

*The Bongachers*

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Tripura have a numbers of Sch. Tribe Communities who are comprised of 5,83,920 in numbers as per 1981 Census Records. Out of 19 different tribes, Bongcher is a sub-tribe of Halam Community which the present monographs dealt with.

In the Present monographs Sri Salliana Sailo has attempted for a scientific and methodical study and analysis of the Bongcher Community, their Socio-Cultural life and economic activities.

I hope, this monograph will be of great help to the administration as well as the research workers of the Social Science field as a primary step.

We are grateful to Mr. Sailo for having taken up this study within the limited resource available at his disposal.

Sd/  
L.C. Das,  
Director of Research,  
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# THE BONGCHERS

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SAILIANA SAILO

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## PREFACE

The Project on Bongcher was allotted to me by the Directorate of Research in the year 1988. But I could not complete it in due time for various reasons. One of the main reasons was non-availability of reference books or any record in writing on Bongcher community excepting population record available in the Tripura Census Bibarani, 1931. Apart from that information, all the materials had to be collected from the fields through conduction of series of personal interviews. In the fields also, there are not many knowledgeable persons as many good old men had passed away. I personally feel that we are already late in making a study on them relating to their history. If it could have been done 20 years back at least, more resourceful informants would have been available.

This tragedy leads me to think that we should lose no time in making studies on the Tribes who have not had their historical records in writing. Otherwise, whatever remnant information are available now will also be lost. Such a precious thing should not be allowed to get lost.

I do not at all claim that this is a good piece of monograph. But I do hope that this being a pioneer study on Bongcher community, some of the materials may be of use for research scholars doing further studies on the community.

I am highly indebted to Shri Vanlalruata Bongcher of Nelsipara, Amarpur in helping me in the translation of some of the stories. I would also like to express my gratitude to Shri Lakhi Charan Bongcher of Nelsipara in taking much trouble to collect leaves of medicinal plants for me.

Sailiana Sailo

## INTRODUCTION

Tripura is situated in the north-eastern corner of India. It is surrounded by Bangladesh in its three sides and the eastern part is bordered by Mizoram and Assam. The State has a geographical area of 10,477 Sq. Km. It lies between 22.56' and 24.32' North latitudes and 90.10' East Longitudes. The maximum temperature recorded in summer is 35.6' and the minimum temperature recorded during that period ranges from 21.3'c to 22.4' c. The minimum temperature recorded during the winter is 8.c. The average annual rainfall is 2100 mm.

In early days, the State of Tripura was inhabited by the tribals alone. It was a Native State ruled by a Royal family of the Tripuri Tribe. The Native State merged with the Indian Union on 15th October, 1949. It attained the status of Union Territory on 1st November, 1956. The Tripura Territorial Council was substituted by the Tripura Legislative Council on 1st July, 1963 having 32 members. Tripura became a full-fledged State on January 21, 1972. After attaining statehood, the members of the Tripura Legislative Assembly was raised to 60.

According to 1981 Census, the population of Tripura is 20,53,058 of which the population of Scheduled Tribe is 5,83,920 forming 28.44%. There are as many as 19 Scheduled Tribes in Tripura according to The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes orders (Amendment) Act, 1976, out of which four tribes are having population less than 500 in the 1981 Census and there are other four migrant tribes who came to Tripura to work in the Tea gardens. The tribe having the largest population is Tripura/ Tripuri/ Tippera, which numbers 3,30,872 in 1981 Census. The population of Halam tribe in 1981 Census is 28,970. The Bongcher, which the present monograph deals with, forms a sub-tribe of Halam. Their population in 1981 Census is not known as in the Census report, population of sub-tribe is not shown.

The Bongcher have close traditional, cultural and linguistic affinities with other sub-tribes of Halam (excluding Koloj and Rupini), and Kuki and Lushai. They concentrate in Amarpur Sub-Division and Kamalpur Sub-Division.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Bongchers of Tripura

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#### Their Origin and Early History

The Bongcher forms a sub-tribe of Halam which is one of the Schedule Tribes in Tripura. They are also referred to as Bongshel or Bongshi. According to them, Bongcher is the correct term. In Bongcher language, 'Bong' means to cut into parts and 'cher' means to sprout. According to their legend, once the Bongchers fought a heroic battle with another tribe who were much stronger. The Bongchers were decimated by their opponents. While they thought that the Bongchers were completely wiped out, they were surprised to find many Bongchers continued to come out and fight. The mystery led them to think that those Bongchers cut off into a number of parts came alive again and fought with them. Since that time, this group of people was said to have been known as the Bongchers. The authenticity of this source is beyond proof but at the same time there is no other available explanation to the source of this nomenclature 'Bongcher'.

There are other two-Sub-tribes of Halam, namely, Bong and Korbong which from their nomenclature are thought to have direct linkages with the Bongcher. Studies on these sub-tribes have also revealed that the three sub-tribes have very close affinities among them. However, the formation of clans does not suggest that the three sub-tribes were one group of tribe in any period of time. Moreover, the Bongchers have as much close affinities with other sub-tribes of Halam like Kaipengs, Molsoms and Ranghols as they have with the Bongs and Korbongs. So we may be contended with the concept that the Bongcher is one of the many sub-tribes of Halam having distinctive characteristics of its own but at the same time possessing basic similarities with most of the Halam sub-tribes and also with the Kukis and Lushai.

Halam is one of the Scheduled Tribes of Tripura. In the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976, Halam is placed at serial No. 6 in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Tripura. According to Census Biharani, the Halams and Kukis were originally under one group. Later on, the subjugated Kukis were known as the Halams. The Halams were also traced to have come from Khurpuitabum, which lies to the northern part of Manipur. This theory is difficult to agree with in toto. What has been seen is that earlier the Kukis and the Halams were poorly known. Any savage tribe was then called Cucis or Kukis. These dreaded tribes were together given the name Kukis which did not necessarily mean that they were of the same origin. The word Kuki was coined by others and so was the case with the Halam. That is the reason why no Halams can tell why they are called Halams and what the meaning of Halam is. Though the Kukis and Halams might have been categorised under one group earlier and as separate Tribes subsequently the most appropriate conception appears to be that they were never Kukis and Halams of their own, rather the present sub-tribes of Halam used to have their own respective identities as separate tribes but close to one another and because of circumstantial compulsions, they had been loosely grouped as Kukis and Halam which they themselves were aware of much later.

Are the subjugated Kukis Halams? If so, when were those Kukis subjugated and brought under a separate group known as Halams? There is no historical record or evidence to support this theory. But there are certain peculiar differences between Kukis and Halams. For the Halam tribes, the Maharaja of Tripura introduced new administrative system, presented them different images of gods and prescribed items of articles to be presented to His Highness during their yearly visits to the Royal Palace. But in the case of Kukis, the Maharaja did not interfere in their traditional administrative systems. They had their own chiefs and they were left completely free in regard to their religious beliefs and no items of articles for presentation were prescribed for them. The Kuki chiefs claimed that they had brotherly relationship

with the Maharaja.

There is one theory which suggests that bifurcation of Kuki tribe was the design of the Maharaja for the purpose of divide and rule. As the Kukis were good fighters, the Maharaja was said to be apprehensive that unless a divide and rule policy was adopted, they might pose a serious problem at any time. The bifurcation was said to occur just after the Jamatia Revolt of 1863 which was subdued by the Maharaja with the help of the Kukis. How far this theory holds good is also difficult to say as documentary supports are not available.

The Bongchers claim to occupy sixth position among the sub-tribes of Halam. The number of Halam sub-tribes is still confusing. According to Tripura State Gezzatteer, 29 part Vol-16 of 1931, circular No.9 regarding Census, Halam consisted of the following nine tribes:-

- |            |              |           |
|------------|--------------|-----------|
| 1. Morsum  | 2. Rangkhoh  | 3. Kolo   |
| 4. Kaibeng | 5. Bongshel  | 6. Rupini |
| 7. Korbong | 8. Thangchep | 9. Chorai |

Again, in the Tripura State Gezzatteer, Circular No. 10 of 1940, the sub-tribes of Halam were the following:-

- |                     |                         |            |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| 1. Murchlong        | 2. Rangkhoh             | 3. Kaipeng |
| 4. Kolo             | 5. Koireng              | 6. Korbong |
| 7. Kulu or Khulung  | 8. Chorai               | 9. Dap     |
| 10. Thangchep       | 11. Sakchep or Sakechep | 12. Nabin  |
| 13. Rupini or Rupni | 14. Bongshel            | 15. Longai |
|                     | 16. Langlung.           |            |

According to 1931 Census (1340 T.E.), there were as many as 19(nineteen) sub-tribes of Halam. At present, there is no record officially on the number and names of the sub-tribes of Halam. But what can be confirmed is that the Bongcher is one of the sub-tribes of Halam. Just as there are plethora of Halam sub-tribes, their entry points to Tripura also appear to be numerous. Some group entered into Tripura from the East through Cachar District of Assam, some from the present Mizoram while some other groups entered from the South-East through Chittagong Hill

Tracts.

It is exceedingly difficult to trace the historical origin of the Bongcher. The reasons are many. There is no literature on them. The sketchy oral history handed down from generations are the only available sources. Aged men and women are extremely few. Moreover, their illiteracy stands on the way of having good communication with them. They claim that their original home is Sinlung. It is interesting to note here that other allied tribes like Mizos, Kukis and some Halam sub-tribes also trace their original home as Sinlung or Chhinlung as the Mizos pronounce.

Sinlung or Chhinlung means stone lid of a cave. Though the exact location of Sinlung or Chhinlung could not be ascertained, it is firmly believed that it is somewhere in China. Some writers are of the opinion that the word Sinlung or Chhinlung was derived from one of the names of Chinese king. In any case, there is no denying the fact that the Bongchers originated from the East and for one reason or another they entered into Tripura.

It is extremely difficult to have a fair idea on their early history, that is, before they entered into Mizoram. Analysis to their folktales and folksongs do not provide any clue to this period. One definite indication of their early settlement in Burma and Mizoram is available from their Blessing call made while harvesting paddy. While threshing paddy inside the rough bamboo basket in the jhum, they used to cry saying "Rihli, Champhai buh hawng rawh" which literally mean "Rihli, champhai rice come forth". Rihli (Rih lake) lies to the east of Mizoram just within Burma and Champhai is one of the towns of Mizoram lying in the eastern side bordering Burma. Champhai has a good paddy land and is known as the granary of Mizoram. Rih lake also has good surrounding paddy fields. The Bongchers must have definitely occupied the surrounding areas of Rih lake and the Champhai plain land and had a bumper harvest of paddy. Till the present days they used to seek the blessings of Rih lake and Champhai for good harvest. It is very likely that from Rih lake area, they moved towards the north-west and reached Champhai.

According to one story narrated by them, once they stayed at Parsensip village and during that time their chief was Kawrpuia. He was a drunkard and used to terrorise his subjects. There was

a war with the Hmars and the Bongchers were badly defeated and their chief was also killed . The Hmars referred to here might not necessarily mean the Hmars of Manipur as it may simply implies the tribe settled to the north of them. Hmar means north, and when it is used to refer to people, it simply means people of the north. The Bongchers pronounce "Hmar" as "Mar". Parsensip is located to the north east of Kolosib in northern Mizoram. That means they moved to the north-west from Champhai in Mizoram.

The village they could trace with certainty was Buarpui in Mizoram. Many of the present generation could say that their elders used to tell them about their stay at Buarpui. Buarpui is situated in the Lunglei District of Mizoram. That indicated that from the north of Mizoram they moved to the south Mizoram. According to their hearsay, during their migratory movement, they were in the same groups with some other Halam tribes like Molsom and Kaipeng. At one point, they crossed over one deep river with bamboo rafts strunged together with jungle creepers. While some of them had crossed over the river, the jungle creepers got broken and the bamboo rafts capsized. Due to that mishap, some were left behind on the other side of the river and those who could cross the river proceeded further and climbed the nearby hill where they settled for some time. Often they would turn back their faces to glance at the place where their neighbours and friends were left behind and shed tears, thinking longingly of them. Due of that, the hill was named Lungleng tlang. 'Lungleng' means to have longing thought while 'tlang' means hill. So, Lungleng tlang will mean the hill of longing thought. The river they were said to have crossed is most probably Tuipul river as Lungleng tlang is to the West of this river, not very far from it. Lungleng tlang is in south Mizoram and till today, the hill is called by the Mizos by this name.

In course of my interviews with Shri Krishna Baigya Manik Bongcher of Paija (Kamalpur sub- Division), he told me that his grandparents used to narrate the story that their ancestors came from Sinlung and on their westerly movement, they resided in places like Lungleng tlang and Buarpui. Shri Bongcher is about 90 years old and is the eldest living man among the Bongchers

at present (1989). So, this version corroborates the information given by other Bongchers.

According to them, they entered into Chittagong Hill Tracts from Mizoram and thence to Amarpur in South Tripura. How and when they entered into Chittagong Hill Tracts and how long they were there could not be traced out. It is very likely that they did not remain there long in that region as they did not have any knowledge about rivers and places of that part of the country. They are, however, sure that their entry point to Tripura was Amarpur.

As per the hearsay information available with them, the Bongchers penetrated into Amarpur during the reign of Amar Manikya. It was further stated that Amarpur was the capital of Tripura during that period. If that be so, the Bongchers entered into Tripura around the years 1584-86. Though there are no historical records and evidences to confirm this hearsay information, it cannot be denied either till more authentic sources can be found out. Their first known settlement place was Sonkang and Tuicholong in Amarpur Sub- Division. Sonkang is in the south- east of Tuidu bazar and Tuicholong lies to the east of Tuidu bazar. From Tuidu bazar, Sonkang village is about 4 Km and Tuicholong is about 3 Km. As Tuicholong is a Tripuri word, most probably the village was earlier occupied by the Tripuris. The next village remembered by them was Ompi, located to the east of the present Ompinagar. From Ompi, majority of them shifted to Nelsipara. This village was given its name after the name of their leader Nelsi Laksmi Bongcher.

His daughter, Radhasari Bongcher is still living with an age of about 80 years (1989). It is estimated that they shifted to Nelsipara round about in the year 1910. The remaining families migrated to Kulai in Kamalpur Sub- Division. Again , some of them returned from Kulai and settled at Longthing (Donlekha) in Amarpur Sub- Division. Those who remained at Kulai subsequently shifted to Kulai Gantacherra and from there some families migrated to Paijabari and some to Tuicholong. From Nelsipara also some families shifted to Gamagur which lies to the east of Ampinagar, about 3 Km away from it.

According to one source, the Bongpui entered into Tripura

earlier than the Bongchers. When the Bongchers entered into Tripura, there were only two families because most of them died during their war with the Hmars. They soon inter-married with the Bongpui and within no time the Bongpui were merged with the Bongchers. So, since that time Bongpui has been treated as one of the clans of Bongcher. Perhaps this source provides a good piece of information. One remarkable phenomenon noticed with the Bongchers is that they are far less migratory comparing to most of the other tribes in Tripura. In spite of their tiny population and very high percentage of inter-marriages with other larger tribes, they can still protect their identity and they can also still retain their language.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Their present habitations, population and their clan system.

The Bongchers concentrate mainly in Amarpur Sub- Division . The largest concentration village is Nelsipara near ompi where 25 families are residing there. The hamlets/paras where Bongchers are living at present (1988 A.D) and their population are indicated below:-

<u>Amarpur Sub- Division</u>	<u>No. of families</u>	<u>Population</u>
1. Nelsipara	25	125
2. Longthing (Donlekha)	12	61
3. Tuicholong	3	13
4. Koraimura	4	13
5. Sorthai	5	30
<u>Kamalpur- Sub- Division.</u>		
1. Pajabari	11	47
2. Kulai- Gantacherra	5	38
3. Megazine (Joharnagar)	4	14
4. Ambassa	5	34
5. Kamalacherra	1	6
<u>Khowal Sub- Division.</u>		
1. Howaibari Kuki colony	1	4
<b>Total:-</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>385</b>

In the 1931 Census, the Bongcher population was 219. After 1931 Census, there were no records of Bongcher population in any of the subsequent Census because Bongcher population was always clubbed together with the Halam population. Basing on 1931 Census, it is seen that the growth of Bongcher population is very slow. Comparison with the over -all population growth of Tripura will make the thing clear.

Population					
	1931 Census	1971 Census	1981 Census	1988 Survey figure	Percentage of Annual growth (1931 as based Year).
1 Tribals as a whole.	1,92,249	4,50,544	5,83,920	- -	4.07
2 Halam	12,713	34,192	28,970	- -	2.56
3 Bongcher	219	N.A.	N.A.	385	1.32

To find out the reasons for such extremely low population growth rate, leading persons of the community were interviewed. The following points were suggested as probable reasons for slow growth rate -

i) because of extreme poverty and ignorance, they could not avail of modern medical facilities leading to high death rate. This is particularly true in the case of those residing at Nelsipara and Longthing (Donlekha). They say dysentery / dysentery type of diseases have been claiming many lives. They suspect that their drinking water may be the cause of this.

ii) They presume that they have genetic weakness due to confinement of marriages within small community earlier.

iii) Because of poverty, they could not have nutritious food.

But analysis of the family population ratio of the community does not really support the above suggestions. As per field survey conducted during 1988, there are 76 families against 385 population, that means average population per family is 5.07 which is quite normal. The average per family member is 5.70 in case of the couple belonging to Bongcher and 4.59 in case of the wives belonging to other communities. The main reason for retardation in their population growth is perhaps short longevity of life due to lack of medical care and nutritious food. This is

also supported by the fact that old people are very few among them.

Another interesting thing found among the Bongchers is high inter- marriage with other tribes. Out of 76 families, as many as 44 families have house- wives of other tribes. The tribe- wise break- up of house- wives belonging to other tribal communities are as given below:-

Yingng	-	1
Chorai	-	13
Moad	-	5
Mawel	-	5
Rangkhe!	-	4
Bong	-	2
Kuki	-	1
Rupini	-	1
Reang	-	1
Hmarchaphang	-	1

44

The percentage of house- wives of other tribes is as high as 57.87. Utmost attempts have been made to find out the reasons which lead to such high inter- marriage among the Bongchers, but no definite clue could be arrived at. The probable reasons are- i) As the community is very small, most of them are in some ways or the other related to one another. So they like to come out of too much confinement through inter- marriage. ii) Love marriage is very common among them. Most probably, love ventures outside the small society for romance, taste and out of curiosity. There are five clans in Bongcher tribe. They are- i) Bongpui, ii) Chorai, iii) Iryng, iv) Ronte and, v) Vatok. Earlier, there was one more clan known as Hakmung consisting of one family only. This family was said to have come from other trib , Sailo. By Sailo, they mean Mizo. The man was said fleeing away from his community out of fear for his life and then joined the Bongcher community. The word Hakmung is interpreted as the one who is despised and spitted upon.

He was made one of the leaders of Bongcher community as 'Kamchikau' throughout his life time. But one of his descendants, Durga Manik Bong-cher was accused of possessing witch- craft and was driven away by the Roy about in the year 1943. Durga Manik Bongcher was said to have settled down at Hawaibari near Teliamura with his family members. Since that time Hakmung clan was considered as no longer in existence. The clan- wise population of Bongcher as per survey conducted in the year 1988 are as follows:-

Bongpui -13  
Chorai -112

Iryng - 62

Ronte -86  
Vatok -112

Bongpui clan is selector of site for new village. Those belonging to Vatok clan are said to have always separatative attitude and will prefer to live separately from others. The Iryng clan claim that they are offsprings of tiger. The story behind this claim is that once there was a widow who had only one daughter. Never did anybody care for them and her neighbours also would never enquire about their health and daily problems. One day, all adult villagers were out to bring rice from the neighbouring village for a wedding feast. On their way back, they found that a stream which they had to cross over was swelling and turbulent. All the villagers excepting the said widow, could manage to cross over the stream by helping one another. However, none was ready to help the poor widow. She then kept on weeping and weeping until a tiger came out and approaching her with its tail reverbrating as if to tell that it was for her help. Finding no alternative, the widow took the risk by grasping the tail of the tiger. The tiger instead of attacking her started swimming over the stream and the widow could cross over it. The tiger and the widow then swore kinship since then. Whenever the tiger killed animal, it would bring one of its hind legs to the widow. But one day it so happened that the hind leg brought by the tiger was found to be of a man. The widow was very upset and rejected it with despair. Their kinship was also severed there and then but with one agreement

that the tiger should no longer bring hind leg of animal but rather either of them should perform funeral rite for the one who would die earlier. Iryng clan claim to be offsprings of a tiger out of the relationship between that window and the tiger. Till now, it is strictly taboo for Iryng families to eat tiger's meat. Whenever they hear killing of a tiger, heads of families of Iryng clan will perform funeral rite in the forest by offering rice for one day. On that day, they will take food only at night when the stars are visible in the sky.

The Ronte clan also do not take tiger's meat because of traditional taboo. The story behind this taboo is that once there was a fiery quarrel among the Iryngs. Out of extreme anger, one Iryng family left the clan and embraced the Ronte clan and started eating tiger's meat. Another Iryng family also swiftly did the same thing. Soon after that, the head of the second family who crossed over to the Ronte clan was attacked by a tiger while returning home from his paddy field. He was so severely injured by the tiger that as soon as he could enter into his house, he fell down and died without being able to narrate the incident to his wife. The incident terrified all the Ronte families that they had given up eating tiger's meat.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Administrative set-up.

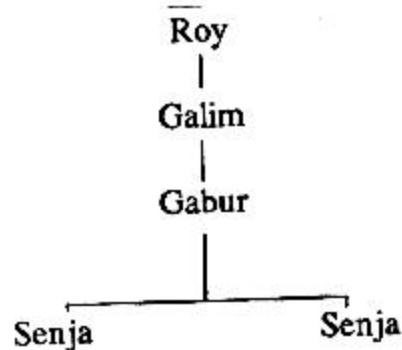
Nothing could be traced out about the administrative set-up of the Bongchers before their entry into Tripura. It was certain that they did not have chieftainship. But there must have been some community administrative systems adopted by them. To guess that they might have elective system for choosing their leaders will be over-estimation. The most probable system prevalent at that time was that the village elders would sit together and under the guidance of wiser and resourceful elder, carried out village administration and settled disputes. At present old men could not tell anything about their pre-Tripura period administrative system.

After they entered Tripura, the Maharaja of Tripura introduced to them an entirely new administrative system. But when was this introduced could not be confirmed. According to them, it was introduced as early as during the time of Amar Manikya (1584-86). However, no supporting documents and evidences could be found to authenticate this claim. The hierarchy in the administrative set up introduced by the Maharaja was that Roy was the head. Under him, Galim occupied the second position, Gabur the third position and the Senjas the fourth position. There were two senjas and the positions of the two Senjas were determined by their seniority as Senja. All of them were appointed by the Maharaja on the basis of suggestion made by the village elders. The five members in the Council were appointed from all the five clans of the Bongcher.

The term of the Roy was not fixed. He held the post so long he enjoyed the confidence of his community. When the Roy resigned the post or was removed, the existing Galim would automatically become Roy and Gabur would occupy the resultant vacancy of Galim. The vacancy of Gabur thus created would be filled up by the Senior Senja. The Maharaja would appoint a new man to fill up the vacancy of one Senja with the recommendation of community elders. There was no bar to induct again the earlier Roy as Senja.

As stated above, the term of Roy was not fixed and he occupied the position as long as he liked or as long as he could muster the support of the community elders. He could resign the post on his own. He could also be thrown out by the elders of the community who would sit together and take a decision in that behalf . The Maharaja would abide by the decision of the community.

The hierarchy in the Council is illustrated below:-



Though democratic system of election was not adopted, representation from every clan was ensured. Formation of the Council was systematically done and powers delegated to the members were also clearly demarcated. Roy was head of the Council and therefore very powerful. Galim and Gabur were members of the Council and assisted the Roy. The Senjas were somewhat like police. They were not directly involved in decision making. They enforced the orders and directives issued by the Council to the people. When litigants failed or refused to turn up in the Council's Court, the Senjas were sent out to bring them, if necessary by force and sometimes by binding them. No one would dare to obstruct them. The defaulting litigants, when brought to the Court, were often severely beaten up and the Roy himself used to beat them. There was no separate building for the Council's Court, the house of the Roy was used for the Court Room. The verdict given by the Council's Court was final for every dispute and there was no provision for appeal. The only scope available was to approach the Court of other Tribe. But this was avoided for obvious reason, that is , such action would invite repercussion to the appellant, even ex-communication from the community,

and might also bring bitter relation between the returned two tribes.

Members of the Council were not paid anything and neither did they get a share of revenue. Their main incomes were proceeds accruing out of penalty fines imposed by the Council. They were also doing jhuming like other families. But they were given due respect because of the enormous powers exercised by the Council. Very few names of Roys are remembered now and their periods of Royship are not recorded. Names of Roys remembered are given below chronologically.

1. Bahadur Lai Bongcher
2. Guru Gusai Bongcher.
3. Birchondra Bongcher.
4. Chonglienngar Bongcher.
5. Radha Singh Bongcher.
6. Chondra Kumar Bongcher.
7. Kapneithang Bongcher.

The Royship came to an end around in the year 1953 during the time of Kapneithang Bongcher. The reason for the expiry of Royship was more or less natural. Following merger of princely State of Tripura with the Indian Union on 15th October, 1949, the connection between Tripura Palace and the Roy was snapped off. With the absence of backing from the Palace, the people became gradually recalcitrant to the orders and directives of the Council. From the Government side also there was no attempt to uphold the Council. Soon after the abolition of Royship, the community administration of Bongcher collapsed. The vacuum created lot of problems to the community. Then they realised that the community needed alternative administrative system to take care of the community. So they adopted the Choudhury system. The choudhury was elected along with two sardars who would assist the choudhury. Election was done unanimously without votes by all adult male members of the village or villages. As the Bongcher population had dispersed by this time, in Amarpur Sub-Division they had one choudhury and in Kamalpur Sub-Division they had two choudhuries one at Kulai Gantacherra and another one at Paijabari. This Choudhury system still continues till today.

But their effectiveness in the community affairs are dwindling. The reasons are lack of support from the Government and introduction of Panchayati Raj. Choudhury system as it appears, was copied from neighbouring tribes like Reang.

Name of the Choudhuries at various places are given below:-

Amarpur.

1. Paltan Bongcher.	-	1955-58
2. Judda Kumar Bongcher.	-	1958-60
3. Baigya Manik Bongcher.	-	1960-63
4. Paltan Bongcher	-	1963-75
5. Lakhi charan Bongcher	-	1975-85
6. Bikram Minil Bongcher	-	1985- Till now.

Kamalpur.

Kulai Gantacherra.

1. Ganga Manik Bongcher

Paijabari

1. Mohon Bongcher

Relationship between Maharaja and Roy.

The Maharaja entrusted the entire administrative responsibility of Bongchers to the Council headed by Roy. The Roy collected revenue on behalf of the Maharaja administration. The rate of revenue was not uniform and it differed from year to year. Normally it was about one and half rupee per family per annum. The Roy did not have any share over the revenue collected. Every year during Durga puja (normally in October) , the Roy and Galim had to go to Agartala to pay homage to the Maharaja. During that time they had to deposit the revenue collected to the Maharaja. In addition to that, they also had to give the following items as presents to the Maharaja.

a) Few pieces of short- lenth bamboo used as cooking vessel and a piece of bamboo stick to grind the vegetables cooked by that bamboo vessel.

b) One small bundle of stalks of arum called by the Bongchers 'Kamentri' . The botanical name is Alocacia indica of Araceal family. These stalks are common vegatables among the tribals.

c) About two handfuls of green long chilly (Capsicum)  
d) One bamboo basket which the Bongchers called "Paiper".  
The Roy could take along with him to Agartala not more than five villagers. Whenever the Roy met the Maharaja he must dress himself with the dresses given by the Maharaja. The dresses consisted of one long overcoat, turban, arrow, earring and bungle. One medal was also given to him which he must wear whenever he met the Maharaja. In the medal, there was inscription in Bengali the name of the Maharaja and the years of his reign. They said that Rabi Hrangkhawl when posted at Teliamura T.K. as Tahsildar collected the Roy's dresses from the Bongchers saying that the same were wanted by the Government. Since then no trace could be made on the whereabouts of the dresses. I interviewed Rabi Hrangkhawi on 8.8.1990 at his residence at Teliamura. He said that the dresses were collected in 1952 in connection with the visit of Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India.

When Roy and his party were to proceed to Agartala to meet the Maharaja, the entire Bongcher community was visited by gloominess. As the Roy and his party had to go on foot, it took about half a month for their back home. The journey which took such a long duration gave them the feeling of uncertainty about their safe coming home and at the same time, they were worried by the fear that unforeseen problems might arise during the long absence of the Roy. While bidding farewell to the Roy and his party, they would all weep. The wife of the Roy would also weep bitterly in the see-off gathering. The Roy would try to comfort his weeping villagers and his wife in spite of the fact that he himself was also in a heavy mood.

At Agartala they were lodged in the Rest House. Lodging and food were provided free. In addition to that Rs.15/ was given to the villagers who accompanied the Roy as pocket money. They used to stay at Agartala for seven days. On the last day of their stay, The Maharaja would throw a farewell party. The Maharaja himself would cut jokes for the merriment of the leaders of various tribes assembled there. Sometimes His Highness would ask the leaders to do wrestling for entertainment. At the end of the function, leaders of various tribes would enquire from the

Maharaja the amounts of revenue they would have to pay in the next year. After hearing the amounts, some leaders would pray for reduction in the amounts of revenue fixed on the ground of jhum failure or on other reasons. More often than not their prayers were conceded to.

After spending seven days at Agartala, Roy and his party would start their home-bound journey. Before reaching the village, messengers were sent to inform the villagers about the coming home of the Roy and his party. The whole villagers would gather in a place beyond the village to receive them. Sufficient stock of rice beer would be brought and a special bamboo sitting dias would be prepared there. When Roy and his party arrived, they were seated on the bamboo benches and a glass of rice beer would be offered to the Roy. As soon as the Roy sipped the rice beer, all villagers cheered him and started dancing. After the rice beer was enjoyed by all Roy's party and villagers, they would carry the Roy in a bamboo chair upto his house. The Roy would throw party for his villagers by arranging feast for two or three days. At the end of the party, the villagers would enquire from the Roy the amount of revenue they would have to pay in the next year. The Roy would then tell them with restraint the amount so fixed by the Maharaja and with all possible encouragement to pay.

#### Position of Roy in the Council.

Roy was enjoying an enonimous power and was not definitely one among the equals. Other members of the Council were just assisting him. Of course, he took advice from other members when decisions were taken by him which other members were supposed to support. But he could not afford to be a tyrant as he had to enjoy the confidence of the people to maintain his position.



**A Bongcher family in front of their mud-wall house.**



**A Bongcher with traditional dress.**



**A Bongcher poultry house.**

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Customary Laws

Law of inheritance. The eldest son is the inheritor. But if the eldest son gets married and establishes a separate family, he has no right to claim to be the inheritor. The next eldest son or the youngest son or any son who stays with the parents and feed them till their death will be the inheritor. However, if the father leaves his 'will', it will be according to that. Immoveable property will be equally shared by the sons. In some cases, a share is given to the mother on the condition that whoever looks after her will inherit that share. Nowadays, daughter also starts claiming shares in the father's property, but this demand has not yet been yielded to. When a couple have no son, the eldest daughter will be the inheritor. If the couple is childless, the father will decide who will be the inheritor from near relative.

Stealing. In this regard, application of customary law among the Bongchers in Kamalpur Sub- Division and those in Amarpur Sub- Division are slightly different. The practice in Kamalpur Sub- Division is that if the stolen goods is recovered, Rs.60/- is fined along with one bottle of wine and one kola (clay pot) of rice beer. But if the stolen goods are not recovered, Rs. 180/- is fined along with one bottle of wine and one kola of rice beer. The practice among the Bongchers in Amarpur sub- Division is that both the complainant and the accused have to give Rs.10/ and one Kg. of sugar each to the choudhury to open the case in the village court. After that the case will be heard by the village court. If the stolen goods are not recovered, the value of stolen goods will be recovered from the culprit and handed over to the owner. As a penalty for committing theft, the culprit will be fined Rs. 15/- and out of that Rs. 14/- will be given to the owner of the stolen goods and Re.1/- will be returned to the culprit as a consolation for wiping his tears. Let us now see one real case which was settled by the village Court. The theft case was of 1970 at Nelsipara. The names of parties were not given for obvious reasons.

Case- stealing of one maund of paddy.

One villager Mr. X was charged with stealing paddy from the jhum house of Mr. Y. Two other villagers claimed that they saw the man stealing the paddy, and accordingly informed the owner Mr. Y. Mr. Y filed a case in the Court of Choudhury and as a fee for filing the case he paid Rs.15/ and one bottle of arrack. Choudhury then sent out his Assistant to make pronouncement in the village for information of all the villagers that a case was going to be heard. All adult male members assembled in the choudhury's residence. The choudhury asked the accused to deposit Rs.15/- and one bottle of arrack. After the accused deposited the same, hearing of the case started. The choudhury asked the accused whether he stole the paddy as alleged by the complainant. The accused Mr. X flatly denied as having stolen the paddy from the jhum house of Mr. Y. Then the choudhury examined the witnesses. The witnesses stuck to their point that they saw the accused stealing paddy from the jhum house of Mr. Y. The accused was beaten up for not disclosing the fact. After that the accused Mr. X confessed that he committed theft of paddy from the jhum house of Mr. Y. Though the complainant charged that the stolen paddy was one and half maunds, the Court calculated it was one maund. Two basketfuls were stolen which were estimated at one maund.

The value of one maund of paddy was estimated at Rs.70/- Based on that estimation, fine of Rs. 70/- was imposed on the Culprit. Rs. 70/- was handed over to the owner of the paddy. The owner of the paddy returned Rs.10/- to the choudhury out of gratitude for settling the case and out of that amount Re. 1/ was returned to the culprit for he was made to weep and wipe out his tears. The Court fee realised along with the amount paid by the owner of the paddy was utilised for purchase of chickens which was eaten up by all participants in the trial of the case in the villages court.

For stealing of vegetable from jhum, no fine will be imposed for the first time. If the person does it again, he will be fined Rs. 15/- and one bottle of arrack.

Refusal to do social service / absence in social service.

If a villager refuses to work in social service like clearing of village foot- tracts, or absent himself without reasonable ground, he will be fined equivalent to a day's wage and the amount will be equally distributed to all the persons who put their labour on that day. Sometimes they will purchase something to eat with amount realised as fine and eat it at the work- site itself. In case the defaulter refuses to pay the fine, he will not be allowed to walk on the foot- tract cleared on that day.

Killing of other's domestic animal. If domestic animal of others is killed or grievously hurt, a substitute animal of more or less the same size will have to be given.

Pre- marriage pregnancy. If a girls gets pregnant before marriage, it is the duty of the parents to make formal report to the Roy/ Choudhury to take necessary action. If the Roy/ Choudhury learns the matter before the parents have come to know of it he will inform the parents that their daughter is pregnant and will also pass remark saying that it is strange the parents do not know anything about their daughter. After all, it is socially and morally binding on the parents to report the case immediately to the Roy/ Choudhury. The Roy/ Choudhury will summon both the parties , that is the boy's side and the girl's side in the village court. The girl will be asked to name father of the baby. Whoever the girl names as father of the baby that is taken as correct without any question. The boy will be fined Rs.15/- and one pig or one goat. The girl will also be fined Rs.5/- Both of them will be pressurised to get married. If the boy refuses to accept to be the father of the baby , he will be fined Rs.30/- instead of Rs. 15/- . The amount realised as fine will be distributed equally to all adult male members participated in the hearing of the case. Marriage after pre- pregnancy will be performed at the residence of the Roy/ Choudhury.

Sexual abuse. If a man misbehaves with a girl for having sexual satisfaction, he will be fined Rs.20/- and a goat or a pig.

Penalty to commit adultery. If a man is caught trying to commit adultery, he will be fined Rs. 35/- and a goat or a pig. Out of the amount, Rs. 15/- will be given to husband of the woman as a consolation for earning shame and bad name. This is termed as 'Sudjel'. The remaining Rs.20/- will be distributed among the participants in the Court.

Adultery. Cases of adultery will be settled in the following ways.

i) Adultery between unmarried man and married woman. The man will be fined Rs.25/- and a goat or a pig and the woman will be fined Rs.5/- Out of Rs.25/- realised from the man, Rs 15/- will be given to husband of the woman. The balance amount including Rs.5/- realised from the woman will be distributed among the participants in the court. The pig or goat will also be consumed by the court members.

ii) Adultery between married man and married woman. The man will be fined Rs. 35/- out of which Rs. 15/- will be given to the husband of the woman. The woman will also be fined Rs. 15/- which will be given to the wife of the man. In addition to Rs.35/- the man will also be fined one pig or one goat which will be consumed by the court members. The balance amount accruing out of fines will be distributed among the court members.

iii) In case the unmarried man and married woman want to get marry- the man will be fined Rs. 15/ and the amount will go to husband of the woman. The woman will also be fined Rs. 15/- and that amount will also go to her husband . The woman will leave the house only with the dresses she puts on and will have no right to claim the properties and children. The marriage will be performed at the residence of the Roy/ Choudhury. They will have to provide three chickens and drinks to the members of the court.

iv) In case the married man and married woman want to marry - The man will be fined Rs. 15/- and that will go to his wife.

The woman will also be fined Rs. 15/- and that will be given to her husband . This fine for divorce is known as 'Maktha' . Both the man and the woman will leave their respective houses only with the dresses they put on and will have no right to claim anything from their houses including children . Marriage will be performed at the residence of the Roy/ Choudhury. The Court will demand three chickens and drinks.

Divorce. If a man divorces his wife, he will be fined Rs.15/- and one pig or one goat. He will have at once leave his house only with the dresses he puts on and will have no right to claim any property and children. Same case will prevail if a woman divorces her husband . The fine realised will be distributed among the court members and the pig or goat will also be consumed by the court members.

Elopement with other's wife. Customary law in this case will be clearly illustrated by this real case which occurred at Nelsipare in 1969. But names of the parties are kept anonymous. Mr. X took the wife of Mr. Y out of her house and kept her in his house as pre- planned by both of them with the ultimate aim of getting married. Mr. Y filed the case to the village court, that is to the choudhury. Choudhury after admitting the case called his two khondols and asked them to announce in the village informing the villagers that a case would be heard at the residence of the Choudhury. Then all the male adult members, gathered together at the residence of the Choudhury.

Mr. Y gave Rs. 15/- and one bottle of arrack to the Choudhury as Court gee. The khondols were sent out to bring the accused Mr. X and also the wife of Mr. Y. On their arrival , the Choudhury informed Mr.X that a case had been filed against him accusing him of eloping with Mr. Y's wife and to hear the case he must give Rs. 15/- and one bottle of arrack as a court fee. Mr X gave Rs. 15/- and one bottle of arrack to the Choudhury, as asked for.

Choudhury asked Mr.X whether it was true that he eloped with the wife of Mr. Y.Mr.X answered in the affirmative. Then the

Choudhury turned towards Mr. Y and said that Mr. X could elope with his wife which meant that she was no longer interested to be his wife. When asked his reaction, Mr. Y said that as his wife could elope with Mr. X, he took it that his wife did not like to be with him any longer and as such he also did not like to accept her as his wife any more. Again, the Choudhury asked wife of Mr. Y why she eloped with Mr. X she replied that she wanted to marry Mr. X and she also did not like to return to her husband.

The Choudhury then categorically told Mr. X that as he eloped with other's wife, he would have to pay fine. Mr. X replied that he was ready to do that.

Mr. X was fined Rs. 135/- - Rs 60/- for eloping with other's wife, Rs, 30/- and one goat for inducing Mrs. Y to divorce her husband Rs. 30/- for breaking the law and Rs. 15/- for indulging in uncustomary marriage. The fined amounts were distributed as follows:- Rs 60/- was given to the woman's father. As per their customary law, Rs. 60/- was to be given to the father or brother or sister or nearest relative of the woman. Rs.30/- was given to husband of the woman. Rs.30/- was utilised for purchase of drinks for the court members. Goat was eaten by the court members. Out of Rs.15/ realised for uncustomary law, Rs.2/ each was given to the two khondols, Rs,5/- to the Choudhury and Rs 6/- was utilised for purchase of eatables.

But after that Molsom Choudhury came and said that Molsom woman committed a serious crime and as per the Molsom customary law, she should be fined Rs. 600/- (The woman happened to be a Molsom but married with a Bongcher). It was, however, amicably settled that she should be fined Rs. 200/-.

One thing that can be mentioned in this connection is that the khondols and enraged villagers have the right to beat her which can be stopped only by wife of the choudhury. In such case, Rs, 5/- is given to wife of the choudhury by the culprit for protecting her.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Family set- up and food habits.

The Bongchers have patriachal system of family. They do not practise joint family system. The sons will usually establish new familes soon after they get married leaving one son, normally the youngest one, to look after their parents. When a father dies before any of his sons have got married, the mother will not act as head of the family temporarily . The son who gets married first will automatically become head of the family. The following are the family terms used by the Bongchers.

Father- Pa  
Mother- Nu  
Grand Father- Pu  
Grand Mother- Pi  
Son- Sapa  
Daughter- Sanu  
Grand Son- Tupa  
Grand Daughter- Tunu  
Uncle- Panghak  
Aunt- Ni  
Father- in -law- Tarpu  
Mother- in- law- Tarpi  
Brother- Naipa  
Sister- Mainu  
Elder Brother- Upa (Kada is also used)  
Younger Brother- Naipa  
Elder sister- Unainu  
Younger Sister- Nainu  
Elder Brother's wife - Bachoi (Loan word from Kok-  
Barak).  
Younger Brother's wife- Vainu  
Elder sister's husband- Kumai  
Younger sister's husband - Vaipa  
Step Father- Patawi  
Step Mother- Nutawi

Father and father - in- law are addressed in the same way "Kupa" and likewise mother and mother- in- law are addressed as "Kunu". Parents will call their sons and daughters by their nicknames. For addressing Son- in- law, plural form will be used 'bengni' which means 'You' (implying son- in - law and daughter). This term is also used by parents to address their son, who has got married and to address their daughter in- law.

Husband and wife never call each other by real name. They generally call each other "Hui, Hui", or if they can find out alternative name, they will use that one. As soon as they get son or daughter, they call each other by the name of their son or daughter by adding 'pa' or 'nu' at the suffix. When husband and wife are out for cultivation or anywhere, the wife has to go behind the man. This is mainly because the woman feels secure to walk behind the man.

Inheritance of properties:- If the father leaves his will before his death, properties of the family will be distributed / inherited accordingly. Otherwise, the customary legal heir is the son who stays with the parents and feed them till their death. The youngest son is normally the legal heir as the elder sons will get married first and establish separate families. In case when the couple do not have sons or do not have children at all, the father would necessarily leave his will.

Restriction. There are certain restrictions between a brother and his younger brother's wife. They cannot touch each other and cannot hand over anything to each other. The background of this restriction is that once a brother had an illicit sexual relationship with the wife of his younger brother and were caught red- handed. If they touch each other, each of them will be fined Rs. 5/- . Cutting jokes between them is also prohibited. However, they can take food cooked by either of them and can also wash each other's clothes.

Food habits. They take food thrice in a day. The first food is cooked when the cock crows for the second time and take it about

at seven in the morning. Lunch is taken about at 12.00 Noon and dinner about at 7.00 P.M. They do not take anything in between these three meals. They are purely rice eaters. Curry is mainly prepared with dry fish without oil. Pig oil is used for preparation of curry, but infrequently. Household distilled lime is commonly used for preparation of vegetable curry. Bamboo- shoot is the most favourable vegetables. Red and white pumpkins, gourd (Lau) arum, bulbs and beans are the common vegetables taken by them.

They take all kinds of meat except beef. Meat are cooked without oil. First of all , they will cook in a dry pan for some time and then pour water. When it starts boiling, dry, fish, salt and chilly are mixed with it. Skins of animals are also consumed with relish. They will first burn and clean it and then cook with dry fish, salt, chilly and home distilled lime. Pork is prepared by boiling it and then mixing with onions, when it is ready for serving chilly and salt are mixed with. For preparation of fish, dry fish, chilly and salt are boiled with water and after that fish is put in . Their most favourite meat are pork and chicken. They are also very fond of gudok, that is vegetable curry cooked in bamboo vessel. Chilly is taken excessively. Nowadays, mustard oil is increasingly used. Previously, plaintain leaves were solely used for serving food. At present, enamel plates and silver plates are also used though plaintain leaves are also still in use. For carrying food to the jhum or working sites, plaintain leaves are used with which they wrap the cooked rice.

Some Bong- cher words relating to food and fruits are given below along with equivalent words in English:-

<u>English</u>	<u>Bongcher</u>
Pork	Vawkme
Chicken	Arme
Mutton	Kelme
Buffalo meat	Salawime
Meat	Me
Fish	Lugame/ Ngame
Egg	Artui
Rice	Sai

Cooked rice	Buh
Curry	An
Oil	Saruk
Lime	Changal
Onion	Purun
Ginger	Aithing
Turmeric	Aisul
Mosola	Mosola (Loan word)
Potato	Alu (Loan word)
Tomato	Tomato (Loan word)
Cabbage	Copi (Loan word)
Brinjal	Manta
Bean	Bepui
Podina	Bakhor/ Pardi
Bitter gourd (Karala)	Kangla (Loan word)
Snake gourd	Berul
Yam	Bara
Cucumber	Changma
Melon	Dranbai (Loan word)
Water Melon	Maiphawl/ Zaiphawl
Red Pumpkin	Maithum
White pumpkin	Maipawl
Gourd(Lau)	Mailau (Loan word)
Arum bulb	Bal
Chilly	Murchu
Boiled vegetable leaves	Andawng
Cooked vegetable (with dry fish , chilly and salt)	Bai
Dal	Dailu
Salt	Ichi
Plaitain leaf	Mawtna
Cooking pot	Bel
Frying pot	Karai (Loan word)
Big spoon	Haikhaw (Loan word)
Tea/table spoon	Chownawt (Loan word)
Cup	Mag (Loan word)
Jack-fruit	La-ui
Mango	Theihai

Guava	Kawlthei
Lemon	Ser
Papaya	Kengkoia (Loan word)
Orange	Komla (Loan word)
Pineapple	Mortai
Coconut	Nerkla

### Drinks and smoking

The Bongchers prepare three varieties of drink, namely, Zu (rice beer), Rakzu (distilled/alcoholic spirit) and Brandy (double refined/ distilled spirit). For preparation of liquor, leaven (Chawl in Bongcher) is used which is also prepared by them with various kinds of leaves. At time, they usually prepare with the following combinations.

Rice-	1 Kg
Leave of Chawl tree-	1/2 Kg
Damkol plant-	2 pieces.
Chilli-	2/3 nos.
Pineapple leaves-	4/5 nos.
Roots of Puihnamchhia -	( Wild and non- edible variety of clerodendron ) 4/5 pieces (roots are to be scrapped)
Laiber plant-	1 piece (stem is to be scrapped).
Microcos peniculata (local name zuthur)-	10 pieces (stem to be scrapped)
Bark of Hnahkiah tree (callicarpa arborea) -	1 piece of about 4" square.

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Rice -beer and alcoholic drinks are consumed by all excepting the children . The christians among them, of course, have discontinued this habit. As regards smoking, earlier all matured persons used to enjoy smoking known as Daba made of bamboo. Nowadays, they have been rapidly substituting by bidi and cigarettes. Most of the males and females smoke. Quite contrary to most of other tribes, the Bongchers hardly chew betel nuts.

They do not use metal tools at home. Some of them visiting market places do take a look of curiosity.

**Household implements and furniture of Bongchers.**

<u>English</u>		<u>Bongcher</u>
Dao		Chem
Axe		Rawi
Spade	Kawdal( borrowed word)	
Sabal		Chemlu
Nail		Perek
Bed		Zalna
Cane/ bamboo stool	Mura (borrowed word)	
Mat		Pher

## CHAPTER SIX

### Religion, Belief, Rituals and Ceremonies.

Like all other tribes, the Bongchers are also animists. Their belief is mainly based on legend. They believe in the existence of many spirits, some are good and some are notoriously evil. To find out the main god worshipped by them, their elders and priests were interviewed. But the replies did not agree, the reason seems to be that their original belief had been intermingled with the beliefs of their neighbouring communities. Some of them say that their principal worship is the god of Inkil. Inkil means corner of a house. The legend behind this that once there was a widow who had a small daughter. One day, she laid her daughter down in a swing and left her to fetch water. A snake then came out from the corner of the house and slept with the small girl to guard her. When the mother came home the snake went back towards the corner of the house and vanished. It was believed that god appeared in the form of a snake and was always present in the corner of the house. Since that time, they have been worshipping Inkil (corner of the house) with the belief that god is there. They bow down before it and address it Kunu (Mother). Before they enjoy their first harvest by themselves, they will first offer a portion of it to the god of Inkil. They will bow down and say-

“Kunu Inkil, Ka sakmana ke nekmana nang ka hawng pek ta”.  
(Mother Inkil, here I am offering you food and drink).

After that they will offer again a portion of their first harvest to the Sun and looking at the Sun or the Moon, they will say-

“Ninu Thapa, Ka nekmana Ka Skamana nang Ka hawng pek”.  
(Sun and Moon, here I offer you food and drink).

The Sun is treated as female and the Moon is treated as male. Offerings should be made only by females. Before offerings are made, they should take bath and burn scented sticks. The practice of bathing and burning of scented sticks are likely to have been borrowed from non-tribals. Another group says that worshipping of Inkil god has been adopted from Tripuri community but is not

the principal worship of Bengchers. This group claims that the main worship is god shiv. They relate Mahadev to the god shiv. This claim is difficult to agree to as it is far too much akin to Hinduism. Of course, it may have relevance at present, but it could not have been before their entry into Tripura, for the simple reason that in animism such element could not exist.

What we can say in conclusion is that they were absolute animists but after their entry into Tripura, they have been gradually assimilating in their beliefs, the beliefs of others including their religious practices.

The Maharaja of Tripura also presented them "Thirlum Thirphrai" to be worshipped as images of god. When I checked these Thirlum Thirphrai I found that Thirlum was just a round iron - ball smaller than the size of cricket ball and no inscriptions on it. Thirphrai was just a thumb size iron having no inscriptions on it. It might be that because of their old age, the inscriptions have disappeared. Earlier, sacrifice was made once in every year for Thirlum Thirphrai. Two chickens were sacrificed by the priests. Thirlum Thirphrai were also used for finding out the culprits. For instance, one girl became pregnant and named father of the baby. But the boy named by the girl denied the charge. Then Thirlum Thirphrai would be brought to Roy. The priest would perform sacrifice by killing two chickens and ask the boy and the girl to touch the Thirlum Thirphrai. It is said that Thirlum Thirphrai would become very hot when the one who told lie was about to touch and therefore would not dare to touch them.

#### Life after death

They believe that as soon as a man dies, his spirit goes to the Rih Li (Rih lake is in Burma bordering Mizoram). But the spirit cannot depart the dead body before it is bathed. So, the dead body will not be bathed until all his relatives arrive. As soon as the dead body is bathed, the spirit will go out and proceed to Rih Li. After passing through the Rih Li, the departed spirit is fed by one woman Laileimanu by name, with porridge. The moment porridge is eaten by the departed spirit, it will enter Mithi Khua (Hades, the abode of departed spirits). They also believe

that until the departed spirit is fed by Laileimanu with poridge, it will still remember the relatives left behind and will be longing very much for them. But as soon as it is fed by Laileimanu, it will not have any further remembrance for the relatives. So when a man dies, his relatives will cry and say "Laileimanu buhpawk va ne ma raw, ker ngil ma raw" which means "Don't eat Laileimanu's poridge, don't forget me".

In case of spirits of wrongdoers, they believe that as soon as they pass through the Rih Li, they turn into butterflies, when the butterflies die, they turn into pigs, when the pigs die, they turn into goats and then into dogs and then into cows and then into monkeys and lastly again turn into human beings. This particular way of belief appears to have been adopted from Hinduism in a slightly modified form.

#### Spirit of dead infant.

When an infant dies, it is believed that it came from the Mithi khua (Hades) in so much of a hurry that it could not have food there and for that reason it has to go back to Mithi Khua to have food. The grown up persons are believed to have come to this world after having food in the Mithi Khua. The dead body of an infant is buried on the bank of a river along with one egg. It is believed that as an infant does not know the way to Mithi Khua, the egg will roll and roll and the spirit of the infant will follow it till it reaches the Mithi Khua. Infants who die, before cutting any tooth are treated in this manner.

#### Spirit of dead pregnant woman.

They believe that when a pregnant woman dies, her spirit will have to pass through several obstructions on its way to Mithi khua. Thorns, grasses and branches of trees will fall down blocking the way. So, it needs implement to clear its way. As soon as the cremation is done, an axe is put to the cremation fire saying "Hi, nang ka depta hi Rawi lampui a arkhawl ardeng lawmpui ni satna rang". (Look here, this is an axe for you for clearing your way.) After saying that the axe is taken out again from the fire.

#### Re- incarnation.

It is their belief that departed spirits in Mithi Khua will often look at the world and watching the people singing and dancing. Seeing the joyous activities of the people in the world, they are tempted to return to the world. They believe that spirit of a man will re-incarnate as woman and vice versa.

#### How they fear evil spirit of dead man.

They think that on the night of cremation, evil spirit in the resemblance of the dead man will visit the dead man's house by carrying with him the bamboo carriage with which the dead body was carried out from his house to the cremation ground. The bamboo carriage is called 'Tawlai'. Relative of the dead man will not dare to go out of the house fearing that the evil spirit will cover them with the Tawlai. They believe that the dead man's spirit is very much longing for his family members that he tries to take them along with it to the Mithi khua. Villagers, other than the relatives, are also frightened on that night, and every one will carry burning bamboo stick or torchlight while moving out of the house. It is believed that evil spirit claims ownership of the place where the dead body was laid in the house before cremation and therefore that location is very much dreaded. That is why this place is sometimes used for testing bravery of a man. A man who dares to sleep at that place on that night is considered as brave enough. It is said that a man who sleeps on that place will see in his dream an evil spirit covering him with Tawlai and if he is not brave enough, he will be filled with horror and cry out for help.

They are also afraid of the spirit of dead infant with the superstitious belief that it will appear in its likeness and cry out. They also think that evil spirit "Tarpa" may bring it again over his two arms.

#### Disposal of womb.

When a woman gives birth, the womb is kept inside the bamboo

vessel or bamboo basket made for catching fish (chawk) and hang on the branch of a tree, in obscure jungle. It is said that anybody who sees the hanging object will immediately hear chirping of a small bird and the hanging womb with the bamboo vessel will fall down and moves around the legs of the person who sees it with a view to stop him from proceeding further. If that person passes urine, the moving object will again go up and keep hanging. Mr. Lakhi Charan Bongcher, Whom I also interviewed claims that he had seen this happening himself before his marriage. This strange thing is said to be still in existence

#### Rituals and ceremonies.

A woman who gives birth is considered as impure for seven days. Inside the house , a portion of the room with be set apart for her and the baby . To demarcate a portion of the room allotted to them, bamboo will be put across the floor and the mother cannot cross over this. She is not allowed to cook. Her husband will cook and serve her. She is not allowed to go out except through the backdoor of the house to response to nature's call . All her and baby's clothes will have to be washed by her husband or her daughter, if matured daughters are there in the family. Baby's clothes are called "Rebek". Before expiry of three days from the birth of the baby, all visitors must carry with them "Meichher" (burning bamboo sticks). This is because they think that if they go without meichher, evil spirit will come and attack the baby causing it to cry out of fear. The family also cannot throw away ashes from the hearth till removal of the umbilical cord. The ashes will be kept in a basket till purification ritual is performed.

After completion of seven days by which time the umbilical cord has normally been removed, priest and kurma (the woman who arranged delivery of the baby) will be called to perform ritual for purification which is known as "In rithung tir".

Seven chickens are required for performance of purification ritual for sacrifice to the following gods- one for water god, two for Arthung, god of purity, one for Sangru, god of riches. When

sacrifice is made to Sangru, chicken is to be killed on the elephant shape wood. Two chickens will be offered to "Einu Eipa". Einu is goddess and Eipa is god and they are considered as goddess and god of protection. One chicken will be offered to Inkil to appease god of Inkil who is always disturbed by the baby cries. The priest will carefully examine intestines of the chickens and if any tearing or blood is found in the intestines, sacrifice is to be made again. Besides chickens, small quantity of rice, two earthen pots full of wine and one bottle of arrack are to be provided by the parents of the baby. Rice is required for performance of ritual and drinks are enjoyed by the priest and persons who gather in the house. After performance of the ritual, father of the baby will bow down at the feet of the priest and enquire if the performance of ritual is satisfactory.

After this Kurma will throw away ashes from the house. She will come inside the house again and lift the baby up to her bosom and go outside the house with a burning bamboo stick followed by the mother. Kurma will place the burning bamboo stick on the ground and she will oscillate the baby over the fire. After that, looking at the Sun she will say "Sun and Moon, see this baby". Then the baby and the mother are considered as free from impurities. Parents of the baby have to give to Kurma one earthen pot of wine, half a bottle of arrack, Rs.5/- and hand woven cloth for petticoat. It is believed that if these things are not given to Kurma, the Kuram when dies, her departed spirit will not be able to cross the Khenbet lui, the river which flows into Rih lake. So, presentation of the things mentioned above to Kurma is a must.

Apart from birth ritual, there are no more rituals or ceremonies to be performed excepting at the time of death. When a person dies, he will be watched for one or two hours and after that he/she will be declared death. The dead body will be washed with warm water and dressed neatly. One chicken will be killed and offered to the spirit of the dead man along with a small quantity of rice, cotton, oilseed and money (Rs.2/- to 5/- ). From the date of death, wife or husband, brothers and children of the dead person are debarred from taking oily food, dry fish and sour vegetables for three days. This observation is known as "Merasi". After two days, food will be offered to the spirit of the

departed soul in front of the house. On completion of seven days, the family members will go to the cremation ground and collect remnants of the forehead bone. The cremation ground is called "Than". The forehead bone will be kept inside a bamboo vessel and kept near the house. The family members will offer food near the bamboo vessel at the time of taking food in the morning and evening. This offering will continue for one year. After one year is completed, all relatives will give Rs.1/- or Rs.2/- to the keeper of the bone, who is the son or brother of the dead man. Sankirtan (group singing in a moving circle) is performed for one night. The next day, the bone will be taken to Dumbur river and immerse into the water. Perhaps this particular ritual is not the traditional practice of Bongchers but rather adopted from the practice of other Communities.

Wife or husband of the dead person is not allowed to oil her or his hair and sing and remarry for a period of one year. No decorative dress should be put on and no combing of hair should be done. Any one who breaks these restrictions will be fined Rs.15/-.

When one year is completed, younger brother or sister of the dead man will bring flower to the widow or to the husband of the dead woman and put flower to the upper side of the ear and tell her or him in murmuring voice that she or he is now free from all restrictive binding. This formality is called "Par pek". Along with flower, younger brother or sister of the dead man will bring oil, comb, looking glass and face powder and will dress up the widow or husband of the dead woman. During this performance, Roy/ Choudhury and villagers will get together and drink and sing. Brothers and sisters of the dead man/ woman will weep saying "Now we bid farewell to our brother-in-law/ sister-in-law". The widow or husband of the dead woman will give Rs.5/- to her/his brother-in-law /sister-in-law.

#### Sacrifice for good harvest.

Every year during the time of sowing or paddy, sacrifice for good harvest will be performed. This sacrifice is called "Kumchawi". Two chickens will be offered to Einu Eipa (goddess and god) near

a river. Another two chickens will be offered to Tui pathien (god of water) and to Sangru (god of riches). Sacrifice to Tui pathien is made for bountiful rains and sacrifice to Sangru is made for riches. After this, one goat and one chicken will also be sacrificed near the river. While sacrifice is made, the priest will chant "Kunu Eipa, hima phulna a indawnga i awm a changkhawm sela, a meisunte ar a hawng chawi a, no kawma chubai nahung unna hi a bibu ze a, kam thawhna a tak hawng chang tir rawh. (Mother, Father, this man has nothing in his house excepting the chicken which he has brought to you now and he now bow down to you and therefore look after him".

#### Sacrifice for cleaning of village.

In the month of December, sacrifice for "Khawsar" is performed. This is for cleaning of the village and it is a community sacrifice. Four chickens are offered to Einu Eipa, Tui and sangru. In the evening, two more chickens will be sacrificed - one at the eastern edge of the village and another at the western edge of the village. The priest and his two Assistants will perform the sacrifice without uttering a word. First of all, they will perform it at the western edge of the village and roast the chicken and eat the whole flesh. Then they will go to the eastern edge and perform the sacrifice with one chicken. The chicken will be roasted and consumed. After observing all these rituals, the priest and his Assistants go to the Roy/ Choudhury and start talking. After that all the villagers are also free to talk and start fire in the hearth. Anybody found talking or starting fire in the hearth during performance of the ritual will be fined Rs.5/- . The Khondols are acting as intelligents to find out if there is anybody not observing silence and not extinguishing fire during performance of the sacrifice.

During this observation, one goat and one chicken are also sacrificed to kali, goddess of power. This practice does not seem to be original but rather adopted much after their entry into Tripura.

### Sacrifice for the sick

When a person falls sick, Inkil ( god of house corner) is consulted to find out the causes of sickness while the patient is to wear thread around his/ her arm. They ask god of Inkil, saying

“Kunu, nang kei chakna dam tirang, ar nahawng pek iti”.

(Mother, help me to recover , I shall offer you a chicken).

After this, if the patient is found to be improving a little , a chicken will be offered to the god of Inkil by the priest. Intestine of the chicken will be examined by the priest and if any broken spot is found , another chicken is to be sacrificed. Then two leaves of jackfruit tree are brought and the priest throw them up in the air. When they fall down on the ground, it will be checked whether the two leaves are showing opposite faces. If one leaf shows front side and another one back side, it is considered as perfectly alright . But if the two leaves show the same sides, the priest will throw them up again till the third time. In case the two leaves show the same sides, the priest will throw them up again till the third time. In case thw two leaves show the same sides till the third throw, the priest will ask the Inkil what it actually wants, pig or goat. Whatever the priest will prescribe is to be offered for sacrifice.

If the patient does not improve after this sacrifice, they will approach “Tarpa” (Evil spirir) in the jungle. One cock along with a little quantity of rice are offered in the jungle . The entire flesh of the chicken is consumed in the forest itself. If condition of the patient does not improve after this sacrifice, another sacrifice is made with two cocks in the jungle at the foot of a big tree. The sacrifice is made to “Asen Thingkung”. Asen and Thingkung are said to be sons of Tarpa while Asen is the elder one. They are considered as soldiers residing in a tree trunk. They are very much afraid of them as they are considered causing death by taking away their spirits. In this sacrifice, blood of the cock will be spread over the rice.

Even after this sacrifice , if the patient does not recover, the priest will consult Inkil , Tarpa and Asen Thingkung by making bamboo decoration. The priest will observe for one or two days. If the patient's condition remains the same, he will prepare herbal medicine and apply. If the patient still does not show any sign

of improvement, the priest will prescribe turtle for sacrifice saying that the "Khawhri" (Witchcraft) does not like pork, mutton and chicken excepting the flesh of turtle. The sacrifice is to be made at night in the jungle and the whole flesh is to be consumed there. If the patient does not recover after all these sacrifices, he / she is left at the mercy of god.

#### Bawlpu (priest ).

Bawlpu in Bongcher language means priest. In Tripuri language, it is Ochai. This local term "Ochai" is frequently used by them instead of using their own term, that is Bawlpu.

There are two types of Bawlpu, one is Bawlpulien (senior priest) and another is Bawlpute (junior priest ). The Bawlpulien is assisted by the Bawlpute and while assisting him he also learns everything from the Bawlpulien. Bawlpute should be sincerely obedient to Bawlpulien. When Bawlpulien wants to retire , he will inform Bawlpute. Certain formalities are to be observed for delegation of responsibilities of the Bawlpulien to Bawlpute. Rs.5/- and one gamsa (a piece of thin cloth) are given to Bawlpulien by Bawlpute. Two chickens are offered as sacrifice to purify the Bawlpute. Water sacrificed in the ritual is kept in bamboo flask and Bawlpulien will spread over the head of Bawlpute. After this Bawlpulien will chant saying-

"Kunu Sumtinhei Pawntinhei, nikut chung a ke lan ta. Bawlpu  
chang  
kaining, hima hi ninek nisak ning a pe rang mi Bawlpu a chang  
a".

(Mother Sumtinhei Pawntinhei, I hand over this man to you. Now I am no longer priest, the priest who takes over priesthood from me will offer you food and drink to you).

Village leaders and elders are also present during this ceremony. More chickens are killed to feed the village leaders and elders. After this, the two priests go to the residence of Bawlpulien and join the drinking. Bawlpulien will spread water over the head of Bawlpute who kneel down before him. After that he will declare that Bawlpute is handed over the charge of Bawlpulien. But after this also, former Bawlpulien can still perform offerings

and sacrifices if requested by the newly appointed Bawipulien. Bawpu does not get any wage. However, the villagers help him by cultivating his jhum, one day each in a year without any wage. This system is known as "Manlai". The villagers are fed by the priest with pork, chicken and rice beer on the day they cultivate his jhum.

Ritual for restraining tiger from eating the flesh of animal killed.

When it is learnt that a tiger killed an animal they will bring water with cup and pour it over a grindstone and chant

"Hi lung aikhiring ka den Ikeipa me aithat hi lungin  
ka deng khir pek rawh".

(Turn the flesh of animal killed by the tiger as hard as this grindstone).

Their superstitious belief is that after doing this, flesh of the animal will become as hard as the grindstone and the tiger will not be able to consume it. They will then collect the meat for their own consumption.



A Bongcher women ready to go out for work.



A Bongcher women distilling liquor.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Courting, marriage and divorce.

The Bongchers have never practised dormitory system. Young boys visit girls in their houses at night. Normally, the boys will go to the girl's house in a small batch consisting of close friends. The boys will play chawngpereng, locally made quiter- type musical instrument, or saranda, locally made three- stringed violin and proceed to the girl's house at night. When they reach the entrance of the girl's house, they will stop and wait for welcoming word from the girl. As soon as they are welcomed by the girl, they will enter into the house and take their seats near the fire place. If the boys are acceptable to the girl's parents, they will go to bed and soon pretend to be in deep sleep. Sometimes , girl's parents are already on bed when the boys go to the girl's house. In that case also, if the visitors are welcomed ones, the parents will not disturb in any way. However, if the visitors are not acceptable to them, the girl's parents will not go to bed or even if they are already on bed , they will frequently get up and start smoking Daba (locally made bamboo smoking pipe). In case , the boys remain till late night. they will politely say that it is now time to go to bed. It is not to be considered that necessarily the boys go to the girl's house for courting only, the visit is also just a part of life of young boys and girls. For many a time, they go only for the purpose of killing time by gossiping.

A boy who falls in love with a girl will invite his closest friend/ friends to accompany him when he visits the girl's house at night. Round about at 10.00 P.M. they will proceed to the girl's house playing chawngpereng. As soon as they reach entrance of the house, the girl will call them to get inside . Parents of the girl, normally on bed by that time, will raise their eyebrows and try to identify the boys. If they find that the visitors are acceptable, they will go on sleeping . All the boys, excepting the lover will soon lay down on the floor and pretend to sleep so as to give a chance to the two lovers to exchange their words of love. The boys will leave the girl's house early in the morning when no one has yet got up. Seldom the boy (lover) will be left behind by his

friends in the girl's house as in which case, the boy's parents will have to negotiate immediately with the girl's parents for marriage. One thing to be kept in mind is that when both the lovers are left alone by the girl's parents and the boy's friends by pretending to be asleep (or may be actually in full sleep) , it does not necessarily mean that the girl has surrendered herself for the sexual appetite of her lover. In spite of such available opportunities, sexual relationship does not occur at all normally. The apprehension that young tribal boys and girls are sexually loose because of their free social life is sheer misconception . Some of the songs played with chawngpereng while courting a girl are narrated below:

Scene:- The suitor is strolling towards the girl's house playing chawngpereng. The girl is spinning cotton with local made spinning wheel (Charkha) on the raised bamboo platform attached to the house. The house of the girl has raised floor about 5 feet high and therefore wooden ladder with bamboo rail are fitted to climb up the house.

Boy: Playing this song with Chawngpereng-

Nangman dek maw nupangte,  
Tukban kan mawhawng luikit,  
Rakal kan maw hawng luikit,  
Nangma dek maw nupangte?  
(Are you all alone, girl-  
Shall I climb on wooden ladder  
Or shall I climb over the hand rail,  
Are you all alone, girl?)

Girl: Girl will reply by saying-  
Hawng ta rawh, ni zak maw zak,  
A tu reng awm a ngawi,  
Keiman reng ki awm.  
(Come, are you feeling shy?  
There is none else,  
I am all alone.)

Boy :- He will again play his chawngpereng with this song:

Nu nute a in maw inta,  
Napate a in maw in ta,  
Nu upate a zin maw a awm?  
(Is your mother in the house,  
Is your father in the house,  
Is your elder brother in the house?)

Girl: The girl will again reply:  
A tu reng a awm a ngawi,  
Ka pa a awm khawm inhhunga a awm,  
Ka nu khawm inhhunga a awm,  
Ka date a leng ta.  
(There is none here,  
My father is inside the house,  
My mother is inside the house,  
My brothers have gone out.)

The boy will enter into the house, take a seat and prepare to start smoking in bamboo smoking pipe. The girl will take over the pipe and put a piece of burning charcoal over the tobacco and hand it over again to the boy, The girl will ask the boy what he wants to have, drink or any other. The boy will reply in music-

Zu Khawm duhmiang rakzu khawm duhming,  
Kei duh chu khatka a awm,  
In rikila lu a kawm mi ki duh.  
(I do not like rice beer, either I like arrack,  
There is one thing I like to have-  
The one which is at the corner of the house.)

The girl will laugh. Because the one which is kept at the corner of the house is nothing but rice beer or arrack.

Marriage:- Love marriage is common among the Bongchers though there are cases of marriage through negotiations by parents . When a boy and a girl fall in love, the boy will inform his parents his desire to marry that girl. If his parents are agreeable to his proposal they will invite their relatives and go to the house of the girl to consult her parents. This time they will carry nothing

with them. In case the girl's parents are also agreeable to the proposal, date for the second meeting will be fixed. In the second meeting, the boy's side will take with them drinks to the girl's house and enjoy together there. They will fix date for the third and final meeting. In the third and final meeting, the boy's side will take with them drinks and dry fish. A lot of dry fish packets will be made and distributed to all relatives of the girl. The dry fish will be consumed there with drinks. During this discussion, final agreements will be arrived at on the date of marriage, bride's price and duration of service to be rendered by the bridegroom by staying in the in-law's house. After making the final agreement, announcement will be made that marriage for such and such persons have been finalised. After this announcement, if either of the parties fails to fulfill the agreement, a case will be filed in the village court by the aggrieved party. The defaulting party will have to pay fine as imposed by the Village Court.

Bride's price. The normal bride's price is Rs.31/- and a piece of cloth, measuring about two metres. It is usual practice that the girl's parents will not really receive the bride price though included in the term of agreement. In lieu of accepting the bride's price, girl's parents will put one condition that the bridegroom should not misbehave with their daughter and should not even touch her hair out of anger. If he does, they will straightaway take her home. There is another system regarding bride's price. Girl's parents may demand Rs. 61/- and a piece of cloth. If the boy's side gives Rs. 61/- and a piece of cloth, the bride shall be under complete control of the bridegroom and should not make any complaint even if treated badly. In the event of her husband's death also, she is not allowed to return to her parents' house.

Performance of marriage. The marriage is performed by priest known as Bawlpu. Nowadays, the priest is also often called Ochai, a borrowed Tripuri word. The marriage is performed in the bride's kitchen house. The bridegroom and the bride will sit opposite to each other with their legs in full length. A stone will be kept in between their. Two chickens will be killed above the

stone as sacrifice. The more the blood of chickens washes the stone the better it is considered. In addition to these two chickens , another four chickens are sacrificed outside the kitchen by the priest.

The bride is to provide beddings, one basket (Thul as called by the Bongchers) and one hand spinning wheel. After four or five days of marriage, the bridegroom and the bride go to the house of the bridegroom to stay there for about a week. After that, they return to the bride's house. The boy stays in the girl's house usually for six or seven years. Nowadays, the normal duration is one year only.

Divorce:- Divorce is uncommon among the Bongchers. However, it is permissible for both sides. If the husband divorces his wife, he will be fined Rs.15/- and one pig. The husband shall leave the house only with the dresses he puts on. All the household properties and their children will be of his wife. The same will be the case if the wife divorces her husband.

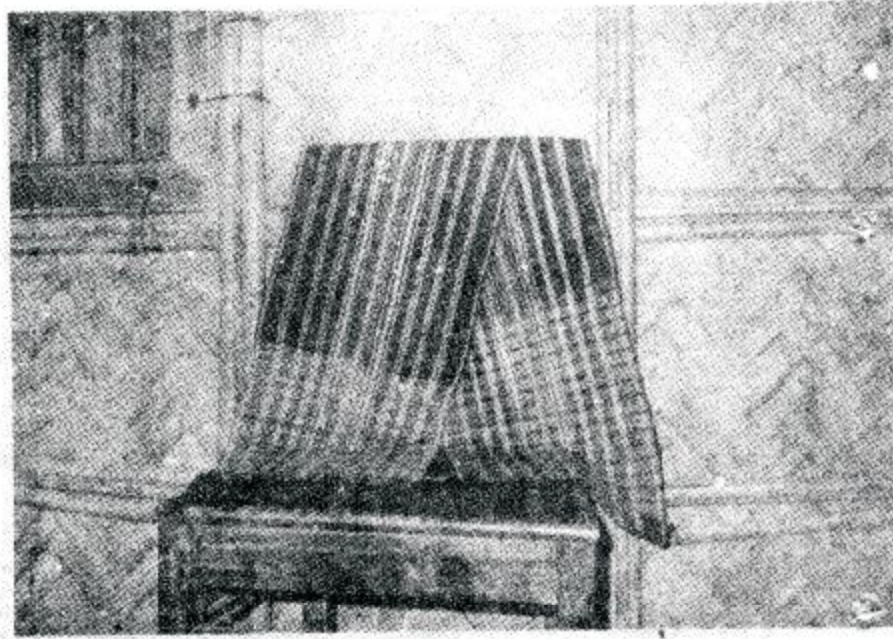
Illegal child:- When a girl conceives before marriage, father of the child is solely determined by the girl's version. Whoever the girl pits out to be the father of the child , that boy has to accept it and the village court also accepts it without any further enquiry. If the boy is agreeable to marry her, he is fined Rs 15/- and one pig or one goat and the girl will be fined Rs.5/- . Generally, the boy and the girl are pressurised to get marry in this case. But if the boy could not accept that the child is his and refuses to enter into marriage, he will be fined Rs.30/- and one pig or one goat and the girl will also be fined Rs. 5/- Pre-pregnancy marriage will be performed in the house of the Roy/Choudhury and three chickens will be killed.

Favourite Boy and Girl:- A boy who does not indulge in thieving and not having illicit affairs with opposit sex but is industrious is highly esteemed and catches the eyes of the girls and their parents as well. Such boy is called "Khawru". A boy who is industrious, expert in basketry and good in singing is the favourite choice of a girl. For the boys, a girl having slim waist and long

hair is attractive and appealing. If a girl is also expert in weaving, that is an extra attraction.

In the fast changing world, love may also have linkage with money, power and position and in no time among the Bongchers too. When such time comes, values bestowed now will have no bearings in choosing the life partners.

Restrictions in marriage:- Son and daughter of two brothers cannot marry. But there is no restriction between son and daughter of two sisters.



A Bongcher cloth called called "Rinai". This is used by lady for covering her breast.



This basket is known as "Thul" in Bongcher. All valuable articles are kept here.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Language, Dresses and Ornaments.

According to George A. Gearson , in his book "Languages of North Eastern India", the Halam dialects belong to Old Kuki sub-group of the Kuki chin group under Tibeto - Burman language. There are two language groups under Halam, one group belongs to the said old Kuki sub- group while the other group belongs to Bodo group. The Bongcher dialect belongs to the old Kuki sub-group. The Bongcher dialect, besides being closely akin to the dialects of other Halam sub- tribes, is also very close to the dialects of Mizo and Kuki (of Tripura) . In spite of their tiny population amidst the numerous bigger tribes, the Bongchers are found not having borrowed many words from their neighbouring communities:

The Bongcher language has not yet been reduced to writing. There are vocabularies / words where there may be inconsistencies in the spellings because of their neutral sounds. For instance, Iryng is to be pronounced as I- ri-ung. In this connection, it has some similarities with languages of Bodo group. For example, in the Reang language, there are quite a number of words which need stress with the help of nasal sound.

As already mentioned above, the dialects of all the Halam sub-tribes belonging to the old Kuki group are almost similar to one another. Let us have some comparative illustrations between the dialects of Bongcher and Kuki or Mizo. There is one distinct disagreement between Bongcher and Mizo dialects. In Mizo, there are numbers of vocabularies having triple consonants whereas in Bongcher it is not to be found. Here Kuki dialect appears to be in between. We may remember here that though Darlong is included under Kuki tribe, they have slightly different dialects. In Kuki dialects, double consonants are often used while consonants are sparingly used in Bongcher dialects.

The following vocabularies will show how triple consonants and double consonants are used in the respective dialects.

<u>English</u>	<u>Mizo</u>	<u>Kuki</u>	<u>Darlawng</u>	<u>Bongcher</u>
Moon	Thla	Thlapa	Thlapa	Tha
East	Chhuahlam	Sualam	Sak	Suahlam
West	Tlaklam	Taklam	Khu	Taklam
North	Hmar	Hmar	Hmar	Mar
South	Chhim	Sim	Sim	Sim
Engine	Khawl	Kawl	Kawl	Kawl
Tree/Wood	Thing	Thing	Thing	Thing
Grave	Thlan	Thlan	Thlan	Than
Locus	Khau	Khau	Khai	Kai
Fish	Sangha	Nga	Nga	Nga
Tell	Hrih	Ril	Hrih	Ril
Tremor	Nghing	Ning	Nghing	Ringing
Thorn	Hling	Rihling	Rihling	Riling
Song	Hla	Hla	Hla	La
Knee	Khup	Rukhup	Rikhuk	Rukhuk
Inside	Chhung	Sung	Sung	Sung

From the above comparisons of vocabularies, it will be seen that the Bongchers do not use triple consonants and even double consonants are infrequently used. One interesting thing is that there is one particular word which all the Kuki Chin linguistic group (excepting those belonging to Bodo linguistic group) can pronounce with perfect phonetic sound, that is "NGUR". Other linguistic groups pronounce it as "NUR" or "MUR".

The Bongcher language also follows the patten of using adjective and adverb as used in most of the Kuki-Chin and Bodo linguistic groups. Adjective is placed after noun and adverb after adjective . These sentences may depict the use of adjective and adverb in Bongcher language.

English: There is a black cow.

Bongcher: Chuta sarat vawm pumkhat a awm.

(Sarat- cow; vawm- black)

English: This is a very beautiful flower.

Bongcher: Hima par satak a chang.

(Par- flower ; sa- beautiful; tak - very)

Another characteristic of Bongcher language is greater stress at the end of the sentence and abrupt ending. This is true in the

case of other Halam languages also. There is no article in the Bongcher language.

As regards the numericals, the Bongchers are not lacking behind . They have numericals upto 10,000. For counting beyond this number, they use Bengali numerals. Some of the numerals of Bongcher are given below side by side with that of the English.

English	Bongcher
One	Khatka
Two	Inikka
Three	Ithumka
Four	liika
Five	Ringaka
Six	Iruka
Seven	Srika
Eight	Iriatka
Nine	Kuoka
Ten	Sawm
Eleven	Sawmleikhatka
Twelve	Sawmleinikka
Thirteen	Sawmleithumka
Fourteen	Sawmleilika
Fifteen	Sawmleiringaka
Sixteen	Sawmleirukka
Seventeen	Sawmleisrika
Eighteen	Sawmleiriatka
Nineteen	Sawmleikuoka
Twenty	Sawmnikka
Twenty- one	Sawmnikka Khatka
Twenty- Two	Sawmnikka Inikka
Twenty- Three	Sawmnikka Ithumka
Twenty- Four	Sawmnikka liika
Twenty- Five	Sawmnikka Ringaka
Twenty- Six	Sawmnikka Iruka
Twenty- Seven	Sawmnikka Sarikka
Twenty- Eight	Sawmnikka Riatka
Twenty- Nine	Sawmnikka Kuoka
Thirty	Sawmthumka
Thirty -One	Sawmthumka Khatka

English	Bongcher
Thirty- Two	Sawmthumka Inikka
Thirty- Three	Sawmthumka Ithumka
Thirty- Four	Sawmthumka Ilika
Thirty- Five	Sawmthumka Ringaka
Thirty- Six	Sawmthumka Irukka
Thirty- Seven	Sawmthumka Sarika
Thirty-eight	Sawmthumka Riatka
Thirty-nine	Sawmthumka Kuoka
Forty	Sawmlika
Fifty	Sawmringaka
Sixty	Sawmrukka
Seventy	Sawmsarika
Eighty	Sawmriatka
Ninety	Sawmkokka
Ninety-nine	Sawmkokka Kuoka
Hundred	Rizaka
One thousand	Sasikka
Two thousand	Sasinikka
Three thousand	Sasithumka
Four thousand	Sasilikka
Five thousand	Sasirangaka
Six thousand	Sasiruka
Seven thousand	Sasisarika
Eight thousand	Sasiriatka
Nine thousand	Sasikuoka
Ten thousand	Sasisawmka

As we all know, birds and animals have their own respective cries. A particular bird or animal cries in the same tune in all the areas. But how various linguistic groups hear it or interpret it is quite different. Perhaps, this is because of the fact that we hear the voice from our own linguistic background. Let's see how the Bongchers hear the cries of birds and animals.

<u>Name of bird/ animal</u>		<u>Cry as heard by Bongchers</u>
<u>English</u>	<u>Bongcher</u>	
Chick	Arte	Piak, Piak
Cock	Arpa	Kaw-kawrel- kawk
Large Owl	Musingpuiinu	Uang, uang
Tiger	Ikei	A-um, a-um
Bear	Ivawm	Guk, guk
Elephant	Saipui	Ur, ur
Wild bear	Sanhal	Khut, Khut
Barking deer	Sakhi	Hut, hut
Deer (sambre)	Sazuk	Kang, Kang
Saza	Sarza	Hut, hut
Large civet Cat (Viverra megaspela)	Tumpui	Kuk, Kuk
Fox	Sihal	Hua, hua
Wild cat	Sangher	Ngawr, ngaw
Monkey	Zawang	Gegok, gegok.
Ape	Saha	Hu le, hu le
Cow	Sarat	Paw, paw
Pig	Vawk	Awngkek, awngkek
Goat	Kel	Me e-e
Dog	Ui	Bauh bauh
Cat	Imeng	Me-ong, me-ong

#### Dresses.

It is now not possible to trace the original dresses of the Bongchers. By original dresses, I mean the dresses they used before they made any contact with plain people. Now, the men-folk wear white thin cloth (dhoti) in their waist covering the whole of posterior upto the knee. But this Mill product cloth cannot at all be the original dress. So it can be presumed with certainty that earlier hand woven cloth was used. As regards shirting, the present one seems to be the original one. Normally, the men-folk do not put on shirts while in the house. When they go out for work, they used to wear it. The shirt is made of thick cloth woven by loin-loom. The cloth is also made of cotton

produced in the jhum. Stitching is done by themselves with needles. The shirt is having full- sleeves and instead of button they use twisted yarn. Men do not have any other dress. Of course, nowadays the younger generation have started wearing chappals, shoes, trousers and shirts.

Dresses of the women are hand-woven cloth tied at their waist and blouse. Hand-Woven cloth is used by all women of the North-Eastern tribes. But there are differences in the size, colour strips and designs. This cloth is called in Bongcher "Puanbawm". The Bongcher cloth do not possess distinct colour designs. Earlier, the cloth was woven with entire black colour yarn and red strip was added at the edge. At present the colour varieties have increased and do not confine to the original pattern. The women also wear a piece of small long cloth covering their breasts. This cloth is called "Risa". Risa is not used by the Kuki groups. Perhaps, this practice has been borrowed from the Tripuri groups. During my tour to the Bongcher villages, I did not find any woman wearing Risa. The married women either wear cloth (puanbawm) at their waist leaving upper portion uncovered or they wear the cloth upto the breast and the lower portion is covered just upto the upper edge of the knee. The grown up girls wear tight blouse and puanbawm. When they go out for work, they wrap their heads with cloth.

Most of the men and women still do not use shoes. Hair oil is also not much used. Men's cloth wore at the waist is called "poidri" and shirt is called "Kanchili".

#### Ornaments.

Men do not use any ornament. Women have some ornaments. But only two of them appear to be original. They wear ivory earring. Of course, this is now a thing of the past. Ordinary earrings available in the local markets are now wore. They also wear beads. The original beads are not to be seen now. Beads are called "Andili sumrui", and earring is called "Kawrbet". Other ornaments appear to have been borrowed from other communities - the Tripuri group. Those ornaments are -

Bala - Bungle

Toia - Upper earring  
Nakphul- Nose ring

During my field visits, I saw very few Bongcher women/girls wearing ornaments. The reasons may be many - like poverty, too much engagements in day to day work etc. But the main reason appears to be that they do not pay much importance to dresses and they do not feel necessary to spend much on them. I also found that the children are devoid of dresses. This may also be due to poverty. But they are comparatively cleaner than other tribal children in isolated villages.

## CHAPTER NINE

### Plays, Games and Sports

The following plays and games are played by the Bongchers:-  
Men's.

Raw rawnawl- In this game, there are two players. One seizes one end of a thick bamboo about ten feet length and the other seizes the other end and each tries to turn it in the opposite direction. The one who can move the bamboo stick in his direction is declared as the winner. This game was very popular in early days.

Rawbawn- This is wrestling. This game is also simple. The one who can keep down the other by leaning upon him is declared as the winner.

Children (Boys).

Nala pawppheng- This is a play with pop-gun made of small sized bamboo. For this pop gun, a small sized bamboo but thick enough to endure the shooting is selected. The hammer of the pop gun should also be of matured bamboo so as to last long. Varieties of berries are used for the pellets.

Kawrpawi- Kawrpawi is a spinning top. It is made with hard wood, the harder the better. Both sides have tops though one side has longer top. It is spun with a thin rope. When it is fully spinning, it is lifted with bamboo cut into halves and pounded over the other spinning one on the ground so as to stop the spinning. After that the turn goes to the other party. This is a sort of fighting game. The one who can stop the spinning earlier is considered as the winner.

Silai- This is a spring gun made of bamboo for shooting darts, arrows and stone pellets. It is not a game of fighting. It is generally used for testing one's skill in shooting.

Sakawrke- Sakawrke means stilts. It is made of bamboo. This is also a game of fight. While walking on the stilts, one will loll against the other. The one who falls down from the stilts will be the loser.

Chengbal - This is hand wind-mill. It is made of bamboo splits and paper. In a bamboo split, a piece of paper is attached to each

of the ends and in the centre of the bamboo splits a small hole is made in which another bamboo split is fitted for handle. While holding the handle, the boy runs opposite to the wind direction. The force of the wind presses the bamboo split to revolve like wind mill. The more the speed of whirling, the happier the boy will be. As this play requires paper, it may not be a very old game at least among the Bongchers. It is very likely that they adopted this play only after their entry into Tripura.

Gurdi - Gurdi means flying kites. This is not original play of the Bongchers. It is likely that they copied from other communities after their entry into Tripura.

#### Common games.

Kawipawi- This game is played with large bean-like seed of thick woody creeper (Botanical name - *Entada scandens* or *Entada pursoetha*). The bean-like seed is called Kawi by the Bongchers. This game is played both by boys and girls. It is normally played in a group.

Ribik- This is hide and seek game played both by boys and girls in a group.

Gulapridai- This is more or less same with Kabadi. Most probably, they copied from other community of Tripura. The game is played both by boys and girls.

Kelte richawm ka dang - This is cock fight. They lift up one of their legs and hold them with their hands on the back side. They then charge each other on the left or right side. The one who falls down or releases his hold of the leg is treated as loser.

Mit chaw ridai - This is a blind-fold game. It is played in a group. They make a circle and the one who is in the centre is blind-folded with a piece of cloth. He will try to catch those in the circle who in their turn try to avoid catching.

Vaizeng litul - This is swing. In fact, this is not considered as a game, it is taken somewhat like enjoyment activity. The stem fibres of thick woody creeper ( *Entada scandens* or *Entada pursoetha*) are excellent to be used for swing. Only one string is used which is tied at the branch of a tree and a piece of strick is also tied at the other end to facilitate seating. While on a swing,

children used to sing -

“Kipi, in tuiumte bawka ka pe raw,  
Haiphalte bawka ka pe raw,  
Chu lele chu kipe burnung pawr bot”.  
(Kipi, give us a pair of our bamboo flasks,  
Give us a pair of bamboo spoons,  
Look, there is a swing on the hill beyond)

N.B.- Kipi is used here for addressing elder women.



A Bongcher woman carrying her children.



Guitar. It is called Chawngpereng in Bongcher.



Violin. The Bongcher call it Saranda.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Methods of catching animals and birds.

The Bongchers use various methods and tactics for catching animals and birds. The tactics adopted by them are more or less common with those of other Halam sub-tribes and of Kuki. Some of them are also very much similar to the ones used by the Mizos. As wild animals and birds provide good food to the tribals specially in early days when animals and birds were in bountiful, their catching forms one of the joyous activities in their life. At present, wild animals and birds are rare specially in the places where the Bongchers reside. So, their activity in this respect is almost non-existence.

Traps and other methods used for catching of animals and birds by the Bongchers are as follows:-

1. Saipunrum. This is a trap for catching elephant. In a place where elephants are likely to pass through, the earth is dug out about 10 feet deep. Inside the pit bamboo sharpened stakes are impaled. To hide the pit, it is covered with bamboos and then with loose earth. Saipun means elephant.
2. Ikeirum. This is similar to Saipunrum but smaller in size. This is for catching tiger. Ikei means tiger.
3. Sarpharum. Sarpha means turtle while rum means trap. This is a trap for catching turtle. It is made at the foot of the river bank by the side of a bamboo fishing weir. A small pit is dug but hidden with soft splitting bamboo covered with thin mud. Both of the pits are obstructed with bamboo splits to ensure that the turtle crawl on the pit.
4. Sungchang. This is a spear or gun trap. The trap is fixed in such a way to release a spear or pointed bamboo or to fire a gun to kill its victim. This trap is used for catching deers, wild boars and porcupines.
5. Archadang. This is a noose trap for catching jungle fowl, pheasants and other jungle birds.
6. Mangkhawng. This is for catching animals. It is set in such a way that when the victim is just to cross it, a beam or log falls down swiftly on it and kills.

7. Zuchang. This is a noose trap used in conjunction with a small arched triangular frame work. Zuchang as the name implies is the trap for catching rats. But it is also used for catching squirrels.

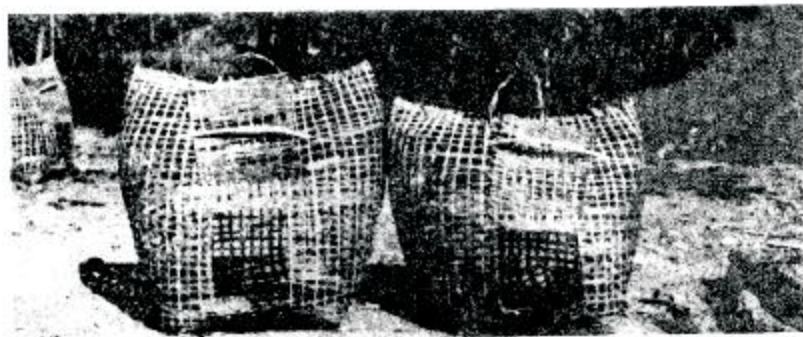
8. Beai. This is a noose trap spread on the ground with a bait to catch wild fowl, pheasants, partridges and other birds. A particular variety of bean-seed is kept at the centre of the noose which tempt the birds to peck it. As soon as the bird pecks the bean-seed, noose of the trap suddenly tightens as the bending stick goes off thus hanging the bird by the neck.

9. Zawntar. This is a cage-trap with door. It may be of bigger size or smaller size. Bigger size is for catching big animals like tiger and bear. Smaller size is for catching small animals and birds.

10. Gurap. This is exactly similar to Mangkhawng but smaller in size for catching small animals and birds.



Bongcher also has picked up fashion.



Boncher poultry baskets.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### FOLK-SONGS AND FOLK-LORES

#### ARSI THAINA

Tha tha va leng lawng,  
Kumpui buh buh a el,  
Lailente tui a choi.  
Arsi ka ta, manlai ka ta,  
Manta kur a den den.  
A tukut maw kutna kel,  
Lenlung a baw set.

#### English Translation.

Moon, Moon moves around freely,  
Shines over the year's paddy fields,  
Lailente is drawing water.  
Stars are mine, everything is mine,  
Brinjal plant is bending with fruits.  
Whose hand is pinching others' hands,  
He catches pieces of lead sinkers.

**Note:** This is children song. Children sing it under the moonlit night. The Bongchers say that the black-spot in the moon is a man Lailente by name drawing water.

## RAW HETNA

Raw raw hawng hawng,  
Arkhawngte tui a ral,  
Raw raw hawng hawng,  
Ka vawkte tui a ral.

### English Translation.

RAIN RAIN RAIN  
Rain rain rain,  
Thirsty is my chicken.  
Rain, rain rain,  
Thirsty is my piglet.

**Note:** This is children song. When the rain starts/is about to start raining, the children will rush out of their houses singing this song and get themselves washed by the rain.

## AR KHON LA

Zan var twnga zun kukra,  
Ar khon twng arkhonpa,  
"Thwi rwina, thwi rwina",  
A rol rol a tan khong rel.

Ramsaipa a ke tek tok tek tok,  
A kor lep lup lep lup,  
A nawn ver vur ver vur,  
Izu pin rwmwi chang chini.

### English Translation

#### THE SONG OF DAWN

A time for an Owl is when dark night ends,  
A time for a Cock is when dawn comes,  
"Get up, get up. "  
Cry out they.

An elephant trampling its feet tek tok tek tok,  
Flapping its ears lep lup lep lup,  
Coiling its trunk ver vur ver vur,  
Turn it not into a tail of rat. .

## NAITE OINA LA

Ka pa Lenkhupjwi kiin pek ro,  
Thingpui nu chung a vai ding tol kw lwn pek roi;  
Bol lwia chhimang ka dam pek ro,  
A vai ding tol kw lwn pek ro,  
Silaia kaldung no hong mang rang.  
Nu chung a Zonu kal chem a choi ta,  
Chhim lwia bu kheng ko awm rang;  
A vai ding tol no hong lwn nung,  
Bu spang dondarai nutung rang;  
Ka pa i mi Lenkhup, a vai ding tol kw lwn pek ro.

Mwirang thirswm nohong chang rang;  
Sumtin pumapa hong chang ro;  
Ka pa Lenkhupa imi kiin pek ra,  
Rangkachak tai sol nahong mang rang,  
Ka pa Lenkhupa imi,  
Saipui ha zampher no hong mang rang,  
Ka pa Lenkhupa imi kiin pek ro.

### English Translation.

#### A LULLABY

Sleep my son, Lonkhupjwi,  
Grow luxuriantly as the tree;  
A good health be yours and death be unknown to you,  
Grow luxuriantly as ever.  
Be owner of numbers of guns sufficient to cover a rafter  
in row,  
Work toilsomely is your mother but for you,  
Because surely you would feed her on this earth,  
Grow up quickly my son,  
Abundant paddy would you produce to require ladder for  
climbing the rice bin,  
In good health grow up my son.

---

A silver plate you would become,  
A man of rice would you be,  
Sleep my beloved son, lenkhupjwi,  
Let your rail be of gold, my beloved son,  
Sitting would be you on a seat of ivory,  
Sleep, O my beloved son, Lenkhupjwi.

## SARATE LA

Keima sarala chu  
Zonu ke en khom zonu om mak hi;  
Zopa ke en khom zopa om mak hi,  
Zo u ke en khom zo u om mak hi,  
Keiman duk a sarai chu.

Chhima ke en khom chhima om mak,  
Keiman dwka sarai chu;  
Tui rong dunga tui ar vomte chu,  
Lutna bom zol a vai hi,  
Keiman dwka sarai chu.

Ramlai a nathwl ra chu,  
Keiman dwka sarai chu,  
Mania de en khom mania om mak,  
Keiman dwka sarai chu.  
Lutna bom zol a vai hi,  
Keiman dwka sarai chu.

### English Translation.

ORPHAN SONG  
A wretched orphan I am,  
Looking for my mother I found not,  
Looking for my father I found not,  
Looking for my brothers and sisters I found not,  
A lonely orphan I am.  
Looking for a place I found not,  
A lonely orphan I am,  
Just as a lonely black bird in the stream,  
A place to rest I found not,  
A lonely orphan I am.

Like the fruit of Phrynium capitatum in the deep forest,  
A lonely orphan I am,  
Looking for help but I found not,  
A lonely orphan I am,  
A place to rest I found not,  
A lonely orphan I am.

**Note:** Phrynium capitatum is name of a plant and also its leaves. This plant produces large tough leaves used extensively by the tribals for wrapping up rice and also for other purposes. It is doubtful if it has fruit at all. It appears the poet compares himself with the fruit of this plant by assuming that this plant bears fruit very seldomly and when it comes out, it feels extremely lonely in the deep forest.

## TUITE AIMAN KESE KARIN

Tuite aiman kese karin,  
Khonglaw dar manna lei choi ta,  
Chhim khaw vanlai nulei sin ta.  
Khonglaw dar manna lei chhial ta,  
Van khawpui sang tingkhai mah,  
Chemnu chempai reng maw a tha?  
Lo dar khom a tha,  
Lawngngawi lawngngawi awi.

### English Translation.

#### I GO TO A STREAM TO CATCH CRABS

While I was away to a stream to catch crabs,  
My wife and children were taken away due to my indebtedness;  
My wife is made mother of heaven in the south,  
My wife and children have freed me from my debt,  
But she is not suited for the heavenly city in the high.  
Are chopper and scabbard only good things?  
No, bamboo mat for drying paddy is also good.  
Awful! awful ! O awful.

## NUNGAK TANGVAL RIDINA

Changro changro kelreng kung khom chang ro,  
Nachanga shimang them kiti;  
Ke deŕa Limnga nachang nung,  
No dopa ngawiin cher chang kiti, Rama ywi.

Changro changro kelreng kung khom changro,  
Nubula sornim on kiti, Rama ywi.

A mol mol sirika tuiva va sirika,  
Zoizam notho khomin nuchunga,  
Muleng chang ki ti;  
Wi dam khom kham lu ton ka.  
Wi thi khom than phai munka tinin lang,  
Soitoia chong sam jabap wi pek mo ko son, Rama ywi.

Wi ni munka donan chang inla,  
Mun ka nin belkai wi ti ma ko son,  
Chor daia dapon aina le,  
Khuis am nil mak mo ni ti, Rama ywi.

### English Translation.

#### LOVE SONG

Even if you turn into Kelreng tree, turn into Kelreng tree,  
Still I shall break your branches;  
Even if you turn into Nghalim fish and live in the upper  
stream,  
Still then I shall turn into a fish trap at the lower stream,  
O Rama.

Even if you turn into Kelreng tree, turn into Kelreng  
tree,  
I shall be near to you as shadow, O Rama.

Even if you cross over seven hills and seven streams,  
I shall fly over you like an eagle;  
As long as we live we will share one pillow,  
When we die we will share one grave,  
Have we not replied to the query of Saitoia, O Rama?

If we were vegetable we will sprout together  
And provide for one meal, shall we not?  
In the evening I comb my hair by looking at the glass,  
Do you say that my hair is not smooth, O Rama?

**Note:** Kelreng is the name of a tree, the fruits of which are eaten by birds and are used as baits for trapping them. Ngalim is a small fish commonly found in the streams of the hills and is delicious. Rame is the name of boy depicted here as her lover. It may be his real name or simply dubbed as Rama.

## NUNGAK TANGVAL RIDINA

Tui sang rila phudu par nu jwi,  
Tong rangin Khuisam kei nil chu,  
Ton lwia paraia a choi dw, Sitanu chu?  
Bet rangin kokor kei vak chu,  
Bet lwia barai a choi dw, Sitanu chu?  
Ship tuia chang khom mun ka nin tong wi ti,  
Kaia Sitanu chu.

A sera mwi ser changin khom,  
Mulkanin ser kai wi ti, Kaia Sitanu chu.  
A dona donan changin khom,  
Mun kanin bel kai wi mo koson,  
Kaia Sitanu chu.  
Vanlaia po swl changin khom,  
Mun ka nin chang wi ti, Kaia Sitanu chux.

English Translation.

### LOVE SONG

You appear to me like a lotus flower,  
I comb my hair to wear you on the head,  
Are you going away before I wear you on my head, Sitanu?  
I am preparing myself to wear you on my head,  
Will you remain without my wearing you on my head,  
Sitanu?  
Let anything happen to us,  
We will face it together.

Even if we were a fire-brand,  
Together we will be put into one fire-brand, Sitanu.  
Even if we sprout like a vegetable,  
Have I not told you that we will be cooked together for one  
meal, Sitanu?  
Even if we were clouds in the sky,  
Let's move together all along, Sitanu.

## **PHAWITE AND NENKANGTE STORY**

One day Phawite and Nengkangte worked together in the jhum field in rotation or in turns system. When it was time for having lunch, Phawite said to Nengkangte, "Friend, come and let's have our lunch, the Sun is also now in the middle of the sky". Again, Phawite said to Nengkangte, "Friend, you fetch water from the water-point and let me light a fire". But as soon as Phawite started lighting the fire, he was consumed by the fire at once. Nengkangte also went on rolling to bring water, but he was broken apart as soon as he fell down on the water-hole.

**Note:** Phawite is fine shavings especially for lighting or kindling a fire but personified here. Nengkangte is a lump of earth but personified here.

It is common practice among the tribals that young boys and girls work in the jhum in turns. That is one day they will work in A's jhum, the next day in B's jhum and so on turn by turn.

## THE STORY OF CHEMCHHAWRMANPA

One day, Chemchhawrmanpa was sharpening up his dao on stone lying on the bank of a river. Mistaking it to be his cave, a lobster entered in between his thighs and pinched his testicle painfully. Chemchhawrmanpa was in full rage and cut off a bending bamboo at the back. The bamboo flinged and hit the squirrel at his testicles. Provoked by the action of the bamboo, the squirrel bit off the cord of Kha-um creeper. (Kha-um is a climbing plant. The seeds of its fruits are edible. Its botanical name is *Hodgsonia heterodita*). The cord of Kha-um creeper fell down straight and struck the nest of Taivangs down below. (Taivang is stingy big ant). Enraged Taivangs nipped a wild bore at the belly. The wild-bore got angry and at once uprooted a nearby plaitain tree where a bat was having his daily snooze. The frightened bat flew away and pitched right on the elephant's ears. Discomforted elephant run amuck and trampled down the house of an old woman. The old woman was so terrified and ran helter skelter and then felt the Nature's call. When she reached the upper side of the village fountain water supply, unable to control herself any longer, she left her excrement near to it.

Ill-luck would have it that some of the people observed the old woman leaving her excrement. They came together and surrounded her and called for an explanation saying, "Old woman, why do you leave excrement at the upper side of the village fountain water supply?" The old woman said, "Why does the elephant trample down my house?" Then the people asked the elephant saying, "You elephant, why do you trample down the house of the old woman?" The elephant said, "Why does the bat enter into my ears?" Then they asked the bat saying, "You bat, why do you enter into the elephant's ears?" The bat replied, "Why does the plaitain tree fall down disturbing me?" Then they asked the plaitain tree saying, "You plaitain tree, why do you fall down at all?" The plaitain tree said, "Can I fall down by myself? It is the wild-bore who has uprooted me." Then they asked the wild-bore saying, "You wild-bore, why do you uproot the plaitain tree?" The wild-bore said, "Why do the Taivangs nip my belly?" Then they asked the Taivangs saying, "You

Taivangs, why do you nip the wild-bore particularly in his belly?" The Taivangs said, "Why do the Kha-um creeper fall down on our nest?" Then they asked the Kha-um creeper saying, "You Kha-um creeper, why do you fall down on the nest of the Taivangs?" The Kha-um creeper said, "Can I fall down of my own? It is only because the squirrel bit off my cord". Then they asked the squirrel saying, "You squirrel, why do you bite off the cord of Kha-um creeper?" The squirrel said, "Why does the bamboo hit me particularly at my testicles?" Then they asked the bamboo saying, "You bamboo, why do you hit the squirrel at his testicles?" The bamboo said, "Why do Chemchawrmanpa cut-off me without least provocation?" Then they asked Chemchawrmanpa saying, "Chemchawrmanpa, why do you cut off the bamboo unnecessarily?" Chemchawrmanpa shot back and said, "Why does the lobster pinch my testicle?" Then they caught hold of the lobster and asked, "you lobster, why do you pinch the testicle of Chemchawrmanpa?" The lobster was in a very awkward position and in trying to save his skin he said, "I was under the impression that I was inside my cave and so pinching all around". As he could not give satisfactory reply, to divert the attention of the angry mob, the lobster said, "If you put me into the fire, I will become clear red and if you put me into the water, I will turn pale". Thinking that if he was drowned, he would surely die, they threw him into the water. However, let alone drowning, he swam around homely; and entered into his cave. The people brought a Hnathial stick and poked into the cave to kill the lobster. When they withdrew the stick, they noticed something like blood stained mark at the one end of it and thought that they had inflicted a grievous hurt to the lobster and said, "This lobster will never be able to come out of the cave". Then leaving him there, they all dispersed.

**Note:** Hnathial is a plant having large tough leaves used extensively for wrapping food by tribals. Its botanical name is *Phrynium capitatum*.

## THE STORY OF PAPIYASA

Once upon a time, there was a man called Papiyasa. His parents died when he was still very young. He could keep his head above water by collecting fire-wood and selling them. One day while on his way to sell the fire-wood, he came across a bunch of banana hanging on its tree and found that two banana fruits were fully ripen. Unloading his fire-wood, he proceeded towards the banana tree to pluck the ripen fruits. While proceeding eagerly, he said to himself, "if I eat the bigger one first, the smaller one will grow bigger and if I eat the smaller one first, the bigger one will become smaller". There was a tree standing beside the banana tree in which a Crow was nurturing its young in a nest. The crow listened to what Papiyas was saying and misconstrued that he was intending to eat the flesh of its young. So it became very much bewildered. Then the Crow said to papiyasa, "O gentleman, please have mercy upon me and do not disturb my young. In return I shall tell you a very precious secret. Take this rice-stirrer home. Clean up your rice pot and beat at its upper edge with this rice-stirrer and rice will start pouring inside the pot and keep on beating the pot untill adequate rice pours in" Papiyasa had agreed to take the rice-stirrer.

There was one old woman who had a small thatch house near the path which was frequented by Papiyasa on his way to market to sell fire-wood. One night, the old woman had a dream. In her dream she saw one man coming to her house and asked her, "Old woman, do you notice one man who is passing near your house every day with fire-wood?" The old woman said, "Yes, I used to see him". The man again said, "When he returns home after selling the fire-wood, invite him to take rest in your house, provide him food and exchange steal thily whatever things he brings from the market as they are extremely valuable".

In the next morning, Papiyasa came with fire-wood as usual. The old woman, remembering her dream, said to Papiyasa, "My grandson, you look to be very tired, please come to my house to take rest while on your way back". Papiyasa said, "Yes, of course." Papiyasa returned home in a sunny noon with his rice-stirrer. When he was about to pass through the house of the

old woman, he was called by her and said, "My grandson, please come and take rest. I am sure you are feeling thirsty as today is very hot. Drink this water". Papiyasa drank the water. The old woman said, "My grandson, I feel pity on you as after getting tired and exhausted, you will have to cook by yourself at home. I have cooked plenty of food, so let's have it. You can take bath here and go home in the late noon." Yielding to the suggestion of the old woman, Papiyasa went to the water-supply point to take bath. During that time, the old woman exchanged the rice-stirrer and rice of Papiyasa. After having bath, Papiyasa came back and had food with the old woman. He returned home in the late noon. As soon as he reached home, he cleansed his rice pot, took out his rice-stirrer from his bag and started beating the rice pot. But alas, no rice poured into it at all. He got very angry. He said, "Tommorrow, I will go and eat up the ripen bananas by any means".

The next day, he started off again to sell the fire-wood. When he reached near the banana tree, he unloaded his fire-wood to pluck the ripen bananas and repeated saying the same words, "If I eat the smaller one first, the bigger one will become smaller and if I eat the bigger one the smaller one will grow bigger". Hearing the same words, the Crow was bewildered again and said to the man, "O gentleman, please spare my young, I will tell another good thing to do". Papiyasa said, "Lier, liar, I can't believe you any more. Yesterday you gave me a rice-stirrer and nothing came out of it when I did as you told me to do, not a single rice poured into the rice pot. So, I am determined to eat today". The Crow said "Please give me another chance. Take this she-goat. When you reach home, flick the back of the goat and just tell the gold plates, money and cloths to come out. These things will come out of this goat". Papiyasa was convinced to withdraw his plan to eat the bananas and took home the she-goat. When he reached near the old woman's house, he was again invited by her to take rest and take food with her. Papiyasa tied down the she-goat near the house and took rest in the house of the old woman. As advised by the old woman, he went to the water supply point to take bath. During that time, the old woman exchanged the she-goat. After taking bath, the man took food and

started for home. When he reached home, he tied tightly his she-goat and flicked it on the back and cried out in order to bring out gold plates, money and cloths from the goat. Observing that nothing came out, he became furious. He brought a piece of fire-wood and beat the goat severely on the back. He beat it so severely that the goat had to pass excrement. He said "The Crow has decieved me again and again. Tommorrow I will go and see if it dares to decieve me again. If it tries to do, I will beat it down." Till that time he could not have an idea that the old woman might have played mischief with him.

The next morning, Papiyasa went out again to sell fire-wood. When he reached near the banana tree, he said the same thing. The Crow begged for mercy again. Papiyasa said, "My mercy is running out, don't play fool with me any more. If you don't listen, I will pull you down". In utter desparation, the Crow enquired "O gentleman, you don't really get anything out of the she-goat I gave you yesterday?" Papiyasa replied, "No, I get nothing except her excrement". The Crow asked him again, "Did you take rest at any place on your way home?" Papiyasa replied " Yes, I used to take rest in the old woman's house". The crow said, "O gentleman, Please give me one more chance and do not disturb my young. It is very likely that the things I gave you have been exchanged by that old woman. Take this rope and go back and ask the old woman to return your things to you. If she refuses to do so, take oath by your name and tells this rope to tie up the old woman and throw it towards her. The rope will tie up her so tightly that she will nearly die. Untie her only when she agrees to give you back your things." Papiyasa agreed to it, took the rope and returned. When he reached the old woman's house, she invited him again to take rest. Papiyasa went into her house and to the surprise of the old woman, he said, "Old woman, give me back all my things which you have exchanged stealthily". The old woman replied, "I did not exchange your things at all". Papiyasa was in full rage and warned her, "If you don't give me back, you will repent afterwards". But the old woman still sticked to her word. Then Papiyasa swore by his name and said, "You rope, tie up this old woman tightly" and threw it towards the old woman. The rope tied up the old woman so tightly that she had

to pass excrement and was nearly dead. Finding no other escape, she had agreed to return the things to him. Papiyasa untied her and got back his rice-stirrer, rice and she-goat from her. He returned home straight way with his valuable things. As soon as he reached home, he took out his rice-stirrer and beat the upper edge of his rice pot repeatedly and the rice kept on pouring into the pot. He flicked the back of his she-goat and gold-plates, money and cloths were coming out of it. He used to throw the golden-plates and bronze-plates to the river water after one use only. After several years, the river was full of golden and bronze plates and no place was left for water. As a result, the King, who was living down the river was facing shortage of water. He sent out his soldiers to find out the reason of the shortage of water in the river. The soldiers followed the upper course of the river and after some time found the river full of golden and bronze plates. The awe-struck soldiers looked around and found a magnificent house over the river. The soldiers approached the house while the owner was having his food. They surrounded the house and the Commander of the King's soldiers cried out, "Is anybody inside the house?" Papiyasa said, "Yes, I am". The Commander asked, "Come out, immediately". Papiyasa unmindfully said, "I shall come out as and when I wish to. Who is that man who gives me order?" The Commander thundered "Who is that chap who does not give me respect? Come out at once". Papiyasa, after having his food, got up and threw away his plate through the window just missing to hit the head of the Commander. The Commander became more furious. Papiyasa came out of his house and tied up all the soldiers by his magic rope excepting one who was allowed to escape to give information to the King. On hearing the news, the King was very angry and sent more soldiers. But again Papiyasa tied them up all with his magic rope. At last, the king himself led his soldiers to punish Papiyasa. The soldiers fired heavily at the house of Papiyasa. Papiyasa requested them not to fire but the soldiers did not pay head to it. Papiyasa was compelled to tie them up all again with his magic rope and he threw them down to the river including the King. He then became King of that country.

## THE STORY OF BAVAWMTEPU

Once upon a time, there was a certain woman. Her husband died when their two daughters were already grown up. The woman used to go out every morning to harvest corn and came back in the noon. As there were many cannibals during that time, they built a house with a high raised floor. A ladder was used for climbing up the house which was lifted up to the house when it was not used to ensure that no unwanted people could visit the house. When their mother came home at noon after work, the ladder was lowered down for her climbing up the house. The names of the two daughters were Sawrmanziki and Lungmiriami. When their mother came home in the noon time, she would call them saying, "Sawrmanzik, Lungmirian, bring down the ladder". Her daughters would lower down the ladder for her. When their mother was away for work, one young man used to visit them. Bavawmtepu also was busy in trying to climb up the house with an intention to eat the flesh of the two daughters. Bavawmtepu used to say "Please bring down the ladder". But knowing that he was Bavawmtepu, they refused to lower down the ladder. One old woman lived near that house. Bavawmtepu went to the old woman and said, "Old woman, let me eat your flesh". The old woman replied, "I am very old, why don't you eat the flesh of those two girls, their flesh will be softer and sweeter". Bavawmtepu was convinced and left the old woman untouched. He again went to the two girls and requested them to lower down the ladder. But they refused to do so as they knew that he was Bavawmtepu.

Failing to climb up the house of the two girls, Bavawmtepu went again and again to the old woman with intention to eat her flesh. One day the old woman gave advice to Bavawmtepu and said, "Go and lick the spittle out of chewed betel of the two girls and after that your voice will exactly resemble the voice of their mother". Accordingly, Bavawmtepu went to the house of the two girls and licked the spittle out of chewed betel and at once his voice resembled that of their mother. Then he requested them again to lower down the ladder. Thinking that it was the voice of their mother, they lowered down the ladder and Bavawmtepu,

without losing any time, climbed up the house. When they saw Bavawmtepu, they were panick stricken and covered their heads with cloths. At noon, their mother came home and asked them to lower down the ladder. But her two daughters dared not to respond her as Bavawmtepu warned them not to do so less they would be eaten up. Their mother kept on waiting and waiting in front of their house and gradually she was absorbed away by the heat of the sun. In the mild late noon, their boy friend Manwitangzala by name, came to their house and asked them to lower down the ladder. But they were stopped by Bavawmtepu from responding to his call by threatening that if they responded, he would eat them up. Their boy friend was disheartened and said, "Damn it. You dare to turn a deaf ear to my call". He went back with a heavy heart. When it was night, the two daughters lit fire in the stove and boiled water and also cut open the bamboo floor for dropping Bavawmtepu. Suspiciously Bavawmtepu enquired, "Dear grand daughters, What are you cutting?" They said, "We cutting animal's head brought by our grand father." Bavawmtepu was so pleased to hear it and said, "Such a good news. I suppose we will enjoy it tommorrow morning." Bavawmtepu again heard the noise of boiling water and asked, "Dear grand-daughters, what are you cooking?" They replied "We are cooking the animal's head brought by our grandfather. " Bavawmtepu was highly pleased to hear it and said, "O how delicious it will be". When it was time for going to bed, Sawrmanziki and her sister got themselves ready to sleep. They said to Bavawmtepu, " Grandfather, we want to sleep beside you". Bavawmtepu readily agreed to their request as he was eager to eat their flesh. The two girls said to Bavawmtepu, "Grandfather Bavawmtepu, there is no space for Manwitangzala, so please move aside, still further more?" Bavawmtepu, with least suspicion, moved further and further till he fell down through the hole of the floor made by the two girls for the purpose. Immediately the two sisters poured on him boiling water and Bavawmtepu died instantaneously.

Soon after the incident was the starting of dawn. The two girls left their home to search out their boy friend, Manwitangzala. When they found that one beautiful thing was left behind in front

of their house by Manwitangzala, they said, "See, this is a sign that he was really disheartened by our failure to respond him". While they were going in search of him, they met two men weeding jhum and asked, "You two weeders, did you see

Manwitangzala passing through this side

?" The two weeders replied, "Yes, we saw him passing through." Sawrmanziki and her sister said to the next hill, "O hill, pull yourself down so that we may glance Manwitangzala". The hill-range lowered down itself and the two sisters could have a quick look at Manwitangzala. The two sisters resumed chasing Manwitangzala. They met another three jhum weeders and asked, "O three weeders, did you see Manwitangzala coming this side?" The three weeders replied, "Yes, we saw him but he had already passed through that hill". The two sisters said to the hill, "O hill, lower yourself down so that we may see Manwitangzala." The hill lowered itself down and the two sisters could see Manwitangzala at a great distance. They resumed pursuing him. Soon after that there was a heavy rainfall. Manwitangzala was also compelled to take shelter in the jhum house. The younger sister said, "Sister, let's go to that jhum house. "But the elder sister said, "No, let's keep on going". Then they went on and on. After some time, they reached a flooded river. They were feeling helpless to cross it. They searched and searched the convenient place to cross the river. At last, they found a weak bridge. When the younger sister walked over the bridge nothing happened. But when the elder sister started walking on it, the bridge produced breaking sounds. So, the elder sister did not dare to pass through the bridge. Then the two sisters decided to pass through the bridge together by holding each other's hands. When they reached the middle of the bridge, it broke down and both the sisters fell down into the water and died. Their spirits turned into butterflies. But Manwitangzala came and beat them to death. They again turned into Shimul tree (Bonbax insigne) , the younger sister into the white species and the elder one into the red species. They grew side by side. The elder sister felt pride by thinking that she was prettier and therefore used to look herself often. As a result, her body became bent and till now red species of Shimul tree has a bent trunk.

## THE STORY OF VAPAWLPA

Once upon a time, there was a certain man who had two children. The elder one was a boy and the younger a girl. The man was a high priest. When their children were still very young, his wife died. He married to another woman. As he was a high priest, he had to go to many villages to perform sacrifices and could have hardly any time to stay at home. Though he married again with the expectation that his children would be looked after properly by his second wife, she happened to be too lazy to take care of them. Rather she always asked them to bring fire-wood from the forest and also to fetch water from the water-supply point. Moreover, when they brought fire-wood and water, she would beat them on the plea that they took much time in bringing them. The two children were deprived of love and care in their house. But their father was under the impression that his children were well looked after and so with least worry he used to intoxicate himself with liquor in other villages.

Whenever his wife came to learn that he was coming home, she made bamboo-splits and slept on them so as to make strip-markings on her back. On return of her husband, she would show him the strip-markings and said, "Look at my back and see how notorious your children are. You always go out to other villages and during your absence, they used to treat me like this and there is no doubt that they would kill me soon". Her husband was surprised to hear the allegation and enquired, "How can those small children beat you so severely as to leave the strip-markings on your back?" He called his children also and asked, "Children, why do you beat your mother"? His children replied and said, "During your absence, our mother forced us to bring fire-wood, water and to make the matter worst, would beat us severely. She should also give us only burnt rice found at the bottom of the rice pot." Their father was not inclined to believe in their words and insisted that they should speak out the truth. He said, "Don't tell a lie. I have seen the strip-markings on the back of your mother out of your beating." His children revealed further and said, "Our mother had slept on the bamboo splits since this morning as a result of which strip like markings were created on

her back." Their father was at last convinced by their words and kept mum.

The man was again out of the village to perform sacrifices. Taking the opportunity his wife caught hold of the children and said, "Your father rebuked me because you lodged complaint against me. So saying she got more angry and again beat them and starved them. When it was time for her husband's coming home, she made bamboo splits and slept on them as before to make stripped markings on her back and left her hair without combing. When her husband came home, she said to him, "You believe the words of your children which are utter lies. If you don't kill them I will divorce you and go to my parents." She arranged her dresses and bags as if she was about to leave the house. Her husband could not agree for divorce as he loved her and finding no other alternative, promised to kill his children. He got up early in the next morning.

He prepared food and all of them took it. He also wrapped a portion of the food by a plaintain leave for lunch in the forest. He said to his children, "Come, today let us go to the forest for hunting." Then they started for the forest. After reaching some distance, he asked his children, "My children, have you gone to this place?" His children replied, "Yes, yes, this is the place from where we used to collect fire-wood." Then they went on. After going some distance, he again asked them, "My children, have you gone to this place?" His children replied, "No father, we have never been to this place." He said, "Let us have a rest. Perhaps you are feeling hungry." They took rest and the father made a temporary hut with leafy boughs. They took lunch and after that went to sleep. They brought with them one puppy. As soon as the children were asleep, their father brought a jungle creeper and tied up the puppy and left them with broken heart. When he reached home he told his wife that he had killed the children in the forest. His wife was so pleased on hearing the news that she enthusiastically prepared food, washed her hair and combed it nicely. Her husband also went to take bath. In the late afternoon, she strolled around their house in a happy mood with the thought that she would then be able to live happily with her husband. But suddenly, she saw the same two children with a

puppy returning home by the back-side of the house. Immediately, she went inside the house, spoilt her combed hair and cried out wildly. When her husband heard her unusual cry he rushed home from the water-supply point and asked, "What happens, what happens". She said, "You told me to have killed your children. But now it has been revealed that you had just told me a lie, it is a proof that you are trying to harass me. Look, as soon as I saw them coming home, I ran towards them to welcome them but in return they spoilt my combed hair and me on my back. They do not have any love for me." In front of her husband, she took out her clothes and her other possessions from the basket and arranged them as if she was to leave the house. (This basket is called "Thul" in Bongcher. It has a close-fitting conical lid or cover). Unable to withstand her threat, he swore that he would kill his children the next day. The next day after having breakfast, he led his children and one puppy to the forest again. He also took food wrapped with plaintain leave. The children expressed their apprehension to their father and said, "Father, you are perhaps going to leave us in the forest again." Their father said, "Not at all, yesterday I just tested whether you would be good hunters." He led them far more away into the forest than the previous day. Their father constructed a temporary hut with leafy boughs and they had lunch inside the hut. He said, "Children, go to sleep, we will go home in the late noon otherwise you will too exhausted." The children replied, "Father, we will not go to sleep otherwise you will leave us here". They loitered in the forest aimlessly. Not knowing what to do, their father pretended to be asleep and when they tried to awaken him, he pretended to be unaware of it. The younger child went to sleep beside her father. The elder one also could not remain awaken alone and so went to sleep with them. As they were very tired, they soon fell into a deep sleep. Then their father got up and killed the puppy, kept its blood in a bamboo vessel and left for home with it. When he reached home, he found his wife in a highly upset mood and she also did not show him any sign of welcome. He said to her "My dear wife, I have killed my children and also brought their blood in a bamboo vessel to remove your doubt." His wife was so pleased to hear the news that she immediately

started preparation of dinner for her husband.

When the sun was about to set, the younger child woke up and also awakened her elder brother and said, "Brother, get up, our father has left us again." They got up and searched for their puppy. When they found that it had been killed by their father, they started weeping bitterly. Just at that time, the Great Hornbill made loud resonant calls, "Tok, tok" at a great distance. The elder child consoled the younger one by saying, "Sister, don't cry. I heard a human voice in a distance." Presuming that it was the voice of their father, they proceeded towards the voice though it was already dusk. They met none and it was full of dense forest. They reached one big tree and could not proceed any further because of darkness. They halted there waiting for dawn. In the night, the elder one had a dream-like vision in which their father came to him and said, "My son, as soon as dawn starts tomorrow, climb up the tree beside you. You will find two eggs of Great Hornbill in the hollowed trunk. You should give one of the eggs to your sister to eat and another one should be eaten by you. It will so happen that after you eat them, you will feel severe itching on your body. But you should bear in mind not to scratch your body by any means. If you can withstand the itching, you will have feathers like the Great Hornbill and may fly joyously." Early in the next morning, remembering his dream, the elder child climbed up the tree standing beside them and found two eggs of Great Hornbill. He passed on one egg to his sister and another one was eaten by him. He said to his sister, "Eat the egg. After you eat it, you will feel severe itching on your body but ensure that you do not scratch your body otherwise we will have different bodies and we will not be able to live together". When her sister ate the egg, itching started on her body so intolerably that she could not restrain herself from scratching. By scratching her body, she removed all the feathers which started coming out of her body. In the meantime, her brother had feathers similar to the Great Hornbill as he could withstand the itching. He said to his sister, "I told you not to scratch your itching body, but you did. Now we are different creatures. My throat is just starting stammering and it seems I will not be able to speak for long. Remember, when I fly over you, you should

come with me by following my shadow."

He was soon attracted by jungle fruits. As soon as he took the fruits, he could not speak any longer and rather croaked, "Tok, tok". He led his sister wherever he flew by showing her his shadow on the ground. They lived in the jungle for quite some time and he shared whatever fruits he took with his sister. Later on, he came to realise that his sister did not relish the jungle fruits. They started looking for human habitation. One day they reached a jhum. He hid his sister at the fringe of the jhum and he flew to the jhum-house and stole the cooked rice wrapped with leaf and fed his sister with it. The owner of the jhum wanted to find out the thief and engaged himself in waylaying. That day he did not notice anybody coming to his jhum-house excepting the Great Hornbill at the tree standing nearby.

The owner of the house had a wife. Though they had married for many years, they did not have any child. In spite of the fact that they were already over-aged for having any child, their wishful thinking for having a child could not vanish. While they were having lunch at the jhum-house, they would always discussed together about having a child and would say, "How lucky we will be if god gives us unwanted child of other for adoption." Their conversation was carefully listened to by the Great Hornbill from the nearby tree. He narrated all the conversations he had heard to his sister. He then made a suggestion to his sister, "You do one thing. Just when they are having lunch, you will suddenly enter into the jhum-house and say- my parents, how do you do. Do exactly as I tell you". The next day, his sister suddenly rushed into the jhum-house when the couple were having their lunch, bowed down before them and said, "My parents, do upon me as you like". The couple asked "Are you god or good visitor or bad visitor?" Then she narrated to them all the things that had happened to both herself and her brother. The couple again asked, "Where is your brother? Let him come inside." She said, "He is up there in the tree." They said, "Call him, let him also have lunch with us". Happily she called her brother who flew down from the tree and settled himself on the rail of the jhum-house and he was given food. He could understand what they said but could not speak. The couple then took home his

sister and adopted her as their daughter. Soon she grew up and became a beautiful girl. She was in charge of all properties of the family. Her foster parents also treated her with love and affection.

Her real father and his second wife were leading a very wretched life. One day while searching for paddy, her father reached the village of his daughter. The family of his daughter was the richest in the village. Thinking that he would surely get something from the richest family of the village, he went to the richest man's house and called him from outside, "Hello brother, are you in the house?" The girl replied, "Yes, we are". She opened the door for him and immediately she could recognise that he was his father. However, her father could not recognise her. The girl asked, "Grandfather, what do you want?" The man said, "Would you please give me some quantity of paddy on loan?" The girl brought out a stool and said, "Grandfather, please have your seat." The man refused to sit on it as a mark of respect and rather sat on the floor. The girl said, "Grandfather, please sit down for some time and you will go back after having food with us." She prepared food and served to her foster parents and their guest. While they were having food, the girl had a chit-chat with their guest and asked him about his family, "Well, grandfather, don't you have children? Why do you lead such a wretched life?" The guest replied "I had two children with my first wife, who died early. Ill-luck would have it, my two children also died after the death of their mother". The girl asked further, "Well grandfather, are your children boys or girls?" He replied, "The elder one was a boy and the younger a girl." The girl said, "Oh grandfather, you are really unfortunate man. The same case has happened to me. You see, my present parents are not my real parents. Just like what you have said, I have only one brother and no sister. After the death of our mother, our father married again to another woman. Our stepmother was very unkind and ill-treated us. Not satisfied with that, she made false complaint to our father alleging that we were cruel to her. Our father was compelled by her to leave us in a deep forest. While we were roaming helplessly, we got two eggs of Great Hornbill and ate one each. After that my brother turned into a Great Hornbill and

he brought me to this couple. " The man then realised the fact and was groaning. After he had his food, the girl made ready a load of paddy for him and saw him off. When he reached home, he found that his wife was looking like thunder. Unable to control his anger, he axed his wife to death.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### Bongcher Folk Medicines

The Bongchers use a number of folk medicines. It appears that quite a number of them are common with the folk medicines used by other tribes. But it is very difficult to determine which are of Bongcher origin and which are not. This is because the Bongchers have been having closed contacts with other tribes for such a long period that lot of their practices have intermingled. While some of the medicines are ridiculously simple and primitive, some of them may stand the test of scientific experiments. Though attempts have been made to identify the botanical names of the herbs, some herbs could not be identified yet. So only the local names are given in those cases.

1. Goitre- Awrpuar in Bongcher.

Medicine: Coal- Ochaihangra in Bongcher.

How to apply: Coal is to rubbed on the stone and the powdered coal is to be mixed with little water. This should be applied to the goitre once a day in the evening for seven days.

2. Headache - Luhai in Bongcher.

Medicine: Root of Tulsi plant (*Ocimum sanctum*) and root of Bael(*Aegle marmelos*).

How to apply: Pound together Tulsi root and Bael root and bandage it at the forehead with a piece of cloth just before sleep at night.

3. Convulsion - Ilai in Bongcher.

Medicine: Leave of *Zanthoxylum alatum* and sprouting leave of onion. *Zanthoxylum alatum* is a small tree the leaves of which are used by some tribals to rid a fowl's nest of lice. In Bongcher, it is called Arrikthi nah.

How to apply: After they are pounded together, it is to be applied at the forehead. It is applied till the patient recovers. This medicine is also used for involuntary twitching of eyes.

4. Oedema - Thingpui in Bongcher.

**Medicine:** A tuber, called by Bongchers Khawram chiak arpawm. Its botanical name is not known. It is a leaveless tuber growing on the ground.  
**How to apply:** The tuber is to be grounded and applied to the affected part.

**5. Lombago- Kawngna in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** *Mucuna imbricata* -Zawngpote in Bongcher. It is a climbing plant the bean-like seed of which resembles that of the bean of *Entada scandens/Endata pursoetha*. The pods are covered with irritating bristles.

**How to apply:** The bean -like seed is to be broken and put into the water. The water will turn into black colour. Put the water in the palm and get it warmed in the fire and apply to the areas of pain.

**6. Dysentery - Tan ek in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Roots of phakphel and Indian rhododendron (*Melastoma malabathricum*) and young leaves of Guava. The botanical name of Phakphel tree is *Bridelia tomentosa*.

**How to apply:** The roots are grounded together and roll it into normal medicine tablet size. The patient takes one tablet twice a day. Children take 1/4 of the tablet twice a day.

**7. Heart attack - Lungkhurna in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Fresh turmeric and lime.

**How to apply:** Fresh turmeric and lime are grounded together and apply to the external body around the chest.

**8. Fresh cut/wound - Pawp in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Leaves of cotton and of *Eupatorium odoratum*. *Eupatorium odoratum* is a straggling shrub with lavender-coloured blossoms.

**How to apply:** The leaves are rubbed together and the juice is applied to the fresh cut or wound.

**9. Cholera- EK lawk in Bongcher.**

**Medicine -** Leaves of *Streblus asper* of Rhamnaceal family.

Sarvachang in Bongcher.

**How to apply:** The leaves should be pounded and put it into the water. When the water's colour becomes greenish, the patient is given the liquid every two hours. Exact dose is not prescribed. The green leaves may also be burnt and the ashes are mixed with water and give it to the patient.

10. Distension (Flatulence)- Phongpuar in Bongcher.

**Medicine:** Roots of Kuchiamia tree. Its botanical name is not known. It is a small tree having big pointed leaves and also has latex.

**How to apply:** The bark of the roots should be shaved and the chips are to be put to the water. The patient is to take the mixture.

11. Eye pain - Mitna in Bongcher.

**Medicine :** Saline water and juice of Zawnghaikhawte fruit. Zawnghaikhawte is a mauve-flowering creeper the fruit of which when split open resembles a pair of gourd ladles or spoons.

**How to apply:** One tea spoon full of salt is to be added into a glass of water. Wash the was the affected eye with it. After that juice of Zawnghaikhawte is to be applied.

Mother's milk is also prescribed for this treatment. For male's eye pain, mother's milk of baby-girl is to be applied and vice versa.

12. Rheumatism - Rurenget in Bongcher.

**Medicine:** Fat oil of Indian badger and of python. Indian badger is also known as hog-badger, sand bear, bear-big and balisaur.

**How to apply:** The fat oil is to be applied to the area of pain at night as frequently as necessary. Gentle rubbing should also be done.

13. Skin disease (Ringworm)- Khasuvak in Bongcher.

**Medicine:** Leaves of Dauduraja ( *Cania alata* of *Caesal piniaceal* family) and soot.

**How to apply:** The leaves and soot are pounded together. Before

application, the affected area should be rubbed with fresh cut brinjal. Then itching will develop quickly. That time the medicine is to be applied.

14. Hornea - Tiltut in Bongcher.

Medicine: Tuber of large species of banana and small species of scaleless fish (Latia mach in Bengali).

How to apply: The tuber and fish are to be cooked together and the patient will eat it.

15. Boil - Sakhoi in Bongcher.

Medicine: Lime.

How to apply: Apply the lime to the boil.

16. Small-pox - Rophaw in Bongcher.

Medicine: Young leaves of Neem/ Margosa tree (*Azadirachta indica*).

How to apply: The young leaves should be boiled and the boiled water should be allowed to cool down slightly. The patient will take bath with that water when it is still warm.

17. Fish bone stuck in the throat- Inga ru awk in Bongcher.

Medicine: Hot cooked rice and juice of ginger.

How to apply: Roll hot cooked rice in egg-size and give it to the patient. If the fish bone still remains, give him ginger juice.

18. Itching sore - Chinthak in Bongcher. This itching sore usually occurs at the feet and toes.

Medicine: Tender leaves of one species of red orchid (*Renanthera imschootiana*). It is called Damkolchawr in Bongcher.

How to apply: The tender leaves are to be pounded and wrapped with its own leaf and the itching sore is to be gently rubbed.

19. Split or cracked of under- part of toe neck- Keorchak in Bongcher.

Medicine: *Alocasia indica* of Araceal family. Kamentri in Bo-

ngcher.

**How to apply:** Strip the skin off its stalk and bandage the split/cracked toe with it.

**20. Burns - Maikang in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Fat oil of python.

**How to apply:** Apply fat oil of python to the place of burns.

**21. Centipede bite- Riti awi in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Slug.

**How to apply:** Crush the raw slug and apply to the place of bite.

**22. Snake bite- Irul chuk in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** To bleed the place of bite.

**How to apply:** In order to check spreading of the poison, it is to be tied up near the place of bite with Kainim creeper. Botanical name of Kainim creeper is not known. Then bleeding is to be done at the point of bite.

**23. Foreign body- Riling awk in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Stick insect. Pinraldokin Bongcher (*Bactrododema aculiferum*).

**How to apply:** Crush the raw pinraldok and apply to the spot where foreign body is stuck.

**24. Sticking of poisonous hairs of certain caterpillars in the body. - Rulung riling dotin mething nung in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Bitter gourd (*Momordica carantia*).

**How to apply:** Crush the bitter gourd and wrap it with fresh plaitain leave and keep it near the fire for some time and tie it to the affected area.

**25. Jaundice - Zun eng in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Tender leaves of Tiak tree and small species of prawn. Botanical name of Tiak is not known.

**How to apply:** Cook the tender leaves of Tiak and prawn in a bamboo vessel and give it to the patient thrice a day.

**26. Stomach ache of baby- Naite phunhui lwi in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Umbilical cord. The Bongchers keep the umbilical cord when it is detached from the baby after seven days or so. It is kept carefully inside the basket and does not get spoiled for many years.

**How to apply:** The umbilical cord is put into the water for about one hour and the water is given to the baby for relieving it from stomach ache.

**27. Irritation of throat (resulting out of eating edible arum bulb or stalk) - Balthak in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Roselle also known as rose-mallow, red-sorrel (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*).

**How to apply:** The raw stalk is to be eaten.

**28. Teeth edge- Hachim/haza in Bongcher.**

(Through eating of acid fruit).

**Medicine:** Roselle also known as rose-mallow, red-sorrel (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*).

**How to apply:** The stalks are to be boiled and eaten.

**29. Antidote- Tur a sa nung in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Strong odour dry fish.

**How to apply:** Dry strong odour dry fish in the fire and put it into the water. The patient will drink the water. If the patient does not recover, boiled chicken should be eaten.

**30. Otorrhoea - Korset in Bongcher.**

(Purulent discharge from the ear).

**Medicine:** Castor oil plant (*Ricinus communis*).

**How to apply:** The stalk is kept in the fire for a few seconds and use it for bringing out the ear-wax. After the ear-wax is brought out, vegetable oil is applied.

**31. Inguinal lymphaderitis - Ketla thing in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Dirty coating of teeth.

**How to apply:** Dirty coating of teeth is to be applied to the area of pain.

**32. Numbness of leg - Ke kutin in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Numbness of leg is caused by temporary disruption of blood circulation. It may happen to arm also.

**How to apply:** The area of numbness is measured by a piece of bamboo/ wooden split and break it to that length and the split is wore in the ear.

**33. Retention of Urine - Zun richi in Bongcher.**

**Medicine & mode of application:** One foot is to be put into the water and the other on the ground. The patient will drink water by bamboo vessel. The bamboo vessel is to be cut in such a way that the open end should be near the lower node, and water is to be filled in it from the stream facing the bamboo vessel towards the lower side of the stream.

**34. Muscular strains/ stiffness - Rawl/Takna rebrup in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Brandy and leave of large species of arum, Vawpolpa in Bongcher. (*Caloprotis procera*).

**How to apply:** About 1 glass of Brandy is to be drank. Also anoint leave of arum with vegetable oil and keep it near the fire for some time and then gently rub with it the body where stiffness is felt.

**35. Hick up- Chu-uk in Bongcher.**

**Medicine and how to apply it :** One person is to be engaged to provoke the person who is having the hick up by charging him/her as having stolen eggs. When the quarreling is heating up, the person will forget his/her hick up and the same will automatically stop.

**36. Choked voice - He am in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Ginger.

**How to apply:** Ginger should be put near the fire and when it gets warm, it is to be eaten.

37. **Stiffness of nose - Khawbur narping in Bongcher.**  
**Medicine:** Lemon juice and ginger.  
**How to apply:** Lemon juice and ginger are to be mixed and crushed. The patient will drink the mixture.
38. **Engorged breast due to accumulation of milk - Basui bawkthing in Bongcher.**  
**Medicine:** Earthen/clay beehive available inside the house. There are some species of bees which often make earthen/clay bee-hive inside the house particularly under the roof.  
**How to apply:** The earthen/clay bee-hive is to be crushed with little water and apply to the breast.
39. **Umbilical sepsis - Naite laipan in Bongcher.**  
**Medicine:** Dried dead body of spider and vegetable oil.  
**How to apply:** Dried dead body of spider is to be put in the fire. Collect the ash and mix it with vegetable oil and apply to the umbilical of the baby.
40. **Arthritis (pain in the knee)- Rukhuk zeng in Bongcher.**  
**Medicine:** Poking by red-hot sickle.  
**How to apply:** Put the sickle into the fire. When the pointed end of the sickle becomes red hot, the affected knee is to be poked 4/5 times.
41. **Cough due to flue - Khobur khu in Bongcher.**  
**Medicine:** Tender leaves of Chichai.  
**How to apply:** Cook the tender leaves in bamboo vessel. The soup is to be taken when still warm.
42. **Tongue ache - Lwina in Bongcher.**  
**Medicine:** Lime, salt and chilly.  
**How to apply:** Salt and chilly are to be mixed with lime water and warm it in the fire. Wash the mouth with the warm water repeatedly.
43. **Child coughing due to flu - Naipang khu in Bongcher.**  
**Medicine:** Juice of sugar-cane.

**How to apply:** Burn the stalk of sugar-cane-After that the juice is to be sucked out and given to the child.

**44. Asthma - Ringit rasam in Boncher.**

**Medicine:** Root of Chawl tree. Botanical name of Chawl tree is not known. It has the leaves which resemble Teak leaves but smaller in size.

**How to apply:** Roots of Chawl tree are to be pounded and the juice given to the patient.

**45. Mouth ache - Kana in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Honey.

**How to apply:** The affected place is to be applied with honey.

**46. Obstructed labour- Nai nei tak in Boncher.**

**Medicine:** Meat of a porcupine.

**How to apply:** Porcupine meat is to be boiled and eaten.

**47. Stomatitis - Nerpan lwi in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Curd.

**How to apply:** Apply curd to the lips.

**48. Flatulence of a child - Naipang phung bit vwi riip in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Roots of Zaibandi (small species of Sun flower).

**How to apply:** The roots are to be pounded and juice obtained and given to the child.

**49. Stomach upset and serious vomiting caused by eating of Tapioca - Pangbal rui in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Chicken.

**How to apply:** A black poultry-bird is to be skinned off, and boiled. The chicken is to be eaten.

**50. Toothache - Hana in Bongcher.**

**Medicine:** Roots of Tuipuarsen tree and grass (species- thin and not spreading). Botanical name of Tuipuarsen is not known.

**How to apply:** The roots of Tuiparsen and grass are to be pounded together and apply to the teeth and after some time to be spit out again.

## CONCLUSION

A monograph on Bongcher brought out here is just a pioneer work. It is not at all a complete study. I would like to mention some of my observations in course of my visits to their villages. In spite of their tiny population, they have a high percentage of inter-marriage. They also reside in scattered manner. However, it is surprising to see that they still retain their identity observing their cultural practices and speaking their own tongue. Of course, in regard to dresses, they have to some extent, adopted that of their neighbours. According to them, there are no Bongchers in any other parts of the world. If that is so, how they originated and why their population is so small are a matter of interest.

In spite of the fact that they are generally very poor, many parents have started sending their children to schools wherever there is a school facility. At Paijabari, the children do not go to school as there is no school within their reach. At Nelsipara, the largest Bongcher village, there is no Govt. school. But the gap has been filled up by Christian Organisation by opening a primary level school. There are now two college going students. There are also three Govt.'s service holders in the capacity of Asst. Teacher, Panchayat Secretary and Agri. Assistant. There are students reading in various stages upto Class XI. There is also one Bongcher engaged in Dondosco School, Shillong and another one is studying in Mechanics in that School.

As regards possession of land, the Bongchers of Ambassa are having good paddy land which enable them to do some business activities also. Sadhu Chandra Bongcher (died in 1977) was said to possess large paddy land earlier at Ambassa proper. Those who are residing at Megazine, Ambassa are very poor. One family had earlier got settlement benefit from the Govt. but could not make use of it as the allotted land being tilla land. All the Bongcher families at Gantacherra, Kamalpur got settlement benefits earlier. They have cultivable land and are doing well. The families residing at Paijabari are covered under Primitive Group Rehabilitation programme.

In Amarapur side, the position is slightly different. In Donlekha, very few families possess land. Those who do not have their own

land cultivate others' land as share-cropper or as labourers. The position of Nelsipara is most precarious. This is because they do not have land and moreover, the western portion right from the outskirts of their village falls under Reserved Forest. The northern side where there is scope for jhuming is under the control of more dominant tribe. The only scope of helping them out is perhaps purchase of cultivable land under the Land purchase scheme of Tribal welfare Department and settle them there.

**TRIPURA MAP**  
(Not to scale)



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## INTERVIEWS

<u>Name of person interviewed.</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Address</u>
1. Lakhi Charan Bongcher	56	Nelsipara, Amarpur.
2. Rabiram Bongcher	65	"
3. Nidan Bongcher	55	"
4. Purniram Bongcher	45	"
5. Vanlalruata Bongcher	36	"
6. Sadan Kumar Bongcher	38	Donlekha, Amarpur.
7. Krishna Baigya Manik Bongcher	90	Paijabari, Kamalpur.
8. Kartick Bongcher	65	Megazine, Ambassa.
9. Nibasanti Bongcher	75	Ambassa.
10. Sona Bahadur Bongcher	48	"
11. Gahun Charan Bongcher	65	Gantacherra, Kamalpur.
12. Ganga Manik Bongcher	70	"
13. Rabi Hrangkhawl	75	Teliamura

### Date of interview.

11.4.88  
13.4.88  
25.5.88.  
21.6.89.  
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16.6.88  
8.10.88  
23.9.88  
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3.2.89.  
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8.9.90.



Newly married Kolo Couple.

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