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PRESENT ECONOMIC JHUM ACTIVITIES OF THE CHAKMAS OF TRIPURA

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ABSTRACT

The livelihood of the Chakmas were mainly depended on farming on settled areas as well as JHUMING. The Chakmas who fully lived on JHUM cultivation were leading a migratory life in search of cultivable JHUM land year by year. To facilitate JHUM cultivation and harvesting of crops they build a small hut in the JHUM land. This hut is known as TAUNG is derived from the Burmese/Arakanese. Besides the JHMIA families there were many Chakma families who lived on settled cultivable lands. "In one point they (Chakmas) differ from all the other hill tribes, - they are very averse to changing the sites of their villages, which are kept from generation to generation at one place, they do not aim at any permanency of structure, the houses being built in the fashion of the hills with bamboos only and roofs thatched with wild jungle leaves/sun grass".

KEYWORDS

jhum activities, chakmas.

INTRODUCTION

The Chakmas of Tripura are one of the tribes of Indo-Bangladesh Sub-continent. Anthropologically they belong to a branch of Tibeto-Burmese tribe and this Tibeto-Burmese Tribe originally belonged to the Mongolian race. The Chakmas of Tripura mainly believe in the stream of HINAYANI Buddhism. But among them various rituals of animism are in vogue also. The eminent historian Dr. Heinz Bechert referred the above facts in his book, "Contemporary Buddhism in Bengal and Tripura", (Educational Miscellany, Vol-IV, 1967 & 68)". Contemporary and legendary sources also admit the facts. The original abode of the Chakmas of Tripura was in the Hill Tracts of Chittagong in Bangladesh. They also have been dwelling in India comprising the state so Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal. About one lakh seventy five thousands of Chakmas live here. Besides there in the Arakan regions of Burma more than one lakh of tribes men originated from Chakmas have been settling there. This tribe is known in that region as DAINNAK. It may be said that the Chakmas living in Bangladesh and India are not maintaining any relation now-a days with the DAINNAKS. Prof. S.K. Chatterjee in his book, "Origin and Development of Bengali Language, "Calcutta, Reprint, at page 140, referred the above fact of the Chakmas named. The eminent writer Sugata Chakma in his book. "CHAKMA PARICHI", (Rangamati, 1983, page No. 1) clearly showed that the Chakma language is reasonably taken as one of the Aryan groups of languages. This language contains relativity with the New Indo-Aryan language which derived from the branch of "PURBI-MAGADHI" of Indo-Aryan languages. Niranjana Chakma, another scholar and reputed writer, gave reasons in his book, "CHAKMA BHASA O SANSKRITI PRASANGA", Agartala, 1989, page-31, that the Chakma language has close relations with the languages of the tribes of Tibeto-Burmese living in the North Eastern regions of India. The Chakmas of Tripura mainly penetrated from Arakan in the long distant past through the Chittagone Hill Tracts. It is also very difficult to ascertain when and how they have extended their habitation into Tripura. However it is acceptable that the Chakmas penetrated into the soil of Tripura in the historical past due to natural course of their movement or for other reasons. The coming down of Chakmas from Arakan along the river course was a continuous process as they moved from one river branch to another. Ultimately they came and settled down in Tripura in the early Muslim period of Bengal. The kings of Tripura and Arkan were waging wars for maintaining supremacy over Chittagong. Statue was the Chakma king of Southern Chittagong on the Arakan border. From the source of Chakma History we know that this King Satrua became in same and subjected the people to numerous in-human behavior and atrocities. His people rose against the in-human treatments under such a tyrannous regime. This king was called Pagala Raja. He was ultimately killed by his subjects. The widow of the Pagala Raja fled away to Tripura with her two daughters and some of her faithful courtiers. Later on one of her daughters was married into a noble Tripura family. From this time onward the Chakmas in batches immigrated into Tripura. They were in search of JHUM CULTIVATION and tillable land. During the reign of the Chakma queen Kalindi there was a major exodus of the Chakmas into Tripura for permanent settlement there. Reports are available that above 4,000 Chakmas crossed over into Tripura in 1884. To facilitate our discussion regarding the origin of the Chakmas, their homeland as well as their national where-about, we are citing some opinion of some authors. R.H. Sneyd Hutchin son's "Chittagong Hill Tracts", (Delhi, reprint, 1978, Page-21), says "The tribe is known as THEK by the Burmese and Tui-thek by the kukis..... The Chakmas are undoubtedly of Arakanese origin. They immigrated into Chittagong District where they intermarried largely with the Bengalese wholes' language they speak." S.P. Talukdar in his book, "The Chakmas, life and struggle", (New Delhi, 1987, page-) says "The word CHAWNGMA or SAWNGMA or CHAKMA or CHUKMA means the people of Task or theca clan who are the progenitors of Burmese race." Dr. Dullal Choudhury in his book, "CHAKMA PRABAD (Bengali), (Calcutta, 1980, page-5) says "Ethnically the Chakmas belong to the South East Asian races and through the ages of history, they had been moving to the west from Cambodia—Thailand area towards Burma and ultimately to Chittagong Hill tracts. In the areas extending from Chittagong Hill Tracts to Arakans." But we know from Chakma legends that during the reign of Maharaja Krishna Maniky-a of Tripura (1760-1783 AD.) one Kirtichandra Dewan of Chittagong Hill Tracts settled down at the Gomati valley of Tripura with some of his followers. At that time in the eastern mountain lan borders of Tripura were disturbed by the tribes KUKIS and they sometimes would cross the Gomati valley and would atrocite in the plains by looting and killing the people of Tripura. Once Maharaja Krishna Maniky-a, it is said sought the help of this Kirtichandra Dewan to suppress the disturbing elements KUKIS for protecting his subjects. Kirtichandra Dewan marched against the KUKIS with Chakma and Tripuri soldiers and showed his skill and valor in the battle and subdued the KUKIS. The Maharaja was very pleased with him and honored him by conferring the title NARAYAN or NARAN. From that time Kirtichandra Dewan become known as NARAYAN Dewan in the Chakma society. But it is to be mentioned here that there is no corroboration of this fact in the history of Tripura. But there is a clear record about this in the Chakma history written by Madhab Chandra Chakma in his book, "Sri Sri Rajnama" (published from Chittagong in 1940—P. 71). Though historical references are got about Chakmas that they penetrated into Tripura during the 18th and the 19th Centuries but there are several reliable sources that the Chakmas had good relations with the Tripurians many centuries prior to the period under reference. The relation and contact between the Tripurians and the Chakmas was affirmed by Sneha Kumar Chakma in his essay, "TRIPURAY CHAKMA JATI" which was published on 19th June of 1976 in the news paper of Tripura named JAGARAN. To quote from the book, "SWADHIN TRIPURA CENSUS REPORT", (First Edition, 1906) written by Asit Chandra Choudhury, "At least for sixty years they (Chakmas) have been setting up a colony in the surroundings of Belonia, from thence gradually they spread. "On the basis of the account of Asit Chandra Choudhury the Chakmas entered into Tripura in the year 1840 A.D. This book of Asit Chandra Choudhury is reprinted by the Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Tripura, in 1995.

THE ORIGIN PROBLEM AND HISTORICAL BACK GROUND OF THE CHAKMAS

The Burmese call the Chakmas as Task or Theca, the kukis call them as Tui-thek, the Mogs call them as Saak (putting very feeble accent on the letter 'K'), the Tripurians call them as Chhakhuma and the local Bengalese of Chittagong call them as Chammua. But the Chakmas accurately pronounce them as Changma in accordance with the proper generic term. The British pronounce the name of Changma as Chakma. In later periods the Changmas became known as Chakmas in written form in every where. In the point of anthropological sphere the Chakmas are of Mogoloid origin and there remains no scope of doubt about the origin of the Chakmas. So in this respect the Chakmas are the out- comes to India. But it is very difficult to ascertain the time of their advent into India. The scholars take it granted that prior long year to the advent of the Aryans in the northwestern parts of India the Mongolian ethnic groups emigrated in north-eastern regions of

India departing from the regions of South Western China, The emigrants into India in the far ancient periods are defined by Scholars as Indo-Mongoloid. In this respect the eminent philologist Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee discussed elaborately in his famous book "Kirat-Janakirti". These Indo-Mongoloid ethnic groups were extensively influenced by the Indian Aryan civilizations. By the observations on the Chakmas traditional society and culture, their heritage and ancient history, interferences are logically formed that the Chakmas belong to the Indo-Mongoloid ethnic groups. The Chakmas have their traditional Ethnic Chronicle named BIJAK written in Chakma language. In it we find that the Chakmas departed India in ancient times and entered into Burma now Myanmar and lived there for long years. In later periods about in the fourteenth century A.D. They came to the plains of Chittagong in India leaving Myanmar. Gradually they proceeded towards Chittagong Hill Tracts and settled down there. But some researching scholars in modern times regard the Chakmas as descendants from the South-eastern people. Such as the eminent anthropologist of West Germany Dr. Heinz Be chart says "Anthropologically the Chakmas belong to the peoples of South-east Asia. Their dress shows similarities with the dress of Burmese and Shan people. There is also a number of customs which hint at a form of "Animism" is very similar to that the people of Burmese and Shan groups before their conversion to Buddhism"(Contemporary Buddhism in Bengal and Tripura by Dr. Heinz Be chart, "Education Miscellany", Vol. IV, No. 3 and 4, Dec. 1967 to March, 1968). In this contest the views of the most famous folklorist Dr. Dulal Choudhury are very interesting and far reaching. He said, "The Chakmas are the inhabitants of the south-eastern Asia. They are of Mongoloid ethnic groups' origin. In the long years ago they lived in the Manchuria regions. At that period they were nomadic. Four to five hundred years ago they lived in the Chinghai regions of the Thailand. Later on due to geographical changes and in quest of permanent settlement they entered into Burma and Arakan. In the pre-British period in India they speeded over in the Hill Tracts of Chittagong, Assam, Arakan and Tripura." However, in ancient times the Chakmas went to Burma from north India and later on they entered into Chittagong through Arakan and proceeded towards Hill Tracts of Chittagong and settled there or they entered into Chittagong Hill Tracts coming from Chinghai of Thailand through the regions of north and central Burma and Arakan and it stands on facts that the Chakmas lived in Burma for long years in the past. For this reason their history is inclined and mixed with the Burmese history largely. This truth can not be abided. The ancestors of the Chakmas were known somewhere as kudu or Task or Theca.

To discuss about the above mentioned Chakma chronicles it is necessary to state that from the kingdom of the king Tain Sureswari i.e. from the beginning of the sixteenth century the reliability on the chronicles are formed. Much information prior to this period are found in the Burmese history. In this context it is to be mentioned here that the Chakma historians want to mark the year 1333 that is from the downfall of the Arun Jug as the year of coming of the Chakmas from Burma to Chittagong. In the year 1777 the struggle began on an offensive mood and continued up to 1787. In many battles the Chakma soldiers repulsed the British army gallantly. Later on the English took the policy of forbidding the Chakmas for entrance to the markets in the plain areas. The English policy was to debar the economical process of the Chakmas. Naturally strain on economy bluntly hurt and the Chakma king Janbox Khan was compelled to be subdued to the English with promising a fixed amount of money to send annually to the English Chaucer in lieu of giving cotton – tax. Thus the British rule continued up to 1947. After the partition of India Chittagong was included with defunct East Pakistan now Bangladesh. Chittagong is now a district of Bangladesh.

METHODS

To study on "Economic Settlement of Chakmas youths-prospect and possibilities" Chakmas dominating Udaipur, Sadar, Kamalpur and Kailashahar Sub-Division of the South Tripura, West Tripura and North Tripura District was selected. Detailed information on population, Area Climate, Topography, Land, Cultivation practice for Agricultural and Horticultural crops, Forestry, Animal husbandary, Industry, Markets, Gaon panchayat, V.L.W. circle, Agricultural Sector, etc. were collected agricultural Sub-Division wise of North Tripura Argil. District. In this connection it may be mentioned here that area and boundary of North Tripura district is same for Revenue Department and Agricultural Department. A standard questionnaire was prepared and random sampling procedure was followed to collect house hold wise information from each Agricultural Sector of Unakoti, North Tripura, South Tripura and West Tripura Argil. District. Special emphasis also given to collect information from Chakmas youths of each house hold to identify their preference of occupation and requirement for economic settlement. To study "Economic settlement of Chakmas youth-prospects and possibilities" questionnaires for unemployed Chakmas youth (Boys/Girls) were prepared with an aim to collect preference of occupation. The field work for the study was conducted between January 2010 to April-2011 and data on prescribed format were compiled. During field study observation of the V.L.W. and Argil Sector officer (Gazette) for each Chakmas house hold especially for Economic Settlement also into consideration. A sample of 700 Chakmas house holds was drawn on random sampling basis i.e. 70 Chakmas families and youths per Agriculture sector. The author also discussed with the different Chakmas groups & incorporated the open ions in this report.

RESULTS

(1) JHUM CULTIVATION: In the long distant past the Chakmas penetrated from Arakan through the Hill tracts into Tripura. The fertile Hill tracts of Tripura were one of their attractions to come and settle to live there. Like other tribes of Tripura the landless Chakmas fully depended on the system of Jhum cultivation for their livelihood. The method of jhum cultivation is almost the same of all tribes usually follow. Jhum is a familiar term to the tribal people. Sometimes they are called Jhumias as they live on Jhuming. The system of cultivation of Jhum may be grouped into the following stages:

A. PLOT SELECTION AND CUTTING: At first plots of virgin forest land usually measuring one to five acres are selected on a suitable hill or its slopes. A virgin area is chosen because of its great fertility resulting a bumper crop. After having plot selection the bushes and trees are cut down. The branches of the large trees are cut down because they give shade to the crops which are affected by low production. The process of cutting is completed during the winter season in the month of November to February. The family members who have working capacity are engaged considering the voluminous of works.

B. DRYING AND SETTING FIRE: After cutting the trees herbs and bushes are kept to dry in the sun. When these are well dried in the intense sun fire and these are burnt. The bushes, weeds and herbs are burnt to ashes. The stems and branches of big trees are half burnt.

C. CLEARING OF BURNT AND SOWING THE SEEDS: In April and May rainfall comes and the plot is cleared off. The half burnt stems and branches are used as fuel wood. When the rain comes the plot of land becomes fertile. Various crops together with paddy are shown in the JHUM area. Sesame, Cotton, Variety of potatoes, Cucumbers, Melons, Bringers, Chillies, Ladies fingers and other variety of spices are cultivated. For JHUM cultivation the Chakmas use little edge-shaped hoes, cutter locally named as TAGAL and Khanate. The seeds are put together in the short holes made by the sharp end of TAGAL. When sowing of seeds is completed a MONOGHAR is made with bamboo and twigs. MONOGHAR is a Chakma term for a temporary house in a plot of JHUM area to look after the crops by protecting from wild beasts. Some of the members of the family and in times of need the whole family transfer their residence to this MONOGHAR for the time being to protect their crops.

D. COLLECTION OS CROPS: In the months of May and June the maize plant yields their crops. After this paddy comes in the months of June to August. During August and September cotton is plucked. Other vegetables are also plunked in the meantime. After harvesting the crops the JHUMIAS sell these products at the local markets to purchase the daily needs as salt, oil, dried fish, salted fish etc.

PRODUCTS OF JHUM CULTIVATION AS GIVEN BELOW ARE BASED ON GOOD JHUM HARVEST

| Name of Crops | Seeds shown Per acre land | Products per acre of land |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Cotton | 3 seers | 4 to 5 mounds. |
| Paddy | 10 seers | 5 to 8 mounds. |
| Sesame | 0.25 seers | 2 to 3 mounds. |
| Cucumber locally | | |
| Named as Chandra, | | |
| Marfa | | 3 to 4 mounds. |
| Lady's fingers, beans And other vegetables | | 0.25 to 0.5 mounds. |
| Brinjal | | 0.5 to 1 mounds. |
| Chilies | | 1 to 2 mounds. |
| Cords | | 6 to 8 mounds. |

RANYA is the local name of the deserted JHUM. The legend goes that this RANYA is sometime called as a vegetable market.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The process of JHUM cultivation severely affects the forest in several kinds. As a result of continuous JHUMING forest become a savanna which means grass land mixed with a few trees. To revert a forest again it takes at least eight to twelve years. Dense forests are lowering in numbers. Tigers, elephants and other wild beasts are hereby seen in the forests. Firing of JHUMING plots may sometimes spread to the other forest area and destroy other portion of the forest also. This type of cultivation may cause a climatic change over the whole forest areas. This may cause the low or irregular rainfall. The temperature of the area may be increased or decreased. In the economic point of view as well as the social environmental point the government has been alarming against the coming dangers from the JHUMING system of cultivation. Soil preservation is a burning question of the day.

Since restrictions have been imposing on JHUM CULTIVATION for preservation of soil and to protect forest the landless Chakmas have been fallen into troubles. They had to search out JHUMING land becomes scarce day by day a good number of landless Chakmas are moving out of Tripura in quest of fertile JHUMING land in the neighboring states. They are to live with the Bengalese and they are accustomed to Bengalese habit of living. Thus we find many of the Chakmas in Tripura are accustomed, to Bengalese customs. The land holders Chakmas are adopting themselves to till the land with plough. Even they are acquiring knowledge to use modern tools to grow more corn. The Agriculture Dep't. Has been providing various facilities to modernize their agricultural system. The young generations are very much interested to use modern techniques and have become a part & parcel of the green revolution of India.

Conservativeness is a tribal feature. The Chakmas are no exception to this. We know that the Chakmas have been scrupulously following their age-old social customs and customary laws in every sphere of their life. But in a transitory world every thing has been rapidly changing. Dynamism is the life of a society. With the advancement of modern civilization and to coup with the changing of Socioeconomic and political spheres the Chakmas have adapted aptly with the changing situations. Yet it is surprising to see that the Chakmas still retain their identity following their traditional cultural practices and speaking their own mother tongue. I would like to mention here some of my observations.

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