

2 A Socio-Political Understanding of Human Development Condition: Mediation and Moderation of Social Conflicts

2.1 Mitigating Ethnic Contradictions in Tripura

Tripura is peopled with a number of ethno-cultural groups. How these varied population sub-groups fare in human development terms is an important issue to reckon with. This is because in many parts of the country some social groups seem to suffer more than others due to basic capability deprivations. In short, widespread social inequalities in the country yield a group-differentiated picture of human development. Moreover, ethno-cultural diversity itself may serve as a boon or a bane for improving human development achievements, depending upon the nature of democratic politics that shapes the climate of a given state. In several neighboring north eastern states of Tripura, inter-community tensions between tribal and non-tribal groups, as also intra-tribal rivalries, alleged cultural and economic domination by ‘outsiders’ and the latter’s alleged control over the land, resources, and trade in their regions seem to now and then disrupt their political processes. Against this general background of inter-community tensions in the country’s North-East, it is apt to ask to what extent the state of Tripura – its political and policy processes – has been able to deal with competing demands and interests of various ethnic groups residing within its territorial confines. We contend that these larger background political conditions have a significant bearing on its human development performance.

The Tribal Question

Tripura is one of the states in India that were the direct sufferers of the partition of India in 1947. Prior to 1949, Tripura was a princely state though its social characters were different from those of other monarchies of India. Tribal predominance in this province prevented it from becoming a full-fledged feudal society. No doubt, the influence of Bengali Hindu culture on the royal family (belonging to Tripuri tribe) and on the tribal people in general posed considerable challenge to the core of the indigenous culture, but the tribal system was not entirely marginalized. Various tribes with their own traditional systems of social organization continued to survive and even thrive under the monarchial rule. The tribal chiefs were at the helm of power in their respective

areas. The king of Tripura ruled the hills through these chiefs (Roychoudhury 1983). Although the share of the tribal population in the total was reduced by the end of the 19th century, their social, political and economic existence was not in danger till the merger.¹ The partition of British India followed by the merger of Tripura with the Union of India brought significant changes in this scenario. The heavy influx of Bengali ‘refugees’ from erstwhile East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh) not only brought about major demographic changes in Tripura but also posed serious threat to the economic, political and social life of the tribal population in the state. The ethnic contradiction between the Tribal and Bengali people took a serious turn in Tripura within the first two decades of its merger with India. The land, forest, and/or political power became the most contentious issues there. Ethnic issues gained a lot of political salience in the state particularly since the 1960s, contributing to the rise of inter-community tensions and imbalances. The state became one of the most troubled and insurgency-affected states in the country at the beginning of this century, raising a number of human security and human development challenges. However, it is important to note that by the end of the first decade of this century considerable improvement was evident in inter-community relations in the state, with a significant decline in the incidence of militant activities on the part of the insurgent groups, particularly in the present decade.² The recent decision of the State Government to revoke the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), which was in force in the state since 1997, is indicative of this improvement.

It is important to pay attention, albeit limited, to public policies and larger public action in the state that may have something to do with this relative social stability experienced by the people of Tripura in recent times, as this will help shed light on ways in which claims and counter-claims of different ethnic groups can be mediated and balanced optimally for human development purposes. The analysis that follows is both constructive and critical in the sense that it aims to focus on both achievements of the state in this respect as well as the challenges that still demand urgent attention. The promises and perils that surround the ethnic and tribal question in Tripura are discussed in the following sections with respect to land-related issues as well as those of forest rights that had a lot to do with the emergence of insurgency in Tripura. This is

¹ By 1881 the tribal population was reduced to 52 percent in Tripura, see, Bhattacharya (1988).

² The number of insurgency related incidents that took place in Tripura in 2003 was 394 which declined to 8 only in 2014. See, GoI, MoHA 2004 and 2015.

followed by a brief discussion on educational and occupational mobility of the tribal groups in the state. Finally, we examine the extent and nature of political participation of various social and ethnic groups to get a sense of the overall democratic climate within which human development endeavors of the state are embedded.

2.2 Land Rights

Access to land was a salient issue in Tripura since the time of the kings. The rent from land was one of the principal sources of revenue for the kings, but there was little scope for imposing this rent in hilly areas as the tribal people living there used to pursue Jhum (shifting) cultivation for their subsistence.³ Hence, the rulers of Tripura actively encouraged the arrival of Bengali cultivators in Tripura towards the end of the 19th century to augment revenue of the state by giving land rights to them for the purpose of settled agriculture (Ganguly 1983). This caused a concern but not panic among the tribals about land dispossession. After Partition, however, the situation took a different turn. The heavy influx of Bengali refugees caused an extraordinary pressure on land resulting in alienation of tribals from their land. It affected even the communities that were pursuing Jhum cultivation. As Dasgupta (1986) suggests, the Jhumias started facing a genuine problem of land shortage after the partition of the country due to the continuous migration of people from erstwhile East Bengal that in turn pushed the tribal Jhumias further inside the forest. State policies, especially those in force till mid-1970s, contributed in no mean measure to the alienation of tribals from their land. The government opened up even core tribal areas for the settlement of Bengali refugees that were earmarked as a Tribal Reserve by King Bir Bikram Manikya Bahadur in 1943 (Misra 1976). The land reform Act was amended in 1974 to partially restore land for the tribals, but at once it legalized land transfers to non-tribals that had taken place before 1969. Bhattacharya (1988) claims that between 1951 and 1971 there was a steady increase in the number of agricultural labourers among the tribals, pointing to a loss of land on their part. The Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS), the first ever tribal political organization that came into existence in Tripura in 1967, raised the demand for restoration of tribal land since its inception (Ghosh 2003). Bhowmik's (2012) inquiry on militants belonging to the unit called Tripura National Volunteer (TNV) militants in 1984 found that 64 percent of

³Jhum cultivation, identified also as 'slash and burn' cultivation, is traditionally practiced by the tribals. The vegetative cover of the hill slopes is cleared first in this method by setting on fire and crops are then sown there. After the harvesting of crops, this cultivation site is left for some years for further cultivation.

these families lost their land to the Bengalis and 32 percent of them, being Jhumia families, had no fresh land for cultivation.

The reluctance on the part of the state to fully restore tribal lands that had been transferred to the non-tribals in 1950s and 1960s hardened the basis for tribal resentment towards the state. The relatively low incidence of restoration, as compared to that of cases of transfer to non-tribals, was another cause for concern. According to the Department of Revenue (L R Cell), Government of Tripura, physical restoration of tribal land was completed for 9572 cases as on March 2014 while the number of total petition made for restoration was 29168, i.e., restoration was complete for 33 percent of total petitions only. Studies also suggest that the incidence of alienation of land was much higher than that of restoration. According to Bhattacharya (1988), the total number of cases of alienation that took place in Tripura after 1968 was 20,000, as per the estimates of the Revenue Department of Tripura in 1986, whereas the number of cases settled for restoration was 3,600 till November, 1986 (18 percent of estimated cases of alienation). It means that there were many incidents of transfer for which tribals could not produce valid documents for the purpose of restoration. Ghosh (2003) mentions that the number of applications made for restoration of land till 1994 was 26,952 and that out of this total only for 7000 cases restoration was ordered (26 percent of total applications). **The incidence of restoration, thus, fell short of adequately responding to the challenge of widespread land alienation that had already occurred** (Table 2.1). There might have been instances of alienation that were not even brought to the notice of the concerned authorities with a demand for restoration.

The land that was transferred to Hari Debnath (name changed) of Salema block in Dhalai district is a case in point. As our survey revealed, his parents came down to settle in the present village nearly 45 years ago from another part of the same district. His father, a timber merchant, bought some agricultural land here from a tribal family who had left that village a few decades ago and never claimed the land for restoration.

All these indicate the limited success of the government in restoring tribal land in Tripura.⁴ This partly explains why nearly two-thirds of the respondents, in a survey on the political behavior of the people in Tripura conducted during the Parliamentary Election of 2009, reported that the

⁴ Importantly we found some incidents of fresh alienation in our survey that had taken place in the last 10 years.

government needed to take effective measures to recover the land transferred from tribals to non-tribals (Debbarma and Debbarma 2009).

Thus the issue of restoration of tribal land continues to be salient in Tripura.

Table-2.1. Restoration of tribal lands in Tripura till 2014

Source of information	Reference year for column 4 to 7	Estimated incidents of alienation of land that took place since 1969	Applications made for restoration		Order passed for restoration	
			No. of applications	Area (in acres)	No. of cases	Area (in acres)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bhattacharya 1988	Till November 1986	20,000	-	-	3600	3236.34
Ghosh 2003	Till December 1994	-	26,952	23,240.16	7,000	5,813.95
Tripura HDR 2007	Till September 2005	-	-	-	8,915	7,147.00
Revenue Department (L R Cell), Government of Tripura	Till March 2014	-	29168	25487.67	9572	8146.040

However, the distribution of *khas* land and ceiling surplus land to the landless and marginal tribal peasants suggests a somewhat more promising scenario. According to the Revenue Department (L R Cell), Government of Tripura, the amount of government *khas* land distributed to the people till March 2014 was 231,757.375 acres, covering 199,356 families. STs are found to have benefitted the most from this distribution – 61 percent of the *khas* land (distributed) and 42 percent of the benefitted families belonged to STs (see Table 2.2). Our field survey also suggests that the distribution of *khas* and ceiling surplus land was higher among the tribals than among the SCs and other social groups.

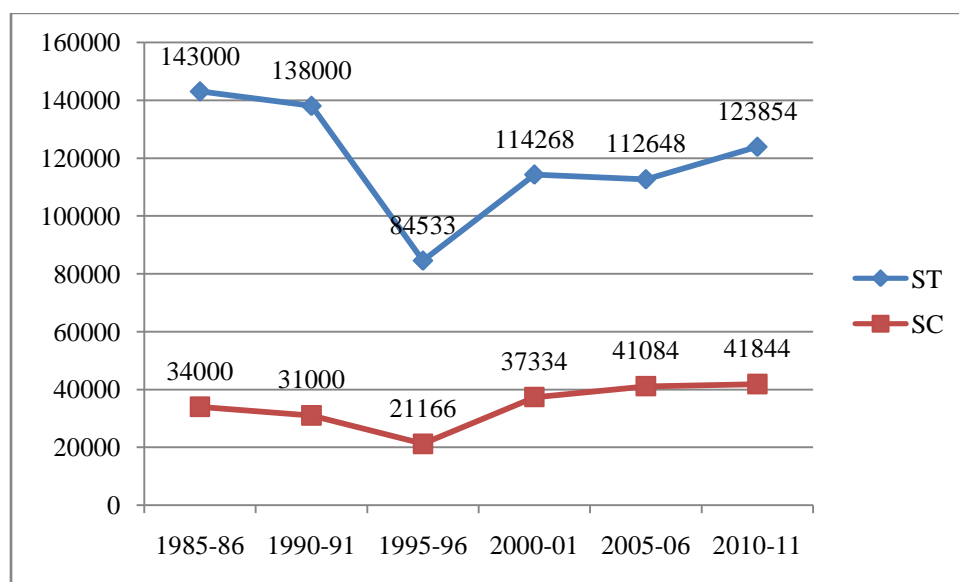
Table-2.2. Share of various social groups in allotted government *khas* land in Tripura (till March, 2014)

Social Identity	Number of families benefitted	Percent to total benefitted families	Area of land allotted (in acres)	Percent to total allotted land
ST	83560	41.9	142275.64	61.4
SC	34509	17.3	35818.73	15.5
OBC	18277	9.2	2531.28	1.1
Religious Minorities	5450	2.7	2974.16	1.3
Others	57560	28.9	48157.57	20.8
All	199356	100.0	231757.38	100.0

Source: Revenue Department (L R Cell), Government of Tripura

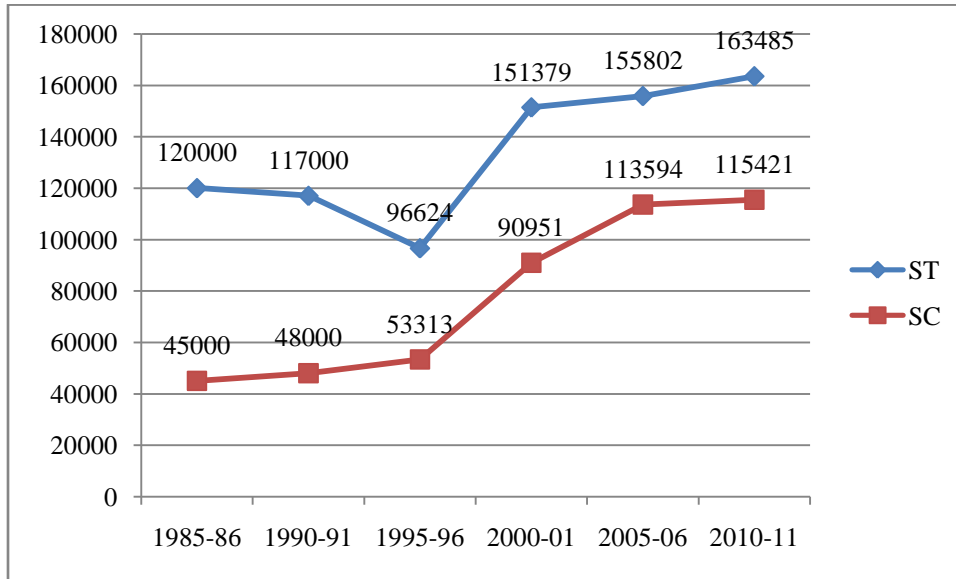
Probing deeper, the Agricultural Census indicates that although the area of land distributed to the STs might have been higher than that distributed to the SCs and other social groups in the period of 1995-2010, there was not much difference in the number of ST and SC beneficiaries (Fig-2.1 and Fig-2.2). Again, Chakraborty (1988) estimated in the 1980s that the surplus land available was not enough to meet the demands of landless Jhumias among the tribal people of Tripura. As the Agricultural Census data show, over time the area of the operational landholdings of the STs has contracted considerably (see fig-2.1).

Fig-2.1. Variation in area of operational holdings (in hectares) in Tripura by social identity



Source: GoI, MoA, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation 1994 (for 1985-86 & 1990-91) and GoI, MoA, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, No date (for rest of the years).

Fig-2.2. Variation in number of operational holdings in Tripura by social identity



Source: GoI, MoA, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation 1994 (for 1985-86 & 1990-91) and GoI, MoA, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, No date (for rest of the years).

Encouragingly, however, we find that the share of tribals in total operational holdings was 44 percent in 2010-11. This was higher than the tribals' share in total population (32 percent). This is also true for all the north eastern states and a few other states in India having tribal population of 10 percent or more, except for Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan (see tTble2.3). In these three states, the tribals' share in total operational holding was lower than their share in total population. It is important to note that the social groups other than the STs and SCs had 42 percent of the total operational holdings in Tripura in 2010-11. SCs owned the smallest proportion of cultivable land in Tripura (15 percent).

Table-2.3. Distribution of operational holdings in 2010-11 across social groups in selected Indian states having ST population of 10 per cent or more

State	ST		SC		Others		Total Holding	Total area (in hectares)
	% of population	% of area	% of population	% of area	% of population	% of area		
Tripura	31.8	43.56	17.8	14.72	50.4	41.73	578152	284358
Assam	12.4	18.86	7.2	5.53	80.4	75.62	2715175	2739752
Manipur	35.1	45.96	3.8	2.48	61.1	51.57	150595	171885
Meghalaya	86.1	100.00	0.6	0.00	13.3	0.00	208848	286167
Mizoram	94.4	100.00	0.1	0.00	5.5	0.00	91736	104529
Nagaland	86.5	100.00	0.0	0.00	13.5	0.00	177763	1071523
Arunachal Pradesh	68.8	100.00	0.0	0.00	31.2	0.00	106528	380263
Sikkim	33.8	55.07	4.6	4.82	61.6	40.11	73879	103142
Jharkhand	26.2	45.39	12.1	10.21	61.7	44.40	2703893	3152051
Odissa	22.8	33.65	17.1	11.78	60.1	54.57	4665568	4798607
Chhattisgarh	30.6	42.46	12.8	7.81	56.6	49.64	3746480	5084048
Madhya Pradesh	21.1	20.05	15.6	8.48	63.3	71.47	8869989	15813213
Gujarat	14.8	9.86	6.7	3.00	78.5	87.14	4880565	9819915
Rajasthan	13.5	8.49	17.8	11.73	68.7	79.78	6875553	21026636
Goa	10.2	27.69	1.7	0.42	88.1	71.89	77895	86943

Source: [Census of India 2011 and](#) GoI, MoA, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, No date.

On balance, the effective implementation of the land reform programme in Tripura has had a role to play in dealing with tribal discontent vis-a-vis land alienation. At the same time, however, land rights entail broader claims for restoration of land – an issue that remains politically salient in Tripura and has a potential to re-germinate seeds of insurgency in the state.

2.3 Forest Rights

Similar to the alienation from land, alienation of tribals from the forest was also an important factor for the emergence of insurgency in Tripura. Seeds of such alienation were sown in the late

19th century when forests started getting reserved by the king. With the continuation of such trendseven under the subsequent colonial rule, at the end of 1943, more than one-fourth of the state's total territory became reserved forest (Misra 1976 and Dasgupta 1986). As a result of it, the tribals lost their traditional right for jhuming in those forests that became reserved. The process got intensified after the merger of Tripura with India. More than one-third of the state's geographical area became Reserved Forests by 1980 when the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 came into being.⁵ Thus, unavailability of land for jhum cultivation became a serious issue in Tripura. The heavy influx of refugees made the situation worse as they were settled even in the hilly areas. In the absence of sufficient land for jhuming, jhum cycles got truncated, resulting in low yields. Moreover, the tribals lost access to non-timber forest produce which was very important for their survival. All these resulted in a livelihood crisis for the Jhumias.⁶ Thus, the right to forest land and forest produce became a contentious issue for the tribals in Tripura. While this demand resonated with those raised by tribals in other parts of the country, it had a special link with the crisis of Jhum cultivation in Tripura. Jhumias became an important motive force behind the rise of insurgency in Tripura. According to Bhowmik (2012), the poor Jhumias were the main recruitment base for the underground militant organizations in Tripura.

However, since the time of kings (late 19th century), there was an effort on behalf of the state to wean the Jhumias away from shifting cultivation. After the merger of Tripura with the Union of India, the Government tried to induce the Jhumias to take up plough cultivation by providing them land (Misra 1976). The government schemes for the rehabilitation of the Jhumias through individual resettlement (for settled agriculture) seemed to be a relatively effective alternative for the Jhumias. The Government also introduced colony schemes for the rehabilitation of the Jhumias (for settled agriculture) though it did not meet with much success. Altogether 13,155 families out of 42,500 Jhumia families (31 percent) were rehabilitated in Tripura till January, 1976 (Bhattacharya 1988). However, owing to the paucity of flat land for their settlement since the 1970s, the government started to rehabilitate the Jhumias, mainly through horticulture and rubber plantation schemes for which plain land is not necessary. These two schemes have been found to be reasonably effective for rehabilitating the Jhumias (Dasgupta 1986 and Roy 2014). According to

⁵ As per the Government of Tripura, the notified area of Reserved Forest and Proposed Reserved Forest was 3571.383 and 254.203 square kilometer respectively in 1980. That is, the Reserved Forests alone then comprised more than one third of the geographical area of the state.

⁶ For detail, see Misra (1976) and Dasgupta (1986).

the Tripura HDR 2007, the number of Jhumia families that were rehabilitated through horticulture and rubber plantation scheme was 8,962 and 9,445 respectively for the period of 1986-2005. As per the records of the Directorate of Welfare for Scheduled Tribes, Government of Tripura, the number of Jhumia families that benefitted economically from horticulture plantation scheme was 49,325 for the period of 1955-2015 involving 49,326 hectares of land. The corresponding figure for rubber plantation scheme was 26,129 for the period of 1992-2015 involving 26129 hectares of land. According to the Office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Government of Tripura, the land used for the rehabilitation of the Jhumias under the rubber plantation scheme was one-fifth of the total rubber plantation area in 2014 in Tripura. There are some additional schemes aimed to facilitate the process of rehabilitation of Jhumias. As per the Directorate of Welfare for Scheduled Tribes, Government of Tripura, the number of Jhumia families that benefitted economically from tea and coffee plantation schemes was 1,454 (for the period of 2001-15) and 160 (for the period of 2008-2013) respectively. Similarly, according to the Department of Tribal Welfare (TRP & PTG), Government of Tripura, the number of Jhumia families receiving animal husbandry assistance till 2014 for their rehabilitation was 12,394. Thus, various departments and agencies in Tripura have been involved in rehabilitating the Jhumias relatively successfully. The Tripura HDR2007 also found a clear decline in the number of Jhumia families in the state. According to an estimate made by the Department of Tribal Welfare, Government of Tripura, there were 22,176 ‘hardcore’ Jhumia families in Tripura in 2015 (belonging to ‘primitive’ tribal group) who were still pursuing shifting cultivation. This figure was found to be 27,278 families in 2007 as per the record of the Forest Department.⁷ Our field survey shows that in nearly half of the total of 24 villages surveyed, people pursue jhum cultivation, albeit as a secondary occupation. It is important to note that all of these villages, except one, fall under the jurisdiction of Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council (TTAADC). On balance it appears that although there is a sizeable number of Jhumia households in Tripura that are exclusively dependent on shifting cultivation, the rehabilitation schemes have met the livelihood needs of Jhumias to a considerable extent, mitigating somewhat the material basis of insurgency.

⁷As cited in the Tripura HDR 2007.

The question of ensuring forest rights of the tribals is of course much broader than the more specific task of rehabilitating Jhumias, and the role of the state in this regard is perceived to be ambivalent. Although the introduction of the joint forest management (JFM) system is considered by some people as an important step in the right direction, there is no unanimity of thoughts in this regard (see Sarker 2009 and Upadhyay 2003). Of course the revised resolution taken by the Government of Tripura in 2001 regarding JFM facilitated greater involvement of the people in the protection and development of forests, but there were lingering concerns about the larger question of the right of forest dwellers to the forest.⁸ A major step was taken in this direction in 2006 with the passage of The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (henceforth, Right to Forest Act) in the Parliament.

Claiming their right on forest land, 66 percent of 1,82,340 individual claimants in Tripura received their title for 4,16,498.79 acres of forest land till September, 2013. With respect to the number of claimants that received titles, Tripura was ahead of Assam in the NorthEast.⁹ Even outside the NorthEast, out of the states having 10 percent or more of tribal population in their total, Tripura is found to be ahead of Jharkhand, Gujarat and Rajasthan in this regard (see Table 2.4). As per the Directorate of Welfare for Scheduled Tribes, Government of Tripura, a majority of the individual claims that was rejected in Tripura came from the non-tribal forest dwellers. For example, relevant data from the Directorate of Welfare for Scheduled Tribes show that while at the end of June 2015 the proportion of rejected application for individual right was little higher than 20 percent of the total applications for the STs (31,908 out of 1,57,602), it was almost 100 percent of the total applications for the 'other forest dwellers' (33,772 out of 33,774). Thus, Tripura seems to have made considerable progress in distributing land title to the tribals residing in the forests. It is important to note, however, that there are wide variations among the districts in regard to the approval of claims. Although the number of individual claims approved for the tribals was the highest for Dhalai (31,843), the proportion of approved claims was the highest for Unokoti (95 percent). The proportion of approved claims was found to be the lowest in Sipahijala district (57 percent, see Table A.2.3 in appendix).

⁸ The revised resolution on JFM entitled the JFM committees to have apart from usufruct benefits 50 percent of the net receipts from the sale of forest produce.

⁹ None of the other states in northeastern India implemented this Act in their states till then.

Table-2.4. Details of claims received, titles distributed and the extent of forestland for which titles distributed (as on 30.09.2013) in states of India having tribal population 10 percent or more*

States	Individual		Community		Extent of forest land for which titles distributed (in acres)		
	No. of claims received	% Distributed	No. of claims received	% Distributed	Individual	Community	Total
Tripura	182340	66.04	277	19.86	4,16,498.79	56.79	4,16,555.58 for 116100titles#
Assam	126718	27.94	5193	16.56	-	-	77,609.17 for 34,286 titles#
Chhattisgarh	-	-	-	-	-	-	6,15,652.18
Jharkhand	-	-	-	-	-	-	37,678.93
Odissa	530849	60.56	10951	24.03	510925	1,51,164.11	6,62,089.11
M.P	464212	36.41	16916	62.07	-	-	10,74,024.34
Rajasthan	69140	48.58	537	11.17	50,477.72	422.15	50,899.87
Gujarat	182869	22.42	8723	20.15	-	-	51,570.79 for 40,994titles#

* Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Goa with tribal population 10 percent or more are yet to implement the Right to Forest Act 2006.

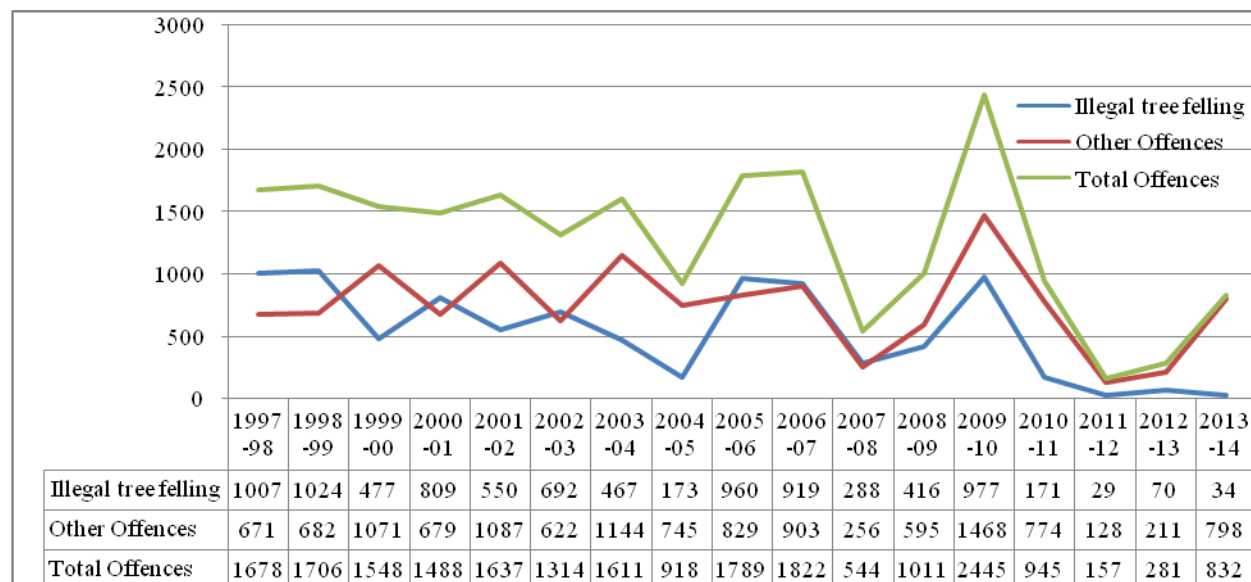
[As per the source cited below](#) The Governments of Tripura, Chhattisgarh, Assam and Gujarat have not furnished updated information regarding the extent of forest land in respect of all the titles that have been distributed. [However, more recent information provided by the Government of Tripura indicates that 64 per cent of 187,791 individual claimants in Tripura received their title for 2,90,511.91 acres of forest land till September 2013.](#)

Source: GoI, MoTA, No date.

However, it is intriguing to note that neither the progressive implementation of the Right to Forest Act 2006 nor the formation of JFM committees seems to have a bearing on the reduction of forest-related 'offences' in Tripura. In 2000-01, on the eve of revised resolution regarding JFM, the number of cases recorded by the Forest Department for illegal tree felling and other forest 'offences' was found to be 1488. After five years of revised resolution when the number of

JFM committees increased to 472 in 2006 from 174 in 2000, the number of total forest ‘offences’ also increased to 1822 in 2006-07 (see fig-2.3 for forest ‘offences’ and appendix table-A.2.4 for JFM committees). More generally speaking, there is no clear pattern evident in the rise or decline of recorded forest related offences, including illegal tree felling and other offences. However, a rise in the rate of reporting of offences may itself be a positive development.

Fig.2.3 Variation over time in number of cases drawn for forest offences



* There was discrepancy in the figures for total offences and their break-up for the years of 2010-11 and 2012-13. This is why we have calculated the total offences by adding the cases of illegal felling and other offences.

Source: GoT, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Planning (Statistics) Department, 2014.

On the whole, it is possible to argue that the problem of inaccessibility to forests on the part of the tribal communities in Tripura has been reduced considerably.

2.4 Education, Work and Social Mobility

Keeping the issue of land and forest rights of different tribal communities in Tripura as a backdrop, and to develop a more rounded understanding of their position in the overall social structure of the state, it is apt to look at their educational opportunities and the avenues of their economic and work participation in the state. This, hopefully, will shed light on the extent to which the numerically significant tribal population of the state has been included within its overall human development project, and whether on favourable terms. The educational progress

and literacy status of various tribal groups in the state has been explored in greater detail in a subsequent chapter, in comparison with educational performance of other social groups. Here we make a few passing references to their inter-generational educational progress drawing upon our field survey in order to comment on their work participation and occupational patterns. The purpose of this exercise once again is to assess the nature of social interaction between tribals and non-tribals in Tripura and the extent to which social and economic policies foster cross-class and cross-caste collaboration for human development goals. The literacy level of the tribals of Tripura lagged far behind that of the immigrant Bengali population in the past and this lag continued till the 1990s, creating what Dreze and Sen (2002) describe as a type of ‘social unfreedom’ that often intensifies the burden of economic unfreedom in the form of income poverty. Since then the education scenario has recorded significant positive changes for the tribal population of the state.

Our household survey data indicate the inter-generational educational mobility of the tribal population. The focus here is on two age-groups, namely, those in the age-group of 21-30 years (who started schooling in the 1990s), and those in the age group of 31-40 years (who began their educational journey in the 1980s) (Table 2.5).

Table-2.5. Variation in educational level for two different age groups of tribals in Tripura

Age group	Illiterate	Literate (Informal)	Below primary	Primary	Upper primary	Secondary	Higher secondary	Graduate/ Post-graduate	Sample size
21-30 years	10.6%	2.8%	8.1%	13.4%	28.6%	18.0%	12.4%	6.0%	283
31-40 years	22.0%	6.2%	7.2%	14.8%	23.0%	21.1%	2.9%	2.9%	209
All age group	21.3%	3.9%	14.3%	16.1%	23.7%	13.9%	4.6%	2.2%	1269

Source: [Pratichi Household Survey 2015](#) ~~Pratichi Household Survey~~

Encouragingly, the younger generation has far outpaced the educational achievement of its older cohort, in terms of both literacy levels and subsequent levels of school education. Thus, as far as education is concerned, a clear indication of upward mobility is found among the tribals in Tripura. Remarkably, the tribal females are not much behind their male counterparts in this regard. The sustained efforts of the state to enhance the educational capability of the tribals seem to have borne fruits to a considerable extent in Tripura.

In the backdrop of this development, it is important to find out the impact, if any, of education on the occupational mobility of the tribals in Tripura. In general, the work participation rate is steadily increasing for the whole population as well as for the tribals in Tripura. While work participation rate increased to 40 percent for the whole population in 2011 from 35 percent in 1991, it increased to 44 percent for the tribals in 2011 from 36 percent in 1991 (see Table 2.6). While looking at the distribution of the main workers for the STs we find that there has been a steady decline in the proportion of cultivators (57 percent in 1991 to 40 percent in 2011) and a steady increase in the proportion of other workers (12 percent to 30 percent). Thus, there is a clear indication of occupational mobility among the tribals. To look more closely at the inter-generational variations in the occupational patterns among tribals in Tripura, we have drawn on our survey data on two age cohorts, namely, the age group of 25-34 years (the comparatively newer entrants into the labour market) and the group of 35-44 years. The comparison is drawn between the male workers of the two categories, to the neglect of the female workers owing primarily to data related difficulties. Among the male workers the focus is on the subset of those who have completed at least ten years of schooling (i.e. Madhyamik).

Table-2.6. Work Participation Rate and the distribution of main workers among STs in Tripura (1991 – 2011)

Year	Work Participation Rate			Distribution of main workers among STs			
	All	SC	ST	Cultivators	Agricultural labourers	Worker in household industries	Other workers
1991	34.7	28.7	35.8	57.3	29.9	0.3	12.4
2001	36.2	32.5	42.7	45.9	29.7	1.1	23.2
2011	40.0	35.9	43.8	40.0	28.9	1.0	30.1

Source: Census of India 1991, 2001 & 2011.

We find that there has been a considerable decline in the proportion of cultivators and agricultural labourers among the educated tribals of the younger generation. While the proportion of cultivators was 36 percent for the age group of 35-44 years, it was only 15 percent for the age group of 25-34 years. None of the educated tribal males in the age group of 25-34 years was found to be an agricultural labourer (see Table 2.7). However, the proportion of non-agricultural labourers has increased in a considerable proportion among the new generation of

tribals – from 8 percent to 21 percent (see Table 2.7). This is a cause for concern, especially in the light of the growing country-wide trend in informalization of off-farm employment. More promisingly, on the other hand, we find an increase in the proportion of people engaged in the service sector among the younger generation of tribals. The small size of the sample of the tribals of the older generation does not allow us to draw any statistical inference, but it is possible to notice some encouraging indications of upward mobility among the tribals in both educational and occupational terms.

Table-2.7. Occupational pattern in Tripura for two different age groups of people having educational qualification Madhyamik or more

Age group	Cultivator	Agrilabour	Non-agrilabour	Self Employment /Business	Independent Professional	Service	Unemployed	Student	Others	Sample size
ST										
25-34 yrs	14.6%	0.0%	20.8%	12.5%	6.2%	18.8%	14.6%	6.2%	6.2%	48
35-44 yrs	36.0%	8.0%	8.0%	28.0%	4.0%	12.0%	4.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25
SC										
25-34 yrs	9.5%	0.0%	33.3%	23.8%	9.5%	19.0%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	21
35-44 yrs	12.5%	12.5%	18.8%	18.8%	0.0%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16
All										
25-34 yrs	7.4%	0.7%	20.6%	21.3%	5.1%	16.2%	20.6%	4.4%	3.7%	136
35-44 yrs	16.9%	5.6%	13.5%	29.2%	2.2%	22.5%	5.6%	0.0%	4.5%	89

Source: [Pratichi Household Survey 2015](#) ~~Pratichi Household survey~~

The occupational mobility of the tribals as observed in our survey is an indication of their development and also quite possibly a basis for somewhat defusing inter-community contradictions in Tripura.

2.5 Political Representation and Participation

The merger of Tripura with the Union of India brought a qualitative change in the political history of Tripura. Prior to 1949, although Tripura was ruled by the kings, they used to rule the hills through tribal chiefs. Various tribes with their own traditional systems of social organizations co-existed there under the common monarchical rule, and the tribal chiefs were all in their respective areas. It was through these chiefs that the government officials collected taxes and tributes. The village disputes were settled in community trials where the chief of the village presided. Some scholars described it as a sort of diarchy (Gan-Chaudhuri 1980). The accession of Tripura by the Union of India brought an end to the tribal system of political organization. The heavy influx of Bengali refugees turned a tribal predominance state into a Bengali predominance state. While the share of tribals in the total population in Tripura was 50 percent in 1941, it was 37 percent in 1951. The decline in the share of tribals in total population continued till 1981 when it was reduced to 28 percent (see Table 2.8). It is true that the tribal population had been rendered a thin majority by the end of the 19th century itself; they turned permanently into a minority community only after the merger. Thus, as an ethnic group, they lost their scope to politically control their homeland in the new democratic set up. **The analysis of the last two assembly elections of Tripura indicates that but for the constitutional provisions ensuring their representation, the tribals wouldn't have enjoyed even the limited political representation and control that they presently have in the state.** From Table 2.9 it is evident that the tribals in Tripura were never elected in those assembly constituencies that were in the general category. In contrast, SCs won in 9 and 10 percent of the general constituencies in the last two assembly elections (viz. 2008 and 2013) respectively, indicating their increasing importance in the political sphere in Tripura. On the other hand, the tribal candidates were hardly fielded in general constituencies. The dormant political presence of the tribal population in the post-unification period in the state likely provided the TUJS the impetus to raise the demand for the sixth schedule in 1969 (Gan-Chaudhuri 1980). Furthermore, it is this imbalance of political power that led the insurgent groups in Tripura to raise the demand for a sovereign state. The Indigenous Peoples' Front of Tripura (IPFT) is at present putting up a demand for *Tuipraland*, a separate state for the tribals comprising the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) areas.

Table2.8. Share of tribals in total population in Tripura since 1941

Year	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Total population	513,010	639,028	1,142,005	1,556,342	2,053,058	2,757,205	3,199,203	3,673,917*
Share of ST (%)	50.1	37.2	31.5	28.9	28.4	30.9	31.1	31.8

*Population data recorded here are at slight variance with those presented in Table A 1.1. These minor anomalies are mainly due to creation of new districts in the State of Tripura in recent times.

Source: Bhattacharya 1988(for column 2 and3), Das Gupta 2014(for column 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8)and Census of India 2011 (for column 9).

Table-2.9. Participation of SC and ST candidates in general constituencies in last two Assembly elections of Tripura (in percent)

Year	Contestant			Elected		
	SC	ST	Total no. of contestants	SC	ST	Total no. of constituencies
2013	8.3	3.3	120	10.0	0	30
2008	7.5	2.3	173	9.1	0	33

Source: Election Commission of India, No date.

The lukewarm response, in most parts of the 1960s and 1970s, of the state authorities to the ethno-political demands of tribal groups led a section of tribals to take the path of violence to achieve their demands and finally it gave birth to the Tripura National Volunteer (TNV) in 1978 that began a new chapter of insurgency in Tripura.

A serious intent on the part of the government. to address the issue of tribal autonomy was first expressed in 1979 when a bill was placed before the Legislative Assembly of Tripura proposing

to set up a tribal autonomous district council under the seventh schedule. Finally, The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) came into existence under the sixth schedule in 1985. However, visible signs of tribal discontent continued to linger, resulting in a demand for the deportation of the ‘foreigners’ to make the tribals free from the domination of the Bengalis. Discontent also emanates from the fact that the TTAADC has relative control over protecting tribal land, culture and language due to the relative lack of its financial autonomy. For example, TTAADC has large tracts of forest land under its jurisdiction and yet has no effective control over forest-related resources or revenues. This lack of financial autonomy of the Council further undermines its political influence in the state.

It is important to note here that **despite this persistent imbalance in the political representation of tribal communities in the state, their interest in electoral participation, sometimes in defiance of the insurgents’ call for boycotting elections, is remarkable.** Although we do not have data on the social profile of voters, the percentage of polling in different categories of constituencies in assembly elections of Tripura may serve as a proxy. In the following table (Table-2.10) we find that except for the assembly election of 1972, the percentage of polling was very high for all other assembly elections in Tripura. Since 2008 the percentage of polling has consistently exceeded the 90 per cent mark – the mark that no other state in India has achieved (see table – A.2.5 in appendix for polling percentage of some major states in their last assembly election). This high percentage of polling by definition entails widespread electoral participation on the part of the tribals in the state. In fact, the percentage of polling in ST constituencies happens to be only nominally lower than that in other constituencies.

Table-2.10. Variation in polling percentages in assembly elections of Tripura

Year	Total	Gen constituencies	SC constituencies	ST constituencies	Female	Male
2013	93.61 (91.82)*	93.60	94.37	93.20	92.94	90.73
2008	92.49 (91.22)*	92.69	93.38	91.75	91.72	90.74
2003	78.71	80.81	81.28	73.90	76.33	80.92
1998	80.84	82.47	83.12	77.15	79.65	81.96
1993	81.18	81.75	82.74	79.61	79.53	82.77
1988	85.75	86.28	87.69	83.78	85.16	86.31

1983	83.03	84.03	86.03	80.44	80.43	85.52
1977	79.51	80.75	81.36	76.72	76.90	81.97
1972	67.36	68.26	69.64	65.19	70.02	64.36

* Discrepancy in figure in the same document of Election Commission. The polling percentage found in the highlights of the documents was lower than the figure obtained from the calculation of total voter and who voted.

Source: Election Commission of India, No date.

Surely, electoral participation does not straightforwardly neutralize the demand emanating from some sections of the tribals for a separate *Tripuraland*. More generally speaking, the issue of tribal political autonomy and influence (or its lack) continues to remain a major challenge to the state's effort to ensure human security and development for its people. Correspondingly, the political imperative of mediation and moderation of inter-community tensions as well as of their claims and counter-claims remains one of the foremost human development priorities facing the state.

2.6 Political will for Inclusive Development

The analysis made in the preceding sections of this chapter shows that considerable effort has been made by the government to address the thorny issues that are partly responsible for the emergence of insurgency in Tripura. To be sure, a lot of ground is yet to be covered in this respect. For example, the success achieved in restoring tribal land or in fulfilling the demand for tribal autonomy has been positive but limited. Palpable success has been gained in enhancing economic opportunities for the Jhumias and in widening tribal educational participation. All this has contributed, at least in part, to nurturing a climate of relative peace and political stability in Tripura, unlike in some of its neighboring states. This is of course not to overlook or oversimplify the various national and international roots of insurgency. This admitted, the general drift of the argument developed here focuses on the nature of democratic politics in the state which seems to deepen, with more or less success, the inclusive nature of the state's developmental efforts.

No doubt, underlying the surface level peace there exist undercurrents of social tensions and conflicts among the 'original' inhabitants and the 'outsiders'. Also, the cultivation of educational and other capabilities of tribal communities has itself raised their collective political aspirations

as a group, which demand and aspire for something more than devolution of power through the creation of TTAADC.¹⁰ Some sections of the non-tribal population on the other hand harbor, as was apparent during our field survey, a feeling of resentment against the tribals, whom they consider to be the “darling of the government”- the government that allegedly formulates policies “only to appease the tribals”.

Ironing out these differences is not certainly easy; but what Tripura has already achieved gives faith about the achievability of the goal of an inclusive Tripura. Fostering interactions, and dialogues, even a combative culture, among diverse cultural groups in the state and balancing their claims and counter-claims are essential to constitute a relatively congenial social climate within which social commitment and public action for inclusive human development can take place. Tripura’s democratic politics and its policy vision seem to be attentive to these imperatives.

To summarise the discussion above, the political changes through and following the partition of India has had tremendous effect on Tripura. With the influx of Bengali refugees, the ethnic composition of the state, which started changing even before the partition, changed radically to reduce the indigenous peoples of the state to a numerically weak minority. The ethnic re-formation of the state had far reaching influence on the state’s social, economic, political, and agro-ecological settings that contributed to the emergence of a violent ethno-political conflict that at times threatened enormous damage. Political will to mediate the underlying problems with an approach of democratic governance and inclusive development has resulted not only in restoring peace in the society but also contributed immensely to the human development achievements of the state. This chapter makes a detailed examination of the different conflicting elements and the connection of inclusive development and democratic governance that mediated to resolve the conflicts, and also identifies the potential problems that need to be addressed.

¹⁰ The proportion of vote casted for the tribal organisations in last TTAADC election (held in 2015) is a hint of it. IPFT, the strong proponent of *Tuipraland*, alone received 18 per cent of the polled vote in that election. If we add the proportion of vote received by the INPT to it, the proportion becomes 29 per cent of the polled vote which deserves special attention.