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Traditions as Identity: Revisiting the Mogs' village administration in Tripura, India

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Abstract

Identifying the distinctiveness of a community, especially in northeastern India, is always a challenge. Generally, most indigenous tribes seem to have similar physiques, food habits, customary practices, and worldviews. The nature and characteristics of their distinct cultures and traditions can be comprehended when someone attempts to understand them through participant observation. The various attributes of each indigenous tribe become apparent through an in-depth case study. As such, many academicians and scholars have conducted extensive research on the tribes in northeastern India from various dimensions-socio-cultural, linguistic, economic, and political. However, the distinct nature of each community has developed curiosity to gain more knowledge on the tribe's way of life. Even in the small state of Tripura, numerous microscopic ethnic communities assert a distinct identity. The paper attempts to underscore the Mog Traditional Village Administration in Tripura, and relate its relevance in the democratic setting.

Keywords: Buddhist, Chowdhury, Mog, administration, traditional, community

Introduction

The Mog community is the sixth largest tribal group in the state of Tripura, following the Tripuris, Reangs, Jamatias, Chakmas, and Halams. The Mogs are of northwest Burmese origin and have settled in Tripura since the 16th century, during the period when the Rakhine (Arakan) Kingdom extended its influence over the region. They are believed to have migrated through the Chittagong Hill Tracts and are considered descendants of the Arakanese people.

According to Burmese historical accounts, after the fall of the Toungoo Dynasty, the Rakhine King permitted some of its former civil officials to settle and govern in parts of what is now Tripura. They are followers of *Theravada*¹ Buddhism, one of the world's oldest Buddhist traditions, closely adheres to the original teachings of the Buddha and emphasizes personal spiritual realization through meditation to achieve *nirvana* (a place of complete happiness) and become an *arhat* (saint of the highest rank). However, they also continue to observe some traditional religious practices and ancestral rituals.

The Mogs have rich cultural traditions deeply rooted in Myanmar (Burmese) heritage. They are renowned for their distinctive folk songs and tales, which are emotionally expressive and have been passed down through generations. The *Wah* festival is the most significant annual celebration of the Mog, uniting the entire community. It features various cultural performances, including traditional songs and dances. Mog communities also possess knowledge of indigenous medicine. In addition to farming, some Mogs practice traditional healing methods using herbal and ancient remedies, a practice preserved through oral transmission across generations.

Mog society is traditionally patriarchal, with the family forming the core of social structure. Customs surrounding life events, such as birth, marriage, and death, are still widely practiced and are often deeply influenced by Buddhist principles.

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¹ Theravada, which means 'the way of the elders,' is one of the two main schools of Buddhism. Its adherents consider Theravada to be the most authoritative branch because they believe their teachings come directly from the historical Buddha.

Marriages are usually simple yet rich in traditional and religious symbolism, blending spiritual rites with cultural customs. Linguistically, the Mogs speak a language from the Tibeto-Burman group, closely related to Arakanese, a form of the Burmese language. Due to frequent interaction with other ethnic groups and the influence of formal education, many Mogs are multilingual, often fluent in Kokborok, Bengali, and Hindi.

Review of Literature

Haradhan Saha & Arun Das (2017) ^[15], in their work, also 'A Study on the Issues and Challenges of the Mog Community in Tripura' provide a comprehensive overview of the population demographics, literacy rates, religious practices, health conditions, and socio-economic challenges of the Mog community in 'A Study on the Issues and Challenges of the Mog Community in Tripura.' The study highlights serious educational shortcomings in Mog-inhabited areas, particularly the presence of poorly equipped schools and a significant shortage of qualified teachers. Saha stresses the urgent need for government intervention to improve educational infrastructure and introduce targeted policies that can uplift the economic and educational status of the Mog people.

Ashish Das (2023) ^[4], in his PhD Thesis titled 'The Mog Community of Tripura: A Study of Customary Laws and Traditional Village Administration,' deals with the customary laws and traditional administration of the Mog community. The research work attempted to underscore the ethos, norms, values, and village-level order of the society. The author has analysed the significant role of customary laws and the village council.

Research Gaps

The existing literature on the Mog community, as reviewed, primarily focuses on exploratory research of the socio-economic and educational aspects. They are informative in nature and provide the background information for further in-depth understanding of the Mogs and their traditional village administration. The present paper is, therefore, intended to critically understand the traditional village administration, the customary law, and its relevance in the present democratic setting.

Research question

- What is the structure and role of the Mog Traditional Village Administration?
- How does it interact with the state apparatus and modern governance mechanisms?

Objective of the study

- To trace the historical evolution of traditional village administration among the Mog community of Tripura.
- To understand the functional structure, roles, and responsibilities within the traditional administrative setup.
- To identify and analyze the contemporary challenges faced by this traditional institution in the context of modernization, legal pluralism, and cultural transformation.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research framework to gain a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political

structure, customary laws, and traditional administrative practices of the Mog community in Tripura. The methodology consists of the following key components:

- **Research Design:** A descriptive and ethnographic research design was employed to investigate the traditional village administration of the Mog people. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of their cultural governance systems, oral traditions, and administrative roles, enabling the documentation of unique and context-specific practices rooted in Mog heritage.
- **Study Area:** Fieldwork was carried out in Mog-inhabited villages located in South Tripura. Specific focus was given to villages such as *Manu Bankul* and *Rupaichari*, selected for their substantial Mog populations and the continued presence of traditional village councils. These locations were selected based on accessibility and relevance to the objectives.
- **Data Collection Methods:** Both the primary and secondary sources of data were used. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including village elders, traditional leaders (locally referred to as *Lungleng* or *Chowdhury*), and other community members who possess deep knowledge of the traditional practices. Focus Group Discussions were also organized with diverse groups across age and gender to gain broader community insights and to validate the information gathered. In addition, participant observation was also employed, and the researcher participated in village meetings, rituals, and public events to observe the functioning and nuances of the traditional administrative setting.
- **Sampling Technique:** Purposive sampling was used to select both the study villages and individual respondents. This technique ensured that participants with relevant experience and knowledge of the Mog traditional administrative system were included in the study.
- **Data Analysis:** The collected data were subjected to thematic analysis. Recurring patterns and themes related to leadership roles, methods of conflict resolution, customary laws, social norms, and the interaction between traditional and formal governance systems were identified, categorized, and interpreted to construct a holistic understanding of the Mog administrative structure.

Historical background and identity of the Mog community

According to various scholars, the Mogs are believed to be of Mongoloid descent. They are known by different names across regions. In Tripura, they are referred to as 'Mog,' whereas in neighboring Bangladesh, the same ethnic group is commonly called 'Marma.' Interestingly, in both regions, the community's name and the language they speak show variations. This variation is partly due to regional linguistic influences, particularly from Bengali in Tripura. Given Tripura's geographical proximity to Bangladesh, there is a strong likelihood that the Mogs migrated from the Chittagong Hill Tracts of present-day Bangladesh (Adhikari 2020) ^[1]. Most historians trace the origin of the community back to Arakan, a historical region in present-day Myanmar, suggesting a long and complex migration history. There are different theories on the origin of the term 'Mog' or 'Mogh'.

The first premise is that it originated from the Burmese word ‘Mogh,’ which literally is a word used as an epithet to address a gentleman. Secondly, another theory links the word to the ancient Magadha Empire.² When the hegemony of the Hindu religion began to flourish in the ancient center of the Buddhist religion, a certain section of the Magadha Dynasty left their native place to migrate to present-day Chittagong, and they subsequently settled on the hills of Chittagong and the southern parts of Tripura, bordering Bangladesh. The word ‘Mogh’ may be derived from ‘*Magadhi*,’ meaning one who hails from Magadha (Ullah 2019) [18]. Thirdly, the Bengali community identifies the people of Arakan as a ‘Mog.’ Hence, ‘Mog’ refers to the people who originated from the Arakan region. Linguistically, the language of the Mog/Marma community belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family, more specifically within the Lolo-Burmese subgroup. Though a definitive classification is still under scholarly debate due to a lack of conclusive data, several linguists, such as Shafer (2015) [14], and Van Driem (2001) [7], have proposed tentative placements within the language family tree, as illustrated in the figure below.

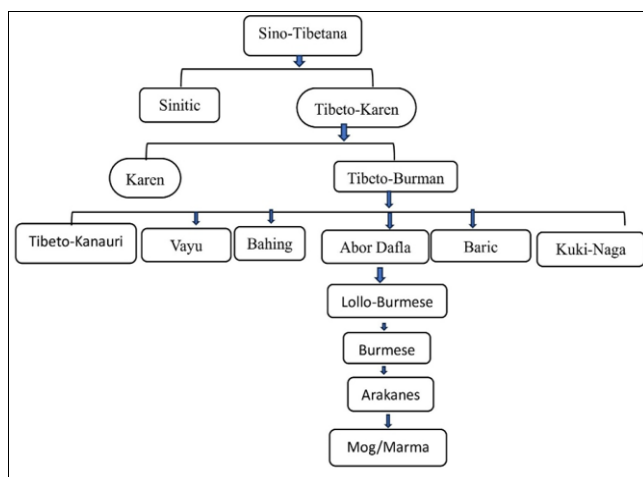


Fig 1: Genetic classification of the Mog by Benedict (1942), Shafer (1955) [14], and Van Driem (2001) [7] of the Mog in Tripura

The Mog community in Tripura, India, traces its origins to the Arakanese of present-day Myanmar. Their migration into Tripura occurred through the Chittagong Hill Tracts, now part of Bangladesh. Among the various movements of ethnic groups from Southeast and South Asia into Northeast India, the migration of the Mogs from the Arakan region (now called Rakhine State) remains one of the lesser-studied historical episodes.

In his study titled ‘*The Marma from Bangladesh: A de-Arakanized Community in Chittagong Hill Tracts*,’ Kyaw Minn Htin (2015) [14] has highlighted that the ‘Mog’ in Tripura are better known as ‘Arakanese’ in Myanmar, and ‘Marma’ in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of present-day Bangladesh. In Tripura, India, the population of the Mogs comprised approximately 38,000 (Census of India 2011). In other regions, they are estimated to be around 200,000 in Bangladesh and about two million in Myanmar. According

to Htin, the Mogs have been settling in the state of Tripura since the 5th century AD. This is reflected in the oral histories and traditional practices. In support of this argument, archaeological research suggests a historical link between the Arakanese civilization and the present-day Tripura and Comilla, with significant evidence from the 7th Century CE.

Settlement and population in Tripura

The Mogs in Tripura are primarily concentrated in the southern region of the state, although smaller populations are also present in other parts, including the western, northern, and *Dhalai* District of Tripura. Due to their wide distribution, there is a lack of precise data specifying the exact number or percentage of villages predominantly inhabited by the Mog people. Field observations suggest that the Mog community is more heavily concentrated in South Tripura, particularly in Rural Development Blocks (RD Blocks) such as *Rupaichari*, *Satchand*, *Karbook*, and *Ompi*. A more detailed understanding of their demographic distribution would require village-level census data or local administrative records focusing on ethnic composition.

According to the census records of the Tribal Research and Cultural Institute (TR&CI), Government of Tripura, the Mog community had a recorded population of 37,893 in Tripura, making them the sixth largest Scheduled Tribe in the state. The following table provides a historical overview of the Mog population across five census decades:

1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
13273	18231	31612	30385	37893

Source: Tribal Population of Tripura, Tribal Research & Cultural Institute

Fig 2: Mog Population in Tripura (1971-2011)

This steady growth in the Mog population reflects both natural demographic trends and the continued presence of the community across several regions of the state. However, without village-level disaggregation, mapping their exact geographical distribution remains a challenge that must be addressed through field-based research.

Social and Cultural Practices

The Mog community in Tripura follows a patriarchal social system, where authority and inheritance are typically passed through the male line. Most families are nuclear in nature, comprising parents and their children. However, in rural and closely-knit village settings, extended family members often reside together or maintain close social ties.

Respect for elders and adherence to traditional roles are fundamental values within Mog households. The community places a strong emphasis on cooperation, particularly within village life. At the village level, traditional authority is embodied by the *Chowdhury*, a community elder or village chief, who is responsible for maintaining social harmony. The *Chowdhury* settles disputes, organizes community events, and oversees matters of local governance.

Marriage is a key institution in the Mog society, often arranged by families in accordance with *Theravada*. The ceremonies generally do not involve a significant dowry system. Instead, weddings are celebrated communally, with feasts and the participation of the entire village reflecting the collective nature of Mog social life. Monogamy is the

² Magadha was a region and kingdom in ancient India, based in the eastern Ganges Plain. It was one of the sixteen *Mahajanapadas* (sixteen powerful, prominent kingdoms and tribal republics that existed in ancient India from the 6th to 4th centuries BCE).

prevailing practice, and polygamy is uncommon in the community.

Children are raised with a strong emphasis on cultural values, including respect for elders, religious observance, and diligence in work. From an early age, they are taught the importance of contributing to family and community life. Inheritance practices are patrilineal, and sons typically bear the responsibility of caring for aging parents.

Language and Oral Traditions

The Mog community primarily speaks the Mog language. It has close affinity with the Arakanese languages and is accepted as one of the language branches of the Arakanese. It belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. It also shares a close linguistic relationship with Burmese, reflecting the community's historical roots in the Arakan or Rakhine region of present-day Myanmar.

Oral tradition plays a central role in the transmission of knowledge, history, and values within the Mog community. Folk tales, myths, proverbs, and especially traditional songs called '*Zana*' are used to pass down moral teachings and ancestral stories. These oral narratives help sustain cultural memory and foster intergenerational continuity. Storytelling is a vibrant aspect of social life. Community gatherings often feature storytelling sessions, where elders recount traditional lore. These elders are highly respected as guardians of oral history and cultural heritage.

Although the Mog language does not have a widely used written script for daily communication, Buddhist scriptures are preserved in the Burmese script. These religious texts are read and interpreted by *Bhikkhus* (Buddhist monks) during important ceremonies and rituals, thus sustaining a literary tradition within the context of a religion.

Festivals and Celebrations

The Mogs' religious belief system and pattern of livelihood are reflected in their festivals and community-level cultural events. Cultural identity, social solidarity, and spiritual values are being strengthened through the celebration of festivals and cultural events. The *Sangrai* festival, the most significant cultural event, is a part of the traditional New Year celebration. It is marked by the beginning of the agricultural season, celebrated in April, every calendar year. There are various religious activities, including rituals, involved in the process of celebrating the *Sangrai* festival. Water is splashed among them as a symbol of purification, renewed life, and cleansing of sins. The youth would sprinkle water on the feet of the elders as a mark of respect, and the elders would bestow a blessing on them. The popular festival in Thailand called '*Songkran*,' and in Myanmar '*Thingyan*,' has a close affinity with the *Sangrai* festival. All the religious sites and venues are properly cleaned and decorated for community worship.

Festivals like *Kathina Chibar Dan* (a religious festival in which followers donate robes, food, and other necessities to monks) and *Asalha Puja* (commemoration of the Buddha's initial sermon) are also commemorated by the Mogs along with the *Sangrai* festival. Moreover, they celebrate livelihood festivals as well, praying for abundant crops. The festivals are a way through which they give thanks to nature and the creators. The events and festivals promote the ethos of cooperation, cohesion, and cultural preservation to ensure the continuation of traditional customary practices for future generations.

Dress, Ornaments and Food Habits

The cultural heritage and identity of the Mogs are significantly portrayed in the traditional cloth and dress. The male groups of the Mogs traditionally dress in a *Lungi* or *Paso* (a piece of clothing wrapped around the waist and reaching up to the ankles, used in different countries in Southeast Asia), whereas the female groups of the Mogs dress in a *Thoboing* (a wrap-around skirt, usually completed with a blouse or shawl). Weaving, bamboo crafts, and traditional musical instruments are well-known among the Mog. Their cultural life is richly embodied in music and dance, which are showcased during community festivals and gatherings.

Most of the traditional and cultural attire is locally made from handwoven fabrics, having unique colors and looks. On the occasion of any cultural events, both males and females wear their traditional clothing, showcasing their cultural pride. The ornaments, specially made of gold and silver, are an important accessory for females. Earrings, necklaces, and bangles are commonly worn and hold both artistic and symbolic value, often passed down through generations.

The Mog cuisine reflects a blend of Southeast Asian and indigenous tribal culinary influences. Rice is the staple food, accompanied by a variety of side dishes that include fish, pork, vegetables, and fermented items. Ingredients such as bamboo shoots, dry fish, and local herbs are frequently used, giving the cuisine its distinct flavor. The cooking style is simple and healthy, relying on minimal oil and spices, which enhances the natural taste of the ingredients. During festivals and special occasions, traditional delicacies such as *ngapi* (fermented fish paste), non-vegetarian items, and steamed rice cakes are prepared and shared in communal meals, reinforcing social bonds. While rice or millet-based alcoholic beverages are sometimes consumed during festivals and social events, their use is moderate and culturally regulated, and such drinks do not play a central role in religious observances.

Traditional Music, Dance, and Crafts

Music and dance form an integral part of the Mog cultural expression. Traditional Mog dances are performed during festivals and weddings. These dances are group performances and are accompanied by indigenous musical instruments such as drums (*dhul*), gongs, and flutes. The *Sangrai* Dance is one of the most popular traditional dances that symbolize joy, prosperity, and unity. Folk songs deal with themes of love, morality, nature, and history. These songs and dances help preserve the community's heritage and serve as a medium for intergenerational bonding.

The artistic talent of the Mogs is embodied in their technique of handicrafts, weaving, and wood carving. The distinctive craftwork of the Mogs is clearly seen in religious sites, such as Monasteries. On any ceremonial occasions, they are fond of wearing hand-woven textiles, and the women are primarily responsible for manufacturing homemade cultural and traditional attire.

Structure of the Mogs' traditional village administration

The feeling of joint responsibility is one of the significant features of the Mog villages in Tripura, and it is an entrenched tradition in their cultures and traditional practices. The traditional administration of the village rests mainly in the hands of the *Chowdhury* and the elders. The

Chowdhury and the elder act as the council, formed at the village level. This council is instrumental in the maintenance of social cohesion, justice, and the running of village governance. Even with the increasing influence of the formal state system, such traditional institutions remain active in resolving disputes, enforcing customary laws, and organizing communal labor.

- **Selection of Chowdhury:** The *Chowdhury* is accepted as the chief figure empowered with power and authority in any village of the Mogs' community. The process of selecting *Chowdhury* has certain attributes, such as being older in age and a male person having sufficient knowledge and understanding of the needs, requirements, and affairs of the concerned village. In addition, leadership capabilities, social status, personal wealth, and familiarity with customary laws are also taken into consideration while selecting the *Chowdhury*. Most importantly, village consensus is ensured before the selection of any *Chowdhury* in a Mog's village. However, the entire selection process is informal and may vary from one village to another. There is no specific term or year for *Chowdhury*, and he may continue if he satisfies the villagers with his performance.
- **Supporting Roles in Village Administration:** Elderly men, respected for their life experience and wisdom, act as advisors to the *Chowdhury*. Depending on the situation, the number of elders involved in decision-making can vary, typically ranging from two to four individuals.
- **Village Council:** The village council is composed of selected representatives from each household. These are usually male or elderly family members, though practices vary between villages. Representation is often based on voluntary participation and mutual agreement within the community.
- **Formation of the Village Council:** Council members are generally senior males, although respected women may also be selected based on the village's customs. Selection is held through common consensus, and individuals who show a willingness to serve are considered. There is no fixed term for council membership. Members typically serve until they are unable to continue due to age, illness, or if they shift from the village.

Role of Traditional Leaders

As the traditional chief of the Mog villages, the *Chowdhury* is entrusted with wide duties and responsibilities. Maintaining justice in society and the well-being of the community are the day-to-day duties of the *Chowdhury*. He primarily draws his power and authority from the customary law, and his leadership embodies the value system of the Mogs and their society.

- **Judicial Functions:** The most important responsibility of the *Chowdhury* is concerning the local disputes and the mechanism to resolve them through traditional means. Cases such as land ownership, family disputes, theft, and marital issues are generally adjudicated through the traditional mode of dispute resolution. All the decisions of *Chowdhury* are in concurrence with the customary law. The main approach to dispute resolution is building cordial relationships and offering compensation rather than imposing punitive measures.

- **Economic Functions:** *Chowdhury* is not directly involved in managing the village economy. His primary role is to adjudicate any conflict that may arise from the unfair distribution of economic and natural resources in the village. The *Chowdhury* mobilizes and encourages the active participation of villagers in development activities, including village infrastructure, such as roads, water sources, and schools.
- **Conflict Management:** Another important responsibility of *Chowdhury* is maintaining peace and harmony in society. As a central figure, *Chowdhury* acts as a mediator of interpersonal and family disputes to stop them from escalating. In some cases, he may also engage in resolving tensions between neighboring villages or ethnic groups.

Customary Laws and Practices in Mog Villages

In the Mogs' community, customary law is the basis for resolving many social and domestic problems. The *Chowdhury* is very important in using these customs to keep the village peaceful and uphold moral values. The process, on the other hand, is informal, but it is based on cultural norms, respect for others, and being involved in the community. The *Chowdhury* deals with the following kinds of cases:

- **Marital Disputes:** Spousal conflicts are most frequently the issues brought before the village headman. Misunderstandings, extramarital relationships, corporal abuse, dowry issues, or avoidance of domestic responsibilities can all lead to such conflicts. The *Chowdhury* usually calls both parties to a community hearing, along with their respective family members. Reconciliation and mediation are the goals of the informal hearings, which derive from customary values. The chief may provide separation when reconciliation is not viable, and at times, impose provisions of property settlement or custody of children.
- **In-Law and Extended Family Conflicts:** The extended family and daughters-in-law versus their in-laws and joint family members are also prone to conflicts. Diplomacy is used in solving these delicate issues. The *Chowdhury* resolves conflicts and maintains harmony by relying on cultural influence and communal wisdom. Because of the moral prestige and legitimacy of village leadership, the consensus is binding.
- **Domestic Violence and Abuse:** Domestic abuse cases are dealt with seriousness, particularly when they involve women. Because of social stigma, these problems were dealt with reluctance in the past, but with increasing awareness and changing social attitudes, village authorities are now actively intervening more. Acting as a medium between official legal structures and traditional legal systems, the *Chowdhury* may recommend the role of police or women's welfare organizations in extreme or repeat cases.
- **Child Custody and Inheritance:** The *Chowdhury* resolves disputes about child custody or inheritance in the case of divorced parents or when parents have deceased. Traditional values, familial responsibilities, and what is believed to be in the best interest of the child's well-being and domestic peace are factors in

making decisions. The same process is applied to dividing property, with tradition governing who receives what and how property is shared.

- **Elopement and Adultery:** The village leader is also approached regarding issues of elopement, premarital affairs, or adultery. These are typically resolved through social reconciliation, which may entail traditional apologies, compensatory acts, or public confession. Rebalancing the community and repairing the social fabric are the objectives.
- **The Traditional Method:** The decision made by the village chief heavily relies on oral customs, long-standing traditions, and public opinion. Instead of punishment, the practice seeks to reconcile and is participatory and inclusive. The values of unity, dignity, and cultural continuity in the Mog society are upheld by this form of justice. The *Chowdhury* preserves the moral rectitude of village life while closing the gap between tradition and modern administration as social values evolve and their engagement with formal institutions increases.

Enactment of customary laws

- **Oral Tradition and Community Consensus:** Due to the lack of written documentation, the customary law of the Mog people is mostly oral, maintained, and transmitted from generation to generation. These laws, based on long-standing usages, Buddhist ethical instruction, and shared communal standards, form the bedrock of village administration and social conduct. To explain, amend, or adapt customary practices to meet fresh social problems or circumstances, the people gather together, often in a village council or an elders' forum. Adaptation of customary law develops organically through consensual agreement and collective discussion rather than being dictated by a rigid legal hierarchy.
- **Elders and Religious Values:** Elders and other respected community members play an important role in interpreting and applying these unwritten laws. Buddhist moral teachings, emphasizing compassion, harmony, and right action, often influence their decisions. The community's perception of appropriate behavior is influenced partly by ethical principles of the Buddha's life and teachings. In addition, besides being religious events, religious festivals and rituals also serve as cultural landmarks that affirm societal values and customs.

Enforcement of Customary law

- **Resolution Process:** *Chowdhury* is generally approached in cases of disputes or rule breaches within the Mog community. The complainant, the alleged, and a few chosen village elders come together in a community meeting that is often conducted at the village hall or the chief's house. Both sides are heard, witnesses are consulted when appropriate, and elder members of the community are sought for advice. Following careful consideration, *Chowdhury* renders a ruling that conforms with social ethics and customs.
- **Nature of Punishment or Settlement:** Punishments in customary law are not meant to inflict harsh punishments, but for the restoration of peace and averting future disputes. To restore peace, the offender

must confess his wrongdoing before the community. Financial compensation is arranged for injury or dishonor suffered. As a last resort, people may be removed from society either conditionally or permanently in cases of extreme or habitual instances. Such policies seek to maintain social cohesiveness and change behavior.

Social pressure as an enforcement tool

Social pressures are the dominant forces in enforcing customary law. Peer pressure and fear of exclusion are the typical means of coercing people to obey in the tight-knit Mog community. Individuals who defy the decisions of the village council are at risk of being ostracized, losing their respectability, or being excluded from group activities. Such a strong social framework is an effective and natural way of ensuring obedience and responsibility.

Formal state law functions alongside customary law, which continues to be widespread and powerful, particularly in secluded or interior villages. The leaders of the village refer to official powers like the police or the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), in those cases where the offense is major, like murder, rape, or extensive theft. But the people still like to invoke traditional internal processes to settle minor civil or social conflicts. The Mog community can maintain its cultural independence while adjusting to the state's more comprehensive legal system.

Protection of the environment through customary practices

The Mog people are close to nature. Their centuries-long environmental knowledge and cultural appreciation of nature are present in their traditions and practices. These informal but influential norms play a significant role in conserving biodiversity and using natural resources sustainably.

The Mog people have a deep reverence for nature as a living, holy thing, and not just a subsistence resource. The Hills, rivers, forests, and specific trees are considered to be connected with spiritual forces or deities, resulting in practices that preserve the environment. Trees like the *Bodhi* Tree are of spiritual significance according to Buddhist principles and are seen as symbols of enlightenment. Rivers are deeply revered and frequently hold the central position in religious ceremonies. For example, for remembering the spiritual path of the Buddha, candles are offered on rivers on the full moon day of *Ashwin*. As a token of gratitude and reverence, community members offer flowers to rivers at the time of the New Year celebration as an emblem of rebirth and respect for natural processes. These convictions prevent taboos against the exploitation of sanctified places or animals, which help preserve local ecosystems.

- **Regulated Use of Forest Resources:** The Mog people practice traditional methods of regulating the use of forest resources to maintain ecological balance. Tree cutting, especially in spiritually valuable forest areas, is restricted by custom. Firewood, bamboo, and medicinal plants are harvested in seasonal or rotational manners, promoting natural regeneration. As followers of the Buddha's teachings on non-violence, hunting is generally discouraged, which helps conserve wildlife populations.

Community-based Land and Resource Management

The natural resources in the Mog villages are customarily held and managed collectively, rather than owned individually. Land, water sources, and forests are shared and managed through community consensus. *Jhum* (shifting) cultivation is practiced with strict fallow periods to allow soil restoration, a rule enforced by customary authorities to prevent land degradation.

Ritual Practices and Seasonal Observances

Rituals and festivals in the Mog community are closely linked to the environment, agriculture, and seasonal rhythms. Before any land is cleared or crops are harvested, ceremonies are held to seek the blessings and permission of nature, reflecting deep ecological respect. Some religious festivals mandate rest days, during which farming or resource extraction is prohibited, allowing nature a pause for recovery.

Customary law actions in case of criminal acts

The Mogs rely on their traditional justice system to handle minor criminal acts and maintain social order. The customary norms and community values emphasize reconciliation, compensation, and social harmony rather than punitive punishment.

The primary power and responsibility of the *Chowdhury* and village elders is to conduct a preliminary investigation into any offence, if and when reported to them. The arguments of both parties (the accused and the complainant) are being recorded, including the statements of the witnesses. Besides, the community is consulted for better ideas on the particular issue. The entire process facilitates determining the nature and seriousness of the crime. The *Chowdhury* and village elders decide whether the matter can be resolved within the community or needs to be channeled to the formal legal system.

Reconciliation, Compensation, and Sanctions

The justice system, as per the customary law of the Mog community, primarily aimed at justice through mutual understanding, rather than punishing. The objective is to repair harm and reconstruct trust in society. The perpetrator or offender may be directed to tender a public apology or asked to compensate the victim through cash, livestock, or labor. In the case of repeated offence showing no sign of repentance, the offender may face expulsion from the village.

In such a case where the offender refuses to comply with the decision of *Chowdhury* and the village elders, or in the case of a serious crime, social exclusion may be imposed. In such a situation, the offender may be prevented from attending community events. Such types of sanctions act as a crucial measure for restoring harmony in society. Any offence expected to disturb religious and spiritual harmony is taken seriously, and the offender may be required to undergo ritual cleansing and make a symbolic offering. These acts serve as a form of repentance and spiritual reintegration, reaffirming the offender's respect for cultural norms and readiness to return to communal life.

Limits and Interaction with State Law

The traditional village administration and justice system among the Mog community operates within the wider structures of the Indian judiciary. They are aware of the

limitations of customary law and administration, and acknowledge that it cannot supersede national, constitutional, or criminal laws. Despite the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution providing certain provisions for practicing tribal customs and self-governance in scheduled areas, *Chowdhury* and his subordinate members adjudicate all disputes, considering the statutory laws of India.

Hence, any serious cases like rape, murder, or critical harm to the body are referred to the police. The general judiciary looks after such crimes with the assistance and support of village leaders. In such cases, village leaders may exercise the role of mediator in the early stages. The customary and traditional judicial system functions in consonance with statutory laws. The former addresses societal issues, and the latter adjudicates serious crimes. But the customary justice system holds significant importance within the Mog community.

Conclusion

The Mog community and its traditional village administration in the state of Tripura embody an exceptional and robust socio-political and administrative setting deeply grounded in their indigenous identity and customary practices. The *Theravada* Buddhist value system and the longstanding practices of village-level community administration are clearly noticeable in their day-to-day life. The extensive impact of modern administrative mechanisms and state governance has considerably affected the Mog traditional village administration. Nevertheless, it still plays a crucial role in maintaining law and order and harmony within the society and the villages.

The *Chowdhury*, aided by a council of elders and community leaders, plays a vital function at the heart of the Mog's customary village governance. This participatory and decentralized system allows decision-making at the local level, fosters conflict resolution, and promotes effective participation. Being a central character, *Chowdhury* is not just a guardian of cultures but also ensures peace in the village, guided by traditional law and Buddhism's moral philosophy. *Chowdhury's* leadership is mostly merit-based, age-based, and community consensus rather than formal voting. It is in keeping with the traditional focus on respect for seniors and experience.

The dispute resolution system among the Mogs is primarily restorative justice, instead of disciplinary actions. The village councils and the *Chowdhury* embrace conflict resolution strategies with an emphasis on understanding between parties, compensation, and restoration of social harmony, and not criminalization. Such a mode of conflict mediation is effective in resolving minor conflicts such as inheritance and property issues, family conflict, and everyday social disputes. But more serious criminal acts like murder or serious crime are largely relegated to the state judiciary, although *Chowdhury* and his men could continue to have a hand in the initial inquiry or moral arbitration.

The interface between customary village governance and the contemporary judiciary system has both strengths and weaknesses. State acknowledgment of customary ways, on one hand, enhances the cultural identity of the Mogs and reinforces the process of resolving conflicts. State acknowledgment of customary ways, on the other hand, usually generates conflict with customary structures, especially when local customary legislations come into conflict with statutory law.

Another important aspect of the traditional administration of the Mog is its interlink ages with religious institutions, especially the Buddhist Temple and the Monks who serve as moral leaders and mediators. The Buddhist Temples are used as channels for public forums, community-level discourse, and even education, thus strengthening the spiritual and cultural underpinnings of village administration.

The Mogs and their customary village government in the state of Tripura are a reflection of the people-oriented village government based on the value system of the indigenous tradition. In the face of modernization of the judiciary and rapid economic changes, the customary system has continued as an important foundation for maintaining a sustainable judiciary within the community. To preserve, sustain, and empower this indigenous institution, there is a need for policy formulation. There must be inclusive development planning and cooperation between traditional and modern frameworks of the judiciary. The preservation of this indigenous institution is expected to uphold tribal identity and autonomy.

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