

Tracing the threads of time: A Historical Perspective on the Halam Community in Tripura.

¹ Sourav Das, ²Sourav Barman

¹Graduate Teacher, ²Guest Lecturer

¹ Education (School) Department, Govt. Of Tripura, ²Ramkrishna Mahavidyalaya, Tripura, India

Abstract- This paper explores the complex past of the Halam people of Tripura, illuminating a rich tapestry of customs, cultural resiliency, and societal development. Despite numerous historical obstacles, the Halam people have preserved their distinctive identity in the north-eastern Indian state of Tripura over the course of millennia. This article presents a detailed view of the Halam community's unique journey in Tripura by fusing the threads of history, culture, and identity. It highlights how important it is to acknowledge the complexity of this resilient indigenous group's historical story while also conserving and honouring their distinctive traditions. This work adds to the larger conversation about indigenous histories and is an important tool for academics, decision-makers, and anyone else interested in the different cultural landscapes of north-eastern India.

Keywords: Halam, Dafas, Khurpuitabum, Koloi, Rajmala, Sikam, Hi-Hook dance, Rai Balmani Festival

Introduction:

The state of Tripura is mountainous. There isn't a mountain nearby. Locally called as Tilla, there are several little hills. Between these isles are a few narrow slits of plain land known as Lungas in the local language. The aerial views of this region resemble weaving. This mountainous tract may be geophysically divided into five classes: hills, lungas, rivulates, marshy or waterlogged regions, and strips of plain near the Bangladeshi border. Due to its mountainous landscape, it was formerly known as "Hill Tippera." The state doesn't have any mountains. The typical distance between two ranges is twelve miles (or eighteen kilometers), and there are six main ranges of hills: Debtamura, Baramura, Atharamura, Longtarai, Sakhan, and Jampui. These hill ranges range from 50 to 3,000 feet above sea level in elevation.

The rulers of Tripura were first referred to as "Pha" and did not take on the title of "Manikya." The Tripura rajas are claimed to have taken on the title of Manikya following Ratna Manikya's rule. The old titles of "Pha" or "Fa" were no longer employed going forward. Ratna Manikya brought three Begalis from Lakshanabati to run his fledgling government: Bara Khandab Ghosh, Pandit Raj, and Joynarayan Sen. He established the position of "Seristas" and declared Bengali and Persian to be the official tongues. The administrative structure featured three different Hindu, Muslim, and tribal elements. According to the Rajmala, the Laskars reigned over remote or recently acquired territories. These small authorities ruled over Nasul and Chhambulnagar (Kailashahar). Laskars were highly respected and had general control over their areas.

Origin of Halam community : There is disagreement on the number of Dafas in the Halam community. Given the various ideas about their clans and dafas, it is exceedingly difficult to determine how numerous they were in the past. Certain clans were occasionally either included or removed in censuses. The Halam are said to contain twelve dafas called "Baro Halam," according to an old urban legend. Later, thirteen, sixteen, or nineteen dafas were formed from the original numbers. The thirteen dafas known as halams, according to Rajmala, are called morchhum or molochh. 2.Rangkhoh 3. Koloi, 4. Kaipang, 5. Rupini, 8. Khulong, 9. Langai, 10. Bongcher 1, 12. Korbong, 13. Phutilangla, etc.

According to its history, the current state of Tripura was formerly a princely state. Tripura, a state with a long history, asserts that it is the oldest of all the Indian princely states. Its earliest known history is thought to be found in the Mahabharata. According to EF Sandys, a British officer in the Tripura royal court, the 153rd chapter of the Mahabharata's "Vanaparva" has a reference to Tripura, and the Tripura kingdom existed long before the arrival of the Christian period. In Rajmala, it has been asserted that references to the Frontier Kingdom in the Ashoka Pillars, the Puranas, and the Mahabharata allude to the kingdom of Tripura. Before joining the Indian Union on October 15th, 1949, the state had been controlled by the Maharajas for an uninterrupted period of thirteen hundred years. As a result, it was designated a part "C" state under the Indian Constitution. Actually, Tripura was a union territory up until 1972, when it was awarded statehood on January 21st. The state of Tripura is located in north eastern India and is surrounded by verdant landscapes. This area is rich in history and cultural variety. The Halam community stands out as a particular thread in this vivid tapestry, creating its own history through the ages. A fascinating chronicle that reveals a rich tapestry of customs, migrations, adaptations, and resiliency is the history of the Halam community in Tripura. This journal article sets out on a scholarly quest to investigate and illuminate the complex past of the Halam group, tracing its origins to antiquity and charting its development across time. The Halams have had a lasting impact on the world, beginning with their origins in the hills and valleys of Tripura and continuing with their interactions with many cultures.

The population of the state is mostly made up of two groups, namely the tribals and the non-tribal. As per the President of India's decree from 1956, the state's tribal populations have been divided into nineteen scheduled tribes. These tribal groups include the Tripuris, Reangs, Noatias, Halams, Jamatias, Lushais, Kukis, Chaimals, Uchois, and Mogs, who have lived in the state for a very long time. They represent the native group. The subsequent arrival of the other tribes, including the Garo, Munda, Oraon, Santal, Bhil, Bhutia, Lepcha, and Khasi. The Bhutia and Lepcha tribes originated in Bhutan, Sikim, and North Bengal; the Garo and Khasi tribes originated in Meghalaya; and the Bhil, Oraon, Santal, and Munda tribes originated in Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal. The later four groups didn't truly arrive until the state's commercial tea plantations began in 1916–1917.

The Halam community is made up of several tribes that are native to the Indian state of Tripura. Tipra Maharaja is credited with creating the name Halam. They gave themselves the name "Riam," which is an oral tradition and literally means "Human being." They also go by the names "Riamrai, Raivon, Longvon, Chepvon, etc." in their

lyrics. Additionally, there are 12 sub-tribes of the Halam, including the Chorai, Molsom, Hrangkhoh, Kaipeng, Kalai, Ranglong, Sakachep, Thangachep, Bongcher, Korbwng, Dab, and Rupini. The Halams are a subset of the Kuki Chin tribes that have lived in Tripura since the day it was established as a Kingdom. The Halams are considered to be an Old Kuki tribe by researchers who have previously helped to the defense and preservation of this ancient monarchy. The Halam community is said to have been named after Tipra Maharaja (S.B.K. Dev Varman, *The Tribes of Tripura*, p. 35). 'Khurpuitabum,' a location in the hills close to the north of Manipur, is where the Halams tribe is supposed to have migrated from (Ibid., p. 35). The Kukis who had bowed down to the Tripura Raja became known as Halam. There is no one location where they are concentrated. They may be found sporadically in Tripura's eight revenue districts, the Barak Valley of Assam, sections of the North Cachar Hills, and three North-eastern states. The Halam community group belongs to Old Kuki groupings in terms of ethnology and language. However, it is challenging to pinpoint their initial habitation. As they examined Halam's migration route, several academics advanced various ideas. However, there are no publications regarding them in anthropological study. According to their own beliefs and traditions, the Halam are believed to have come from a region known as "Khurpuitabum," which translates to "a big cave," and is said to be located somewhere in south central China. The Chin-Mizo-Kuki tribes with modest name changes all subscribe to the same origin hypothesis. According to some, the name "Halam" originally meant "human killer" (K.S. Singh, *People of India*, Vol. V, p.1243). Due to their vicious nature and history of killing outsiders, the locals may have given them the moniker "Halam." It is anticipated that someone else will come up with the term "Halam." According to one interpretation, the words "Ha" and "Lam" in Tripuri language refer to the earth and the journey, respectively. Consequently, it denotes an earth path. According to legend, the Maharaja bestowed the title "Halam" on them when they first met the monarch of Tripura. From this criteria, it may be assumed that Halam migrated to their current location via an earth path. On the term's etymology, there is no consensus, nevertheless. Halam is listed as one of Tripura's Scheduled Tribes in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Regulations (Amendment) Act of 1976 at position No. 6. Due to the passage of time and years, it is often difficult to distinguish between the many sub-tribes of the Halam people. But they have a same ancestor and belong to the same tribe. The Halams are considered to be a Kuki group. It is said that when they came in contact the King of Tripura, the Maharaja had given them the title Halam, which means in Tripuri (Ha=earth, lam=road) is the road to earth or county that is which tribal community obeyed the order of the king and rules of the kingdom were Halam community. They are also known as Mila Kukis. The Halam had collected taxes from the rest of the Kukis of Tripura and they had good relation with the Maharajas.

The Kuki-Chin tribes of the Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group are the ethnic group to which the Halam population of Tripura belong. Additionally their language resembles Tibeto-Burman languages in a more or less direct way. Mila Kuki is another name for Halams, despite the fact that their language, culture, and way of life have nothing in common with those of the kuki people. The "Barki-Halam" term refers to the several sub-clans that make up the Halams. Koloi, Korbong, Kaipeng, Bong, Sakachep, Thanachep, Dab or Nabin, Bongcher, Molsom, Rupini,

Rangkhawl, Choral, Lankai, Kaireng (Darlong), Ranglong, Morchafang, and Saihmar are the major sub-clans of the Halams. Their 57,210 total residents are spread out over the state according to the 2011 census. Halams resides in a conventional "Tong Ghor" built of Changrass (thatch) and bamboos. Along with other replacement jobs, they continue to perform jhum cultivation in addition to plain land farming. They work for the government in significant numbers. Due to the focus of our conversation being the Halam tribes, we have already mentioned that the Kuki tribe is where the Halams originated. The Kuki tribe has a very long history dating back to the prehistoric era. We are all familiar with the Kirata tribe thanks to the Mahabharata. These Kiratas are members of the Kuki tribe, per the census taken in 1340 Tripura bda. However, they themselves only mention "Rem" and not "Kuki." They are referred to as "Khongi" in Manipuri, "Lusai" in Chachar, and "Darlong" in Tripura. Tripuri tribe refers to them as 'Sikam'. They are therefore mixed tribes with various names.

There are vibrant dances performed by Koloi, Rupini, Molsom, Ranglong and Lankai, as well as a special dance tied to Jhum culture. The Halams' Hi-Hook dance is the most well-liked of all. The Koloi clan of Halams currently celebrates the Rai Balmani Festival with great delight and with the help of the entire community.

The Halams of Tripura were brought to the Sylhet area to labor in tea plantations during the British Raj. They still exist in Sylhet and Habiganj, where they continue to rely on this source of income. Only 5000 people make up their small population. With Bengali becoming more popular today, the Kokborok language is being used less and less. Twelve clans make up this group: Machafang, Migli, Charai, Bongcher, Hrangkhoh, Molsom, Rupini, Mitahar, Langkai, Ranglong, and Kaipeng. defense and preservation of this ancient monarchy.

The entire population of the Halam in Tripura, according to Dev Varman, S.B.R. (1981), was 28,970 according to the 1981 census, only 45 of whom resided in cities. 19,364 people throughout various parts of Tripura use the Tibeto-Burman language Halam. A total of 39. 18% of their population is employed. Agri-workers make up 26.37% of them, compared to cultivators who make up 70.15%. The rest, 3.29 percent, are employed in various services, with just 0.19 percent working in cattle, forestry, etc. Hinduism is claimed by the Halam. According to the census from 1981, 89.51 percent of the Halam were Hindus, 10.42 percent were Christians, and 0.07 percent was Muslims and Buddhists. According to a comparison of the census results from the years 1961 to 1981, the population of Hindus among them decreased from 98.44% in 1961 to 97.14% in 1971, and further decreased to 89.51% in 1981. From 1.55 percent in 1961 to 2.73 percent in 1971, and then to 10.42 percent in 1981, more people identified as Christians. 18.80% of them are reported to be literate.

When Hinduism first began to impact the Halam community is unknown. These individuals identify as Hindus, yet their religious practices have numerous animistic elements that appear to be at odds with Hinduism. Particularly when contrasted to the nearby Bengali Hindus, this is more obvious. For instance, Halam married women do not wear vermillion or iron bangles, which are frequently utilized, especially among nearby Bengali Hindu women, as a signifier of a married lady. In actuality, married Halam and unmarried Halam cannot be distinguished by symbolic garb or ornamentation. A number of them practice Vaishnavism and revere Radha and

Krishna. However, the majority of them eat meat-based meals including pork, fish, and dried fish. Instead of creating an idol of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi, some people worship her. They use rice and eggs to create a statue of Lakshmi. Place the egg on top of the rice in the clay pot. Then, a clay pot with eggs and rice is put underneath the bamboo. On full moon days, Lakshmi is typically worshipped by offering beer, rice, eggs, and a chicken as a sacrifice. Christian conversion started in the middle of the 20th century. Christians make up around 30% of Halam. Culture-related activities are not prohibited by the introduction of Christianity among the Halam (religious activities are an exception).

Although Vaishnavism is gaining ground among certain of the sub-clans like Murasingh, Rupini, and Kaloi, the majority of Halams remain Hindus and Sakti-cult adherents. However, Halams are also making Christianity as common. The areas with the highest concentration of halams include Kamalpur, Sadar, Molsom Bari, and Kwipilong in Udaipur, as well as Ampu, Ambassa, and other locations in various Sub-Divisions. Kolai, Murasing, and Rupini are among the Halams; they speak Kok-Borok and share Tripuri social and religious customs. Halams have a 21–24 age limit for boys and an 18–20 age limit for girls for marriage. They still follow their ancient laws while forming marital unions. They have a village council and their own social institute. Most social conflicts involving land, violence against women, and child abuse are handled and resolved by the council.

Despite their ethnic kinship with the Kukis, they are culturally more similar to the Tripur Kshatriyas. The majority of them are Sakti worshipers, although Vaisnavism is gaining traction among the Kalais and Rupinis. Their religion, however, is a blend of animism and Hinduism, with a few practicing Christianity. They believe in bad spirits and worship many gods and goddesses. The following are examples of significant deities: (2) Durga (3) Kali (4) Sundralopa, Sundarrai-Bakundrai. When worshipping Srikalarai-kolorai, Kallaki, Kholongma, Nachensing, Bayoi Taisik neekra, Adam Raja, Long-thoria, Khumtalsin, Yamkaitho-yamanarayan, Chhepiti, Dhaleswari, Khachamannu, and others, they also present burnt fish and meat to Ghosts and Goblins. As altar offerings to Shiva and Yamanarayan, only rice and bananas are given. The most significant celebration, known as "Bara Puja," occurs only once every four or five years. The Surma River is being worshipped. The Community must first gather a significant contribution in order to do such a puja. For sacrifice offerings that are made concurrently with libations, hundreds of goats, ducks, poultry, pigs, and 2/3 bisons are slain.

Riam Chong (language) is the common tongue across the Halam community households. The Kuki-Chin subgroup of the larger Tibeto-Burman family is cognate with the Riam Chong. There are some dialect variations among the Riam-speaking people, known as the Halam group language for legally recognized by Tripura State government as one of the minority languages (Kept under Kokborok & OML) Dept. of Education, due to geographical changes in their places of residence. Additionally, their language and culture have suffered greatly as a result of integration by larger populations. The government of Tripura has made a deliberate effort to advance and develop the Halam language. As a result, the government established the "Halam Language Advisory Committee" to take the required actions for the advancement of Halam. The Halam don't have any

written works of their own to speak of in terms of literature. Roman script was used as a template for all types of documentation.

Social control:

Social control is exercised by the choudhury at the village level and by the rai at a higher level that includes a group of settlements under the traditional social judicial system. By voice voting, both of these office holders are chosen. Crimes including adultery, rape, and theft are punished physically or by the imposition of a fee in cash and kind. Offenders are also fined financially. The Halam people have their own customary style of governance. This administrative structure is composed of Kalim, who serves as the district magistrate, Kabul, who serves as the assistant district magistrate, Chapia Kalim, Chapia Kabur, Chapia, Siarnu or Sierpa (Sipai), Ningnei or Tangkhong, Tangva (Tang-hills, Va-birds), Tuila (La Phutjat), and Kaithar, a recent hire for these positions. From Kalim to Chapia, several of them perform the roles of judge, order-bearer, postman, and water-serving Tuila. Sierpa and Tangva also perform these roles. No one is eligible to be immediately considered for a higher position in this administrative structure. One must serve as a Kaithar for a while before becoming a Kalim or Kabur. Anybody may be Kalim until death. "Ranglong Naruinathang" is the name of the judicial system used by the Ranglong Halam people. Ranglong Halam's top judge is the Halamsa, while the other officials are Khanga, Kalim, and Muktier.

Condition of Halam women: Halam women have practically all of the same social obligations as women in other tribal tribes, including taking care of the home and the farm at the same time. For a Halam woman, it is highly forbidden to interact or even communicate with male family members, especially the elder brother-in-law and the maternal uncle-in-law. Similar to this, she can act as a conduit for communication between her brother-in-law and maternal uncle-in-law. She is unable to roam freely in her home because of various societal restrictions that have been placed on her. The Halams frequently marry via service, elopement, and love, but of all these, marriage through service for the bride and marriage through money for the bride are the most prevalent because women are the Halams' main source of income. Women, in addition to their regular domestic duties, also undertake agricultural tasks, animal care, gathering fuel, obtaining drinking water, and many socio-religious activities. Two popular occupations performed exclusively by Halam women are weaving and brewing. They are superstitious and believe that if men start weaving, they will be attacked by a bear. According to this belief, women are not allowed to prepare the work of basket weaving.

While child and poly weddings are not unheard of, monogamous adult marriage is the tribe's standard. Bride-price, which might reach Rs. 120/-, is replacing marriage by service in today's society. The bridegroom's volunteer service term is referred to as "Damad" or "Utha." Typically, a marriage proposal that is finalized by the bride and groom and in which the parents have no input. A marriage does not include any religious procedures. Drinks must be offered by the wedding parties to the community members present at the event.

During "Hasam Bhojan," it is clear that the Halams held a position of superiority. There must be representation from each of the twelve significant "Dafas" (groups) stated before. Hasam has a military connotation. Consequently, the communal supper served on Vijaya Dashami is intended for the army troops. It was significant politically.

Language: The Kuki language of the Naga group is related with the Halams language. Although the Halam language and the kuki language are similar, the former differs in terms of tone and accent. These distinctions may have been brought about by the physiography of their area and custom. The Halam dialect is also closely related to the Manipuri, Lushai, and Angami languages of Assam, or the Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Chinese family. The ranglong Halam people use their own dialect. It is known as "Reyeamchang" in the Ranglong language. They communicate with other groups in Bengali and Kakborak while speaking Halam among themselves.

Food: Rice is the main food source in Halam villages. Halams prefer pork, which explains the extra care they take when raising domesticated animals (pigs). Despite not being vegans, they avoid beef. The Christians-converted Halams consume beef. Men and women alike enjoy drinking alcohol that is prepared at home. Rough rice and rice that has been double boiled are not popular among the Ranglong Halams. Fine rice is a favorite food of theirs. They also consume dried fish. The "Changall" or "Kharpani" is the other recommended dish in Ranglong Halam. They prepare a specific type of lime from the hard skin of snails and combine it with betel leaf instead of using lime when consuming betel leaf.

Dress and jewellery:

Members of Halam communities done a brief garment that is wrapped around their waists and hangs down to their knees. The Halam people created their own traditional clothing. Locally speaking, a Halam man should wear "puidiri" as his usual attire. The Halam male wears an upper garment called a "Puanlum" during the winter and a "Lukawm" during the summer. The "Rasa" is the primary female clothing item in Halam. Additionally, "Puanzel Tak" and "rasa" are favorites among the Halam women. Although colorful outrageous necklaces made of coins are also a fascination of Halam ladies, the majority of their jewelry are curios of floral seeds and animal bones.

Relationship with other Communities:

All of the neighboring communities, with the exception of the Muslim community, accept food and water. The Bengali, Tripuri, and Kaloi are just a few of the communities with which the Kaipengs have had sexual relationships. For their everyday needs, relationships with Kaloi and Bengali shopkeepers are maintained. They provide agricultural labor for landowner groups like the Bengali and Hrangkhawl. They take part in politics actively. They have a separate crematorium but share all other public spaces, including the water supply. Together with the neighboring communities, they participate in and celebrate holidays like Diwali. They have

developed cooperative ties with the Tripuri and Jamatia, and they uphold their friendships with the Bengali, Tripuri, and Noatia.

Halam cultural taboos include the following:- Ladies are not allowed to wear red flowers on their heads or earrings while clearing jungles for jhum agriculture. Younger people who are under 30 years old are not permitted to drink. (Currently it is not done). Bangles are prohibited for married ladies (Jakshar). Women were not permitted to enter sacred sites while they were menstruating. Fields cannot be plowed by women. The husbands are not permitted to kill anything, and even he is not permitted to strike wood while his wife is expecting.

Society and Economy

The Halam eat meat, however they don't consume beef. The main dish is rice. The use of loose tobacco is widespread. The Halam's preferred beverage is jukla, or homemade rice beer. The hills and forests, which are rich in natural resources, form the center of the Halam's economy. Gathering wild vegetables, roots, and tubers, hunting small animals, weaving, basketry, and jhum farming make up the peoples' economic activities. Endogamy within a community is typical among the Halam. Negotiation and elopement are the two most common ways to find a partner. The most typical type of marriage is monogamy. They don't have any symbols for marriage. Only on the wedding day do the women apply vermillion or any other red color on the forehead.

Damad utha is the term used to describe the bridegroom's volunteer service period. A Halam woman must observe an avoidance relationship with her husband's older brother. She is also forbidden from mentioning her husband's name, his parents' names, or any of his older relatives' names. She is not permitted to sleep in the same areas of the floor as her in-laws' parents and older brothers-in-law. The brothers take on the burden of marrying their sisters after the father's passing. The connections between families are most apparent during celebratory events like weddings, deaths, etc. The general rule for inheritance is male equigeniture.

Customs and Beliefs: A pregnant lady is not permitted to touch a deceased person's body, per Halam custom. A pollution period is observed following delivery until the woman has finished her upcoming menstrual cycle. The woman and her family are prohibited from taking part in any religious rituals during this time. The day that the baby's malai (naval chord) separates from the body is when the naming ceremony for the infant is held. The Halam burn their deceased in fires. Hinduism is the primary religion of the Halam. They practice different forms of religion within the family. The locals are said to be shielded from disasters by the goddess Rakkha Kali. The Halam's most significant event is Ker Puja. No visitors from outside the area are permitted during this event. Some Halam have given up worshipping their ancestral deities and adopted Christianity instead. In addition to songs, the Halam enjoy riddles.

Conclusion:

A complex tapestry of the Halams' history in Tripura spans centuries and is characterized by tenacity, cultural vitality, and a strong bond with the land. The Halams have made major contributions to Tripura's rich heritage, both in terms of their ancient beginnings and their continued presence in the area. They remain a monument to their tenacious spirit through their distinctive traditions, language, and rituals, which make them an essential component of Tripura's historical and cultural narrative. It serves as a reminder of the value of conserving and celebrating the cultural diversity that enriches our common heritage as we think back on their journey.

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