained by the member acquiring it. Sons and grandsons succeed to the ancestral properties, belonging to grandfather, grandmother, father and mother. In absence of a son or an adopted son, the above mentioned shall succeed to the properties belonging to the paternal uncle.

### 4.3 BHUTIA TRIBE

The word ‘Bhutia’ sometimes spelt and pronounced as ‘Bhotia,’ is derived from their original habitat ‘Bhot’ (Tibet). The Bhutia tribe has several sub-tribes: the Dukpa are the Bhutanese Bhutia, the Chumbipa are the Bhutia from the Chumbi valley (eastern Tibet) and the Dhophthapa are the Bhutia inhabiting Dhophap, a place in south Tibet. Similarly, other Bhutia sub-tribes include the Tromopa or Do-mu-pa, who are the inhabitants of Do-mu, the Lachenpa, who are the people of the Lachen valley in Sikkim, and the Lachungpa, who are the people of the Lachung valley in north Sikkim. The Bhutia migration to Sikkim seems to have started in the sixteenth century. The migration took place continuously in many ways and through different routes, from the northern and western passes of Sikkim

The Bhutia are distributed in the four districts of Sikkim, but their main concentration is in north Sikkim. They live in hilly terrain, of high altitude and cold climate, where there is high rainfall with medium snowfall and high humidity with dense forests. They speak Bhutia which uses Tibetan script. A majority of them can also speak Nepali.

The Bhutia are divided into two groups: (i) *Tondu rus-shi*, within which they have 4 *rus*, namely, Chechu thapa, Shandarpa, Kachopa and Shengapa; and (ii) *Beb tsen gye* which includes 8 *rus*, namely, Gansapa, Namchangopa, Chungiopa, Ithenpa, Phenchungpa, Phenpunadik, Namnakpa and Nachangpa. The *Tondu rus-shi* groups are superior to *Beb tsen gye* groups.

#### Religious Beliefs and Social Customs

The majority of the Bhutia follow Buddhism. In fact, they came into Sikkim in the wake of the spiritual sway of Buddhism in the latter half of the 17th century. As regards to dress, the Bhutia men wear *kho*, a long-sleeved coat with belt or *kera*, locally called the *boku*, while the women wear the sleeveless *kho* with the *honju*, a blouse with long sleeves. The male Bhutia also wear the *tson-ta-ti*, a shirt underneath the *boku*.

Before their migration from Tibet, marriage was endogamous at the community level. In Sikkim, except among the Lepcha, the Sherpa, and the Tamang, marriage is still endogamous at the community level, but exogamous at the *ru* level. They also practise sororate junior and levirate junior. Marriage records show that adult marriage is in vogue and generally the wife is younger than the husband but there are many cases where the wives are older. Modes of acquiring mates are negotiation and service. Monogamy is the general practice, except in the north district, where fraternal polyandry is noticed. Till very recently there was polyandry on a wide scale in Lachung and Lachen areas but now its occurrence has declined. The married Bhutia woman wears a striped apron called the *pangden* as a sign of the married state.
During the period of pregnancy (*phuchain*) there is no restriction on women, though, after the birth of a baby, both the mother and the child are cleaned and kept in a separate room. But no restriction as such is imposed. As soon as the mother is able to walk and work, she goes to the kitchen. After three-days, a priest comes to purify the child, the mother and the house. After the child is born, a little butter is given to the child with one or two drops of honey. From the second day, powdered rice with butter is given to the child. The purificatory and name-giving ceremony, called the *phangsang* or *phyakay*, is fixed depending upon the physical fitness of the mother and the child. Their priest (*Lama*) gives the name. Relatives and friends are invited and a feast is arranged. The maternal uncle gives a cash gift and other presents to the child.

The Bhutia cremate the dead in their own cremation ground. The dead body is kept for a period varying from 3 to 49 days, depending on the status of the deceased in the society. Thereafter, the body is embalmed with preservatives and wrapped in plastic sheets and put into a square coffin and carried between two horizontal bamboo poles. The *Lama* conducts the final rites. Nobody will touch the body before the *Lama* gives his blessings (*pho*). The *Lama* lights the fire first. Then other villagers light the fire. After cremation, people come back to the house and at night, perform *puja* to drive away the demon who has taken the soul of the dead.

Property appears to be the main source of conflict. As for rules of inheritance, property is inherited only by the sons. Sons get equal share except the youngest, who generally stays in the house and looks after his mother and younger sisters and therefore is entitled to a little extra over the others. Other sons usually go out and seek other professions. Generally, one of the sons will become a monk but he will also get a share of property. Succession is by the eldest son. In festivals and religious rituals, the families come together.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

1) How is Sikkim known among the different ethnic groups that inhabit Sikkim?

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Religious Beliefs and Social Customs

The main function of the *thar* is to regulate marriage alliances. Each of these *thars* might have one or more *gotras*. Marriage alliances are made on the basis of these partrilineal ancestral *gotras*. Atrayee, Tali, Ram, Atrisha are some of the *gotras* found among the Magar. *Gotras* have a specific role at the time of performing of rituals, especially those performed after death. The members of the Magar tribe are followers of Hinduism and faithfully perform all its tough customs and rituals. The people are polite and hospitable.

Usually there is no pre-natal ceremony. Alcohol is prohibited for the pregnant mother because it is believed that it could damage the child’s brain. After childbirth, the pollution period (*sutakari*) continues for 22 days. During this period, mother and child are kept separate. If her health permits, the mother cooks her own food. There is no taboo on friends and relatives taking food in the house. The name-giving ceremony (*nauran*) takes place after five or seven days in the case of a male child and after three or five days in the case of a female child.

As regards the funerary rites, a corpse may be cremated or buried, depending upon the situation. If there is a river near the place where the person dies, the body is cremated. In the past the dead were usually buried but now under the influence of Hinduism there is a growing preference for cremation. Unmarried persons and infants are generally buried. The corpse is carried in a box (*bon*) to the cremation ground. A Brahmin usually accompanies the party and helps the son/s to perform the funeral rites. The body is placed on the pyre and the eldest son sets it on fire. They normally immerse the bones in the water. Ancestor worship is part of the last rites, after which the Brahmin performs the *kriya* ceremony.

The nuclear family is the most prevalent type but vertically extended families are also found. All the members of a family are bound together by the bonds of love and affection. Rules of avoidance are observed between a younger brother’s wife and the husband’s elder brother and also between daughter-in-law and father-in-law. A free relationship exists between an elder brother’s wife and the husband’s younger brother and also between grandparents and grandchildren. The father’s property is equally divided among the sons. Daughters, if unmarried, also get a share from their father’s property. The eldest son succeeds the father. All families are expected to help one another in times of need and distress.

4.5 TAMANG TRIBE

Like Magar, Tamang is also a Nepali tribe. The word Tamang is derived from Tibetan words ‘ta’ and ‘mang’, meaning ‘horse warrior.’ In Sikkim, Tamang occupies an important position among the tribes of Sikkim. The entire community of Tamang is vertically divided into several sub-groups known as thars. All of these clans are exogamous, but each clan’s members can intermarry with any other clan except in the case of the two clans Goley and Dong, who consider themselves to be ‘brother clans’.

All the members of one clan are said to be descended from the same ancestor. In the case of brother clans the common ancestors were brothers. Theoretically all the clans are equal in social and ritual status. But the offspring of marriages between Tamang and non-Tamang women are considered lower and are not allowed to share the common cup with other Tamang despite the fact that they take the clan name of their Tamang father. In some places the terms *baro jat* and *athara jat* are used to describe people
of higher and lower status respectively. The terms mean literally ‘twelve clans’ and ‘eighteen clans.’ Intermarriage between these two divisions usually does not take place. This is the only horizontal division in the otherwise completely vertically divided exogamous and patrilineal clans of the Tamang.

A Tamang man can marry any girl from any clan except his own and his brother clan. Preferred marriage is between cross-cousins, that is, to one’s mother’s brother’s daughter or father’s sister’s daughter. Parallel-cousin marriage of a man to his father’s daughter or mother’s sister’s daughter is not tolerated. Sons and daughters of one’s father’s brother belong to the same clan as oneself.

A widow can marry her late husband’s younger brother but not the elder brother. Polyandry is absolutely forbidden, but there are a few cases of polygyny found among some rich men. There is no stigma attached to a young man marrying an elderly widow or a divorcée. Likewise, an unmarried girl becoming pregnant is not looked down upon by the Tamang society. The love affairs of unmarried girls or boys do not prejudice their future marriages. If the lover of an unmarried pregnant girl refuses to marry her, he can take the baby after it is weaned and pay some compensation to the girl. Then the mother is free to marry anyone she likes. But marriages or sexual relationships between members of the same clan are never tolerated. Offenders are expelled immediately and they have to go to an entirely new area and settle there.

In cases of wife-abduction the new husband must pay sixty rupees as compensation to the former husband of the woman he has taken. Adultery is punishable by a fine of 40 rupees, which is given to the aggrieved husband as compensation. The husband can keep his wife if he so desires after receiving the payment from an adulterer. The Tamang follow Lamaist Buddhism.

### 4.6 OTHER NEPALI TRIBES

The Nepali community is composed of different sub-cultural stocks with considerable differences in physical characteristics and customs. Each group is sub-divided into many classes. Government has declared some of these groups as tribes. The most important of these tribes are Limbu, Gurung, Magar, Rai, Tamang, Mewar, etc. Of the caste Hindus, there are the Brahmin, Thakur, Chettri, Gurkha, Sherpa, etc. The Scheduled Castes among the Nepali community include Kami, Damai, Sarki and Majhi. The Nepalese are spread throughout the east, south and west of Sikkim. Except for the Sherpa and Tamang who are Buddhists, other Nepalese groups like Limbu, Chettri, Gurung, Gurkha, Magar, Damai, Kami, Rai, etc. follow orthodox Hinduism. We have already described briefly the characteristic features of both Magar and Tamang tribes in the previous sections. We shall now take up the characteristic features of some other Nepali tribes.

#### A. Limbu

The Limbu are affectionately known as the Yakthumba which literally means ‘archer.’ The Limbu in Sikkim share their line of descent with that of the Rai and the Sunuwar, as they all belong to Kiranti group which is also known as the Kirat. The Limbu bear an absolutely uncanny resemblance to the Mongolians due to their broad temple and elongated lower lips. Owing to this distinct quality, they also cherish the designation of being called the Mongolians. They speak Limbu Kura.

The Limbu of Sikkim also possess an integral bond with the Lepcha. The Limbu easily enter into matrimonial relations with the Lepcha. As a matter of fact, the Limbu, in
general, are in favour of inter-caste marriages. Another tribe that also shares a good bond with the Limbu are the Rai or the Khamba. Majority of the marriages of the Limbu at Sikkim are conducted without asking any kind of permission from the parents of both the bride and the bridegroom.

The Limbu across Sikkim are further bifurcated into a pair of sects namely, the Lhasa gotra, who descended from the domain of Lhasa, and Kashi gotra, who hailed from Benares, the religious hub of India. The high priests who perform all their major and minor ceremonies are known as the Phedamba. The bulk of these ceremonies include the various religious rituals and the omens and future predictions.

B. Gurung

The members of the Gurung tribe are regarded as the most hard-working and down to earth people residing in Sikkim. They invest much of their time in cultivation, tilling the ground, sowing crops and various other miscellaneous tasks that can be linked to agriculture.

The Gurung share a common line of descent with that of the robust Mongolians. This is because their facial features and life-style are strikingly similar to those of the Mongolians. They speak Gurung Kura.

The Gurung practise Hinduism with respect and devotion. They also include the Brahmins in their religious ceremonies. The Gurung are divided into two groups namely, the Char jat and the Sora Jat. As far as marriages are concerned, inter group weddings are very common.

C. Rai

The Rai also known as Khamba, bear a peculiar similitude with the Limbu. They are mostly Hindus and are ardent followers of all the various rituals and customs performed by the Hindus in other parts of India. The Rai are also noted for the way they summon the males of their family. The male members of the family also perform all sorts of rituals as they have all the powers that are usually possessed by the high priests.

Since superstitions are still embedded deep inside their minds, the Rai across Sikkim make it a point to employ Bijuwa in order to drive away the evil spirits who, according to them, cause plenty of harm.

With regard to marriage customs, the Rai within Sikkim have a lot of similarity with that of the Kirati tribe. The primary means of earning a livelihood among the Rai is farming. They have developed their own special dialect and are gifted with artistic talents.

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we discussed briefly about the tribal scenario in Sikkim. Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali are the major communities that reside in Sikkim. The Lepcha consider themselves to be the original inhabitants while the other two communities migrated to Sikkim at different periods. Today, the Nepali community which is not strictly tribal, constitutes the sizable population of the State. Besides the Lepcha and the Bhutia, there are also some other tribes that are associated with the Nepali community. Each of these tribes has its own distinct culture, customs, habits, language, religion and other features although most of their members speak Nepali, which has become the lingua franca of Sikkim. 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 Sikkim.

4.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


