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**Land Alienation
in Tripura:
A Socio-Historical
Analysis**

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LAND ALIENATION IN TRIPURA: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Rajiv Tewari*

Abstract

Ethnic identity is an important factor in the distribution of land resources in societies having ethnic diversity. Tripura, during its evolution, faced migration as well as land alienation of its tribal population. The conditions, under which land alienation occurred, and the response of ethnic groups and the State to this, provide a lucid account of how land alienation influenced Tripura. The historical evolution of the state and the various migrations that took place in the state contributed to the alienation. This led to violence, as a result of which the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 was imposed on Tripura. The state responded by taking positive initiatives to resolve the grievances of tribals and help them preserve their culture and economic interests.

Key words: Ethnicity- Land alienation- Effect- State Response

Human beings, when transforming themselves from being pastoralists to agriculturists, adopted varieties of agricultural systems - settled and migrant being the two main types. Land provided food and also became part of the local economy. It provided livelihood, and being the provider of food, also became a basic necessity for human beings. Possessing land became an important human endeavour. In addition, the poor, the tribal and other such groups are dependent on land as their only possession. Land provides social, economic and political power. Thus in the human pursuit for livelihood and social, economic and political power, land became an important element of contestation. However, as the importance of land increased, the greed and avarice of the population led to its alienation with far-reaching impact on society. Tripura, a predominantly tribal state, witnessed a saga of land alienation, which ultimately became an important contributory factor in the relationship between tribals and non-tribals and acquired violent overtones at a later stage.

This is an exploratory study of the causes for the alienation of the land of Tripura tribals. It provides a description of land alienation as well as some provisional explanations of the causal factors driving such processes connected to the history of the state. A historical overview of land alienation and various connected issues, along with some historical and theoretical inputs, will put the matter in correct perspective and will lead to fresh insights on the conflict in Tripura.

Right to Land

Right to land is defined as legally and socially recognized entitlements to land enforceable by a legitimized external authority that could be a village level institution or some high level judicial or executive body of the state. Land rights can be in the form of ownership or usufructuary rights associated with different degrees of freedom to lease out, mortgage, bequeath and sell land. Ownership

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or usufructuary rights, combined with the right to exercise control over land, constitute effective land rights.

The right to homestead land is important for tribal and rural population as it is a guarantee against homelessness and destitution. As land-dependent livelihoods are the chief source of earning a living among rural households, the right to arable land is important for rural households in general and for rural households and tribals in particular. The link between their access to land and the physical well-being of the households is obvious and needs no explanation.

Survey, Settlement and Land Reforms

The various land reforms and settlement operations carried out in the state are covered here. Ownership of tribal land did not exist historically and the modern system of revenue collection and administration introduced the concept of ownership (MohanKumar, 2013). Community ownership was the norm and individual ownership did not exist in the state of Tripura (Debbarma, 2008). The fact that community ownership was the norm makes it clear that the modern system of land records and maintenance did not exist in the state and private ownership, as practised and encouraged by the British government in the rest of the country (Ganguly, 1987), was not the norm. Ownership of resources especially land ownership is the basic foundation of the modern economy. Ownership leads to effective utilization and productivity enhancements in order to garner monetary gains for availing other products and services in the market. "No survey and settlement of pre-existing rights were taken up in the reserved forests and protected lands", and even rent fixing, which was basically anti-tribal in nature, was arbitrarily carried out. Due to poor educational standards and infrastructure development, the awareness level of tribal was also very low.

Most of these problems can be attributed to the geographical and physical state of the state, which was characterised by parallel ranges of hills, namely Jampui, Sakhan, Langtarai, Atharamura and Baramura. Various historical records show that the "forest man lived and eked out a precarious existence from forest products" (Chakravarti, 1984: 44). It was next to impossible to have any survey and settlement of land carried out in the state in the backdrop of the conditions prevailing there. The pattern of cultivation was subsistence farming or shifting cultivation in the tribal region. It met the basic and primary needs of the tribal practising it. Practising plough cultivation was also not possible in undulating forest areas and hilly/semi hilly terrain. In view of its subsistence nature, tribal life was not geared to meet modern economic demands while the gradual increase in the population of tribals also led to an increase in demand for resources, which shifting cultivation or '*jhooming*' could not meet. Therefore, the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 aimed at consolidation of land reforms and revenue from land. This and other such Acts aimed at putting in place a system of land reforms to produce revenue for a modern state.

Land Alienation

Land alienation can be defined as "the phenomenon of transfer of ownership and/or user rights over land from tribal to individuals who can be either tribal or non-tribal" (Gupta, 91: 2113). Though it has been contested that shifting cultivation was a way of life in Tripura (Gupta, 91), the practice has

persisted, the main reason being lack of support from the government on weaning the tribal away from this system of agriculture. Alienation of tribal lands by powerful entities has become a common phenomenon in all tribal areas across the country. It is most unfortunate that “the freedom to live in their own traditional ways” as guaranteed by the constitution is flouted by those who understand the constitution better (Goodpal, 2012).

Land Acquisition

The indigenous/ tribal peoples, who constituted **8%** of the total population of India at 2001 census, make up over **50%** of the total displaced people due to development projects. According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MTA), nearly 85 lakh tribals were displaced until 1990 on account of large developmental projects (Goodpal, 2012). Verma (2004) had made a comprehensive sociological study of the processes and problems of development-induced displacement and its ramifications on the socio-economic, cultural, psychological, political, ecological and other aspects of life. The Dumber hydro-electric project added to the plight of the tribals as large numbers of tribal families were ousted from the region of the Dam (Paul, 2009).

The construction of the Dumber dam in the 1970s submerged over 23,530.55 acres and additional land was used for its power house and the setting up of other infrastructure. Most of these came up on tribal community land, whose loss was not compensated by the authorities. “The project facts mention 2,558 individual land owning displaced families (13,000 persons) but studies point to 8,000 to 9,000 families (40-50,000 persons)” (Bhaumick, 2003: 84). It shows the disparity between the records and the ground reality. “Of the 209,336.59 acres known to have been used in Tripura for development projects during 1947-2000, a third is known to be tribal commons and more than half of the rest is tribal land” (Fernandes & Bharali, 2010: 71). The Dumber dam was the turning point because by 1970 the tribes had lost 20 to 40 percent of their land officially, and more through money lending and other means. Thus, when the Dumber dam was announced they protested against it but the state ignored them. That is when the tribal insurgency began. “It is called terrorism but it is for land”, which shows that the cause of the insurgency is due to loss of land held by the tribals through alienation (Bhaumick, 2003: 85). The Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 laid down that all land not in the name of private persons belonged to the state. The Administrator is vested with the power to allot land for industrial and public utility purposes under this Act thereby making land acquisition easier for the state for various purposes.

Causes of Land Acquisition

Land Acquisition is carried out primarily for development work as most of the virgin land and natural resources exist in the tribal region only. The development paradigm and process, with varied interests at play, make the tribal region the likely and easy prey. The causes of tribal land alienation are innumerable. However, the major causes are individual inability to cultivate land, lack of irrigation infrastructure, increase in number of non-tribal ownerships surrounding tribal land, continuous crop failure due to natural reasons, long distance of tribal land from their settlements due to poor infrastructure, medical expenses, domestic expenditure, alcoholism etc. Incomplete and unsatisfactory

land records have merely aggravated the problem of land alienation (Dubey & Murdia, 1977). Land alienation in tribal areas is also caused by rampant indebtedness among the tribals and by their simple lifestyle, natural honesty and informal dealings. Tribal land alienation takes place when large-scale migration happens due to natural, political, social and economic reasons. Even the colonial government in India adopted the strategy of resettling people with the aim of developing the backward region. A study conducted in various parts of the state by the Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute (TCRTI), Hyderabad brought to light the following types of land transfers in the scheduled areas in spite of the operation of land transfer regulations. 1. Benami transfer of land in the name of certain individuals. 2. Transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals in the form of lease and mortgage. 3. Encroachments, which is another mode of dispossessing the tribals of their land. This is adopted by non-tribals taking advantage of the lack of land records. The landlords and moneylenders devised an obvious method by means of which they develop false relationships with tribal women folk to purchase the land in their names as the regulation prohibits the transfer of land from one tribal to another non-tribal. These non-tribals, though already married, enter into wedlock with tribal women in order to acquire land without any legal complications. In the names of tribal wives, the landlords enjoy all modern inputs from developmental agencies free of cost or subsidized rates. The officials are not able to implement fully the provisions of the protective legislation as several non-tribal landlords and sources are breaking these protections by entering into the social fabric of tribal communities (Mohan Rao, 1993).

Table 1: Extent and Proportion of Common and Forest which have been Diverted/Acquired out of the Total State Area

State	Common Land Diverted (Hectares)	%	Forest Land Diverted (Hectares)	%
Andhra Pradesh	255077.7	25.33	67362.75	6.69
Assam	316041.66*	55.71	92034.49	16.23
Goa	2880	17.72	720	4.43
Gujarat	312653	6.15	1641427	32.31
Jharkhand	141226.1	22.56	139710.7	22.32
Kerala	1222.32	0.79	40673.62	26.2
Meghalaya	8022.07*	10.8	22492.37	30.28
Mizoram	1712.48*	8.14	15874.42	75.38
Nagaland	15985.47	61.97	1762.58	6.82
Orissa	264648.2	27.99	288845.9	30.2
Sikkim	NA	NA	2184.67	4.84
Tripura	27762.45*			32.76
West Bengal	328340.08*			17.02

* Full data on forest common revenue division not available. So they are combined.

Source: Report of the high-level committee on socio-economic, health and educational status of tribal communities of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs Government of India May, 2014

The data in Table 1 shows the percentage of tribal land that has been diverted for various purposes in the country. The reasons for this diversion have been dealt with earlier. In Tripura, 32 % has been diverted, which is primarily attributable to migration of people from East Pakistan and later Bangladesh. Although alienation of tribal land has been acute in most of the states, the level is far greater in Tripura. Land alienation and its consequences on the polity of the state lead to conditions that at times encourage terrorism and insurgency, thereby causing unintended changes in the very fabric of the state.

However, in the case of tribal and underdeveloped areas, the migration of different races superior in modern administrative acumen led to a hiatus in the integration of the backward tribals in a reasonable time space matrix. The after-effects of such resettlement and the infiltration of non-tribals caused land alienation, which led to further pauperization and exploitation of tribals. With the incorporation of tribal regions in modern nation states, electoral politics also dictated the infiltration of tribal regions by non-tribals with an eye on electoral gains. The resultant alienation, and the lack of compensation to the displaced persons (DPs), caused even more exploitation of tribals.

Indebtedness

Money-lenders and traders have traditionally held sway over the tribal population. In spite of all the possible legal and constitutional safeguards, the tribal population suffers from indebtedness and as a result land alienation. The link between private money-lending and indebtedness leading to sale or mortgage of tribal land to non-tribal people is well known and needs no elaboration.

“The economic viability of the crop and the question of crop cultivation relating to output, income and employment generation” have a strong link with the incidents of indebtedness, in addition to other social factors.

Legal Framework

A review of various land laws and reforms has been carried out, and this reveals the impact of laws on land alienation. The pre-existing tribal rights over forests form an important aspect of land management in the tribal region. However, the impact of customary and tribal laws, which have not been considered seriously as part of the legal framework, enabled the land alienation aspect of land management. A review of the latest judgements will reveal the challenge.

The tribals favoured shifting cultivation, and “as a result, they have not recognised alien forest laws and alien settlements that restricted shifting cultivation” (Debbarma, 2008, p. 114), which once modernization took place, imposed a severe handicap on the tribal population. The absence of traditional methods of farming meant that there were no codified land laws to prepare the ground for tenancy and ownership issues. The absence of a codified law, though befitting the tribal lifestyle, was a recipe for disaster in view of the incoming modernization in administration. The cultivation practiced by the tribals was “suitable for the culture of the indigenous people, the topography of the land and the climatic conditions” (Debbarma, 2008) but inadequate for modern civilization. However, it is pertinent to note that the AP Scheduled Areas and Transfer Regulations 1 of 70 (P Ram Reddy vs. State of AP

(1988)) prevents land alienation by prohibiting sale of tribal land to non-tribals. Even Para 5(2) of the 5th Schedule prohibits the transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals.

The law of 'Landlord and Tenant' was passed in 1886 by the independent state of Tripura and contained all the elements for converting communal land into individual property, meaning private ownership of land, which in the long run was going to be detrimental to the interests of the tribal population. More laws were enacted in order to exert control over forests and the land of tribals.

In a recent judgment on the UCO Bank vs. Dipak Debbarma case, the Supreme Court held invalid Section 187 of the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 as it was said to be inconsistent with the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (a Central Act) (Basar, 2016). Despite the Tripura Act being placed in the ninth schedule, it could not enjoy the legal immunity provided under Art. 31-B of the Constitution. The Central Act is held to prevail over the State Act by invoking the principle of predominance of dominant legislation (Basar, 2016).

Needless to say, the vested interests of powerful corporate houses and the political class joined hands to negate the Apex Court's verdict. As in Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), another judgment, on the Samatha case, also became a hurdle to "development" plans. In March 2000, the Supreme Court dismissed the petitions of State & Central governments for modification of the Samatha order. But the efforts to nullify the Samatha judgment by amendment to the Fifth Schedule continued in various government quarters despite the fact that the Supreme Court had not imposed a blanket ban on mining activity in the scheduled areas. Needless to say, the powerful corporate lobby will continue to exert pressure on policy makers to shrink their social responsibilities and cater to their own commercial interests.

Tripura – Physical and Historical Facts

Tripura is a small land-locked north eastern State of India, with an area of 10,477 square kilometres. It is bounded on the northwest, south, and southeast by Bangladesh and on the north-east by the states of Mizoram and Assam. The topography of the western part of Tripura is similar to the eastern part of Bangladesh with hill ranges of varying heights ranging from 1000 to 3000 feet, which emerge from Bangladesh and run through Tripura in a north-south direction till they converge in the dense forest areas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. The valleys between these picturesque ranges have fertile plains and seasonal rivers that get flooded during monsoons. Sixty per cent of the state's land comprises of rain forests, of which 5.7 per cent has been cleared for *Jhoom*[†] or 'shifting cultivation'. The topography does not offer any natural obstacle to migration, physical movement, and insurgency, and consequently becomes an important factor in land alienation and the resultant ethnic conflict.

A brief historical account of the State will put some issues pertaining to the issue of land alienation in Tripura in the correct perspective. The State of Tripura is believed to have been one of the oldest kingdoms in ancient India as per historical records. There are many differing opinions as to its specific origin, based on mythology and references made in the Sanskrit *Rajmala*, the royal chronicle of the kings of Tripura, and other scriptures. Most of the information pertaining to Tripura comes from the

[†] It is a nomadic mode of cultivation which in local language implies shifting cultivation.

studies on Tripura and its people undertaken by the British, and other published reports, notes, accounts, articles, etc. Indian and Tripuri sources were scarce and were almost negligible, especially in the English language. The source of information regarding the dynasty ruling the state comes from *Rajmala*, which gives an account of the various rulers in Tripura and the conditions prevailing then. Tripura, as is evident, is a hill state with a predominantly tribal population. However, it is pertinent to understand that tribal life and monarchy were not very effective in providing an administration that could look after the tribes living in far-flung places in the kingdom. In the absence of modern means of communications, the task of administration itself was very difficult. Beginning from 1891, the colonial regime encouraged East Bengal peasants to cultivate what they called wasteland in western Assam, which in reality was a source of tribal livelihood (Zehol, 2008: 60-61). Such expropriation gave rise to rebellions and revolts, which had by then become normal events in the hill kingdom against the atrocities committed on the tribals. The most conspicuous among these revolts were the Kuki revolt (1826-60), the Jamatia revolt (1863) and the Reang revolts (1939-45) against the policies of the state, particularly regarding taxes and the conduct of chieftains and Sardars. Unequal taxation and food shortages were the likely causes of these revolts and rebellions, which were worsened by the poor state of infrastructure in the hilly states and the lack of a modern system of administration to take care of the needs of the society. The causes, which date back to centuries, continued even in the twentieth century except that the context changed. Like the winds of change blowing across the country, Tripura also saw the birth of socio and political organizations. However, in the beginning, they all espoused social and religious causes and were not political in nature. The 'Jaana Mongol Samiti' or JMS, founded in the year 1936, was formed by a group of Bengali professionals with the aim of responsible government under the monarchy. Biren Dutta, the founder of Tripura Communist party, occupied an important position in the JMS and it is pertinent to note that this organization had agendas which were strongly pro-communist in nature. 'Jana Shiksha Samiti' or JSS was founded in 1945 to launch a mass literacy drive for the tribals. The organisation was founded by a few educated tribal youths. Thus it is obvious that even then the tribal youth were getting sensitized to the fact that the tribals were lagging behind the migrants in modern education and skills. JSS leadership also became conscious of issues like poverty, shifting cultivation and superstitions among the tribals, problems which did not go well with modern state organizations and systems. Tripura communists supported the JMS as they found its cause to be noble and this led to their growing support among the tribals.

The state has a long history. It was known as "Hill Tippera" till 1920 when its name was changed to "Tripura" at the request of the Maharaja of Tripura to the British. The challenges of converting a tribal kingdom into a modern administrative unit generating revenue for sustenance were huge. The growth of economic and mercantile activity in colonial mainland India also affected the administration and economy of Tripura. That this would have impact on land reforms was a foregone conclusion as land happens to be the main source of revenue and earnings in the region. The Tripura King, in order to raise revenue, started banking heavily on forest produce. Forest produce became the most important source of revenue and income. Vested and mercantile interests started indulging in illegal forest plundering in the absence of any regulatory authorities. The Forest Acts enacted in mainland India were introduced in the state. The need to put in place a modern administration and the

gap in availability of trained/educated manpower posed a challenge to the rulers. The need to generate revenue from the tribal society was also strong. The Tripura kings have controlled vast tracts including Comilla and parts of Chittagong, Noakhali and Dhaka divisions of contemporary Bangladesh, which brought them in contact with a large Bengali population. The Bengali influence on the kingdom can be assessed by the fact that even the *Rajmala* was written in Bengali in the fifteenth century. This pool of Bengali population provided the manpower to start modern cultivation and put in place a modern administrative structure in the state. The influx of Bengali population reached astounding proportions post independence, but the Bengali influence could be traced back to periods prior to that.

Two momentous events took place in 1947 concerning Tripura. Firstly, India attained Independence and secondly, Maharaja Bir Bikram Kisore Manikya Bahadur of Tripura died. Independence followed by Partition led to migration on a huge scale altering the demographic pattern of the State. The Tripura which became part of independent India did not have a defined boundary with Bangladesh and with no authorized entry points and border check-posts, migration took place without any control. It altered the rural urban ratio and also the occupational profile of the state, leading to pressure on the state's resources and challenges to the tribals. These changes were bound to make profound alterations in society, polity, culture, and economy. They threatened the ancestral land of the people due to large-scale migration as these areas, once sparsely populated, gradually became part of the densely populated South Asian economic space (Baruah, 2002). A divergence in the basic identity between the tribal way of life and the non-tribal way of life emerged (Ali, 2011). The State thus became densely populated and the state government settled the refugees through various schemes, which indirectly affected the tribal land. Thus in Tripura, "the conflict began after the tribals lost much land to the Bengali immigrants and the conflict is for its recovery" (Bhaumick, 2003: 85). In 1967, the Communists lost both the seats to the Congress and in the same year the Sangkrek or the clenched fist militant organization took birth and also the TUJS (Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti). The issue of marginalization and autonomy took root in the polity of Tripura. In 1978 Congress was voted out and a Communist government came to power with a thumping majority. Elements of TUJS and Sengarak formed the Tripura National Volunteer Force (TNV) to fight for "Swadhin Tripura". The demand for a tribal state within a state was raised by the tribal organizations in Tripura. Tripura Autonomous District Council (TADC) came into existence in 1978 and came under the seventh schedule but in June 1980 violence broke out and it was only in 1982 that elections could be held for TADC. The tribals were however not satisfied with the seventh schedule. In 1985 the TADC was bought under the sixth schedule. In 2000 the INPT came to power amidst allegations of extremist threats, kidnappings etc., and the threat of National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT). However, the rising incidents of arson, killings, and murder led to the application of AFSPA in Tripura with effect from 16 Feb 1997. However, the CPI(M) government in Tripura concentrated on strengthening the grass root level tribal institutions for their effective integration and development. The effect of integrating tribals in the institutional framework of the state paid dividends as the level of violence went down significantly, leading to the revocation of AFSPA.

Tripura: Dynamics of Population

The dynamics of the population need to be seen in order to arrive at the reasons for land alienation. The land alienation in Tripura gave rise to conditions in which the tribals got marginalized, leading to agitation and insurgency taking root in the state. In this marginalization, land played a most important role, such as the loss of the commons managed by customary laws. But the root cause of marginalization was the population changes that took place. A look at the population parameters, especially in North East, will put in place the issue in correct perspective as far as the situation in Tripura is concerned.

Table 2: Basic Data on North East States

State	Area (Sq Km)	Urban Population (%)	Rural Population (%)
Arunachal Pradesh	83,743	23.02	76.98
Assam	78,438	15.40	84.60
Manipur	22,347	31.85	68.15
Meghalaya	22,429	20.07	79.93
Mizoram	21,081	52.15	47.85
Nagaland	16,257	28.87	71.13
Tripura	10,492	26.17	73.83
Sikkim	7,096	24.97	75.03

Source: Basic Statistics, North East States, www.necouncil.gov.in

The data in Table 2 shows the nature of population in the North East, particularly in Tripura. The rural population in a predominantly hilly and underdeveloped state has to be dependent on agriculture as the means of sustenance. The land, its ownership, cultivation and other connected issues assume importance. However, the metamorphosis of a monarchy into the present democratic State as part of the Union of India ushered in substantial and unsettling social, economic and political changes, but the many infirmities showing up in these changes led to cyclic ethnic violence.

Table 3: Tripura Variations in Population during the last 110 years

Year	Total population (Nos)	Density of population per Sq km (Nos)	Absolute Variation (Nos)	Decennial growth rate (%)
1901	1,73,325	17		
1911	2,29,613	22	56,288	32.48
1921	3,04,437	29	74,824	32.59
1931	3,82,450	36	78,013	25.63
1941	5,13,010	49	1,30,560	34.14
1951	6,45,707	62	1,32,697	25.87
1961	11,42,205	109	4,96,498	76.89
1971	15,56,342	148	4,14,137	36.26
1981	20,53,058	196	4,96,716	31.92
1991	27,57,205	263	7,04,147	34.30
2001	31,99,203	305	4,41,998	16.03
2011	36,71,032	350	4,71,829	14.75

Source: Statistical Abstract, Government of Tripura, 2010-11

Table 2 shows the manner in which the demographic changes in Tripura took place, which caused the various imbalances in the sharing of resources, leading to the birth of insurgency. The growth of the non-tribal population contributed to a skewed land ownership structure, state administration and miscellaneous services. These demographic changes are like societal influences on the state that have also grown, diversified and assumed new forms leading to consequences for the state's polity (Sellers, 2010). These influences on society assumed different forms, and one form is the violent struggle and alienation among tribals. Another was the growing sense of identity among ethnic groups and the feeling of belonging people had toward their ethnic group. In fact, group identity reinforces the socio-cultural approach to the Indian Constitution, which endeavours to protect the identity of various groups. Group identity was the cause for the linguistic formation of Indian States and later for the redrawing of borders based on tribal identities.

The ecological inferences derived by using macro level data to infer micro level relationships and then used to study the behaviour of individuals or groups which in this case are the tribals of Tripura reveal some interesting issues. Though such studies may result in ecological myths, yet they give an insight into the condition of land alienation and its effect in Tripura. Even when the survey data available is limited, ecological or combined inferences may be drawn for studying geographical areas having issues like accessibility, security, and distribution. The ecological inference is being made by using the social, economic and law/order data from Tripura. An analysis of the economic performance of Tripura will reveal the effect on land holdings due to migration, resulting in terrorism, and its influence on the nominal GDP and income of the state. That migration led to lopsided land distribution and caused discontent and later violence is evident in the study. The changes in Tripura were not the result of good governance practices imbibed over a period of time but were the result of the State-sponsored rehabilitation schemes launched to settle the immigrants as a result of the partition of the country and the powerlessness of the tribals to react to the changing scenario.

Migration and Its Effect on Society

Partition of India disturbed the age-old socio-economic relationship of Tripura with the British Bengal and the very foundation of its socio-economic framework (De, 2012). It also altered the rural urban ratio and the occupational profile of the state leading to pressure on state resources and posed problems to the tribals. These developments were bound to make profound changes in society, polity, culture, and economy. The sparsely populated region suddenly became densely populated thereby putting pressure on resources, particularly land. However, the concept of ethnicity that emerged in Tripura is attributable to the changing politico economic processes rather than ethnic factors, which were manipulated to meet the narrow ends of vested interests (Ghosh, 2003). However, a negative identity also started emerging when tribals lost land and reserve forests to non-tribals (Ali, 2011). The ethnic identity was reinvented, and the churning in society attributable to politico-economic processes acquired an ethnic colour to meet those challenges. The demographic transition which took place in Tripura due to migration reduced the population of indigenous tribes proportionately compared to the migrant Bengalis, who now account for 51.58% of the population against the tribal population of 31.75%, as per the Census of India 2011. The relevant data available from 1951 census indicates that

at the beginning of the plan period the relative status of the Scheduled Tribes in respect of ownership of land was much superior to that of the Scheduled Castes and also superior to the other higher castes. However, an important aspect of urbanization of Tripura is that migrants, especially migrant Bengalis, played an important role in this particular aspect. The industrialization and development of this backward state revolved around Agartala till as late as 1991, starting from 1864 when Agartala was a village of 864 inhabitants (Bhattacharjee, 1995). The migrant Bengalis played a constructive role in the growth and development of Agartala in particular and Tripura as a whole. The fact that Tripura was not cadastrally surveyed led to the problem of tenancy later, a fact that needs to be kept in mind. Even after the arrival of migrants, the tribals ran their economic and social life according to their customary law.

The fact that the migration of Bengalis was huge from 1941 to 1971 can lead to the application of the “limited good” theory of the peasant environment, which generated extreme envy in Tripura society as the tribals got increasingly marginalised. Even the theory of “tunnel effect” as enunciated by Albert O Hirschman, wherein societies will tolerate inequalities for a limited period of time and after which revolutionary behaviour can emerge from the population (Midlarsky, 1988), can be seen in action. As quoted above, ethnicity also has an economic angle. Any change in the land holding pattern will be taken as an infringement of rights by the sons of the soil. The tribal population, which formed 64 per cent in 1874, gradually started reducing. The various census reports showed a downtrend: 52 per cent in 1931, 37 per cent in 1951, 28.44 per cent in 1981, 29.59 per cent in 1991, 26.74 per cent in 2001 and 31 per cent in 2011 (Statistical Abstract 2014, Government of Tripura).

Table 4: Size of Holdings in Tripura

Size in ha	Total number of holdings	Total Area under cultivation (ha)
0 to 1.0 ha (Marginal)	4,90,569	1,39,405
1.0 to 2.0 (Small)	54,448	74,575
2.0 to 4.0 (Semi-Medium)	45,950	45,950
4.0 to 10.09 (Medium)	1,942	10,292
10.0 to 20.0 and above (Large)	161	10,212

Source: Statistical Abstract 2014, Government of Tripura

Table 5: Distribution of Scheduled Tribes Population in Tripura

District	Rural (Nos)	Urban (Nos)	% of ST Population of Total District Population
West Tripura	149847	26749	19.23
Sepahijala	118385	1016	24.69
Khowai	138104	1433	42.60
South Tripura	151329	1362	35.45
Gomati	184007	4547	42.70
North Tripura	109696	7410	28.05
Unokoti	60561	1759	22.54
Dhalai	205637	4971	55.68

Source: Statistical Abstract 2014, Government of Tripura

Table 4 and 5 above clearly highlight the marginal nature of agricultural holdings in the state, and with the percentage of tribal population being so high it can only lead to their pauperization and marginalisation in the absence of any positive affirmative action by the state. Land holdings of small and marginal farmers are the highest, clearly indicating the economic conditions of the farmers whose productivity, being small and marginal farmers, has been historically low; hence the connected poverty in the group. The alienation of tribal land started taking place the moment shifting agriculture was replaced by plough agriculture by the Maharaja and the tribals' inability to cope with the change in agriculture pattern. Later on, the arrival of immigrants led to tribal land being re-appropriated to rehabilitate the migrants from East Pakistan. In 1948 the first ever farmers' cooperative was formed in Dharmanagar (now Kanchannagar subdivision), and in 1950 a total of 6400 acres of tribal land was transferred for the rehabilitation of the migrants. As a result, the Reang (Bru) tribe was deprived of their land (Fernandes, 2011). Apart from the 6400 acres lost in 1950, the gradual land alienation led to tribals losing not less than 26,101.2 hectares to rehabilitation colonies, out of which 5440 hectares were private land and the balance tribal commons.

In the case of Tripura, the cause of land alienation was also due to the gap between the consumption and earnings of tribals with money lending worsening it (Gupta, 1991). Way back in 1974, an empirical study carried out by the Government of Tripura in the Mohanpur block of West Tripura attributed the cause of land alienation to money lending. However, a 1987 study by Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India attributed it to the sale of land rather than money lending. Apart from shifting cultivation, it was also due to the evolution of other factors, such as the emergence of class structure within the tribal population. The fact that "tribals inhabited the hills and found the hill slopes unsuitable for plough cultivation was another reason for the practice of 'Jhum' cultivation persisting in the state" (Gupta, 1994: 148). Tripura tribals have been practising Jhoom cultivation and hence land records have not been kept up to date. The problem starts when migrants having better information on land records start inhabiting areas where tribals stay. The land records of non-tribals follow the modern legal pattern while previously no tenancy laws existed in the state. Incomplete and unsatisfactory land records have merely aggravated the problem of land alienation (Dubey & Murdia, 1977).

The Tripura kings were ruling a region which was hilly and inhabited by simple tribals, who were spread thinly over a vast area. The task of running a state in the 15th century onwards required a modern educated and trained bureaucracy to help the King in running the affairs of the state. The early period of the fifteenth century saw the embrace of Bengali as a common language by the King and the employment of Bengali migrants to run the affairs of the state. The trickle which started in the fifteenth century led to a psychological and social link with Bengalis settled in erstwhile East Pakistan. Once the country got partitioned, the Bengali Hindus found that migrating to Tripura was an easy and comfortable option to escape exploitation and carnage. After Independence, the trickle of settlers became a torrent between 1947 and 1971 due to the deteriorating political and law order situation in the area. The main effect of migration was the opening of the forest land for the migrants. The forest land in the interior was allotted to the migrants, who were basically cultivators. The opening of forest land had an adverse impact on Jhoom cultivation as the land available came down and the intensity of cultivation increased dramatically. The reduction in available land led to the gradual alienation of tribal

land. Even the economy of Tripura was not so evolved during that period being in transition from Jhoom to an economy created by migrants. The tribal lot suffered drastically and incidents of indebtedness increased. The unequal relationship between tribals and non-tribals proved catastrophic for the tribal lot. The economic marginalization went hand in hand with the cultural arrogance of the migrants, who were dominating the administration by virtue of the fact that they were exposed to the modern thoughts of administration. This also led to the growth of pedagogy in the Bengali language as the migrants were controlling the policy making apparatus of the state. The alienation of the tribals took place on all the fronts - economic, social and political. Table 6 highlights the number of migrants in the state; their magnitude is high in view of the small population of the state (De, 2012).

Table 6: Year wise Migration of Refugees in Tripura

Year	Number of displaced person (Nos)
1947	8,124
1948	9,554
1949	10,575
1950	67,151
1950-51	1,84,000
1951-52	23,300
1952-53	80,000
1953-54	3,200
1954-55	4,700
1955-56	17,500
1956-57	57,000
1957-58	3,600
1958-63	Registration discontinued
Total	4,69,404

Sources: R.B.Vaghaiwalla, Census of India, 1951, Vol XII, Assam, Manipur and Tripura, Part I-A, Report, Shillong, 1954, p-359; A.K. Bhattacharya, Tripura a portrait of population, Census of India, 1971, Published by Controller of Publication, Civil Lines, New Delhi

Tripura tribals meanwhile had become heavily dependent upon Jhoom cultivation, which was nomadic in nature and in the modern sense did not provide a source of revenue to the King. However, tribal needs were being adequately met by the practice of shifting cultivation or Jhoom cultivation. The need to have revenue and a modern system of agriculture forced the King to settle immigrants who can adopt plough cultivation and thereby modernize the sector. However, the forest region where the tribals were spread over were parcelled and granted to the immigrants so that plough cultivation can commence. The granting of land rights to migrants was something alien to the tribal way of life. This continued even after independence and gradually led to the further marginalization of tribals during the period the modern agricultural economy was taking root in the state. Meanwhile, the needs of the tribals increased with their increasing population while their productivity declined due to shrinking land for Jhoom cultivation and the declining yield of Jhoom farmers. The alienation of tribal land moved apace and a vast majority of them became landless over a period of time, the process hastened by the

exploitation of money lenders, who gradually usurped the land of the tribals (Gupta, 1991). The relative prosperity of the immigrants and their higher educational attainments led to their cornering land and all bureaucratic jobs in the state leading to acute marginalization and poverty among the tribals. Although the King saw the writing on the wall and even declared it a protected area for the tribals, he was not able to stop the deteriorating conditions of the tribals, who were heavily dependent on shifting cultivation. In spite of the forests being protected, the democratic regime in the state kept on allocating land from this region to the immigrants thereby compromising the status and condition of the tribals; simultaneously other causes kept worsening their alienation. Even Vasquez's Territorial theory says that territory plays an important role in conflict (Vasquez, 1993) while the State in Society theory at the other end of the spectrum says that the Society reacts to State and this readjustment of position leads to weakening of the State's hold on the region where such a situation develops (Migdal, 2001). The marginalization of tribals led to the formation of various militant and not so militant groups, which demanded special rights, autonomy and in some cases even secession from the Indian state. The formation of militant groups led to unprecedented violence, which provoked a reaction from the state in the form of various laws to curb violence so that development can take place. However, during this period of intense pressure on land, the state tried to accommodate the demands of the tribal groups. The interaction of various other forces in the region, such as the other movements in North East, also sparked violence which affected the state immensely. Table 7 shows the violence level in the state and the manner in which the situation was brought under control through political initiatives and the application of AFSPA.

Table 7: Terrorist Related Casualties Data for Tripura

Years	Civilians (Nos)	Security Force Personnel (Nos)	Terrorists (Nos)	Total (Nos)
1992	59	18	21	98
1993	148	28	7	183
1994	206	22	10	238
1995	178	34	45	257
1996	140	31	18	189
1997	205	50	19	274
1998	214	25	26	265
1999	240	41	22	303
2000	453	16	45	514
2001	239	31	42	312
2002	94	43	38	175
2003	195	39	61	295
2004	66	38	63	167
2005	34	8	31	73
2006	11	19	30	60
2007	10	5	21	36
2008	7	4	17	28
2009	9	1	1	11

2010	0	2	1	3
2011	1	0	0	1
2012	0	0	2	2
2013	0	0	0	0
2014	2	2	0	4
2015	0	0	0	0
2016	0	0	0	0
2017	0	0	0	0

Sources: www.satp.com

The impact on the law and order situation and the economic well-being of the tribals because of the alienation was immense. However, with the sincere effort of the State government and the control of violence by Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), there was a decline in violence. The establishment of TTAADC that followed ensured that the welfare of the tribals was looked after. The reduction in violence is evident in Table 7 and was one of the main reasons for the withdrawal of AFSPA in the state.

Constitutional Measures

Legal changes were introduced in the existing tenancy laws to facilitate land acquisitions by the migrants. The Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reform Act, 1960 recognized individual ownership of land and that which was registered with the state. The Act meant that in case the illiterate tribal was not able to register the land, then he will not have the ownership of it. The illiterate tribals were the worst sufferers of the Act. The alienation as discussed earlier led to the injection of violence in the polity of the state.

Tripura is primarily a rural state, where 85% of the population is rural. The institution of Panchayati Raj was introduced first by Tripura Panchayati Raj Act, 1959. The state started the Panchayati Raj institutions beginning from the earliest period since independence. The 73rd Amendment Act was passed in 1992 and Tripura became the first state to implement the same in the year 1993 with the enactment of the Tripura Panchayat Raj Act, 1993. It led to the establishment of a three-tier Panchayat Raj system having a Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti, and the Gram Panchayat. In the beginning itself, 12 departments were given to the Panchayati Raj institutions and in the year 2000 additional tasks were transferred to the Panchayats. Similar arrangements were done in the Nagar Palikas also with the passage of the 73rd Amendment. Before the 73rd Amendment, the Gram Panchayat was the institution that implemented labour intensive activities in the villages, based on the direction of various departments. Tripura was one of the few states which framed its Panchayati Raj Act based on the 72nd and 73rd Amendment Act and it was one of the first states to establish the State Finance Commission and accept its report. Although the devolution of power, responsibilities, and resources was being done at the state level, it was not sufficient to empower the people. The State government decided to impart the minimum possible skills for developmental planning to the local people for effective utilization of funds available with the Panchayati Raj institutions. The Tripura Land Revenue

and Land Reform Act, 1960 aimed to correct the land alienation among tribals. However, the Act was not very effective in checking the same.

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) was set up on 18 January 1982 under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. The task of the Seventh Schedule is to empower tribals and to take care of the vulnerable sections, but on some counts it was not considered adequate. Hence the provisions of the Sixth Schedule were extended to Tripura from 1st April 1985 by the 49th Amendment to the Constitution. The area under the jurisdiction of TTAADC is a whopping 68 per cent of the State of Tripura. Under it, the tribals enjoy political and administrative authority to run their affairs without any dispute with the state government. The TTAADC accommodates around 66 per cent of the tribal population and thereby empowers tribals who are still leading a life dominated by tribal rules and style. However, the Autonomous District Council (ADC) implementation was slow due to Bengali misgivings of being marginalized. Unhappy migrant Bengalis responded by forming a militant organization called 'Amra Bangali', giving a violent colour to the land alienation issues. The ADC also faces issues of governance and capacity building and has been inefficient. The financing of ADCs is neglected and they do not have enough budgetary allocations to carry out their charter of duties. Since tenancy laws were not in place, even the ADCs were not very successful in reclaiming the alienated land of the tribals. Nevertheless, the creation of conditions to redress the grievances and concerns of the tribals went a long way in ensuring that the marginalized tribals were bought back into the mainstream.

Conclusion

The scope of this study is limited to the secondary sources available and it is descriptive and exploratory in nature. Though it could have explored many issues in greater depth and provided a more comprehensive analysis of land alienation, it still should provide a framework to see the issue in its entirety. The ethnic groups in Tripura were marginalized as a result of migration, which took place in the state over a period of time. The fact that the circumstances during that period led to the marginalization of tribal and ethnic groups cannot be denied. The pressure on natural resources like land led to poverty and a sense of dispossession among the tribals, which found expression in violence and the demands for protection against migration. The Constitution of India was amended to take into consideration the aspirations of the ethnic groups in Tripura. The state government played the role of facilitator in looking after the aspirations of tribals. But the protection of the rights of ethnic groups may not necessarily lead to a fulfilment of their aspirations, as the root cause of poverty and infrastructure weakness can be overcome, not through constitutional protection but only through inclusive economic development and people's participation. However; the continuous stream of judicial and political interventions does display the State's inclination to provide an inclusive framework for the development of the tribal population.

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