

## Political Participation of Indigenous Tribal People in Tripura: An Evaluative Study

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### Abstract

*The state of Tripura, located in northeastern India, has been grappling with various boundary issues, especially concerning its international and neighboring boundaries with Bangladesh and other northeastern states. These boundary disputes have often led to tensions and conflicts, impacting the socio-political landscape of the region. Additionally, Tripura has witnessed significant challenges related to illegal Migration from Bangladesh, leading to demographic changes and straining the resources of the state. Another pressing issue is the lack of land rights for tribal communities, which has further marginalized these communities and hindered their socio-economic development. These issues collectively play a pivotal role in shaping the political participation and dynamics in Tripura, influencing electoral outcomes, policy formulations, and the overall governance structure of the state. Addressing these complex challenges requires comprehensive strategies that prioritize the rights and welfare of tribal communities while ensuring peace and stability in the region.*

**Keywords:** Tripura; Boundary issues; Illegal migration; Land rights; Tribal communities.

### 1. Introduction

The state of Tripura, in northeastern India, has a rich history that is inextricably linked to its indigenous tribal groups and their own sociocultural fabric.

Historically, the tribal populations, including the Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, and others, have occupied the territory for generations, keeping their own identity, rituals, and traditions. Tripura was a princely state ruled by the Manikya family prior to Indian independence in 1947. Indigenous tribal societies

had their own traditional governing systems, social structures, and territory limits, and they were essentially self-sufficient. The 'Rajas' had considerable power, managing their various regions using customary rules, customs, and communal agreement. Following India's independence, Tripura joined the Indian Union in 1949, ushering in a new era in its political and demographic environment. The incorporation into the Indian democratic framework, along with the porous international border with

Bangladesh (previously East Pakistan), triggered major migratory dynamics, including an especially large inflow of Bengali-speaking migrants from Bangladesh into Tripura. The legal and illegal migration from Bangladesh has been a sensitive subject in Tripura, causing demographic shifts, socio-cultural problems, and political issues. Indigenous tribal populations have voiced worry over migration's influence on their land rights, socioeconomic possibilities, cultural identity, and political representation. The in-flow of Bangladeshi migrants has created considerable hurdles to Tripura's indigenous tribal political involvement. The demographic

changes caused by migration have altered election dynamics, raising worries among indigenous people about the diminution of political representation and power. Increased rivalry for resources, land, and political power between indigenous tribals and migrants has heightened tensions, resulting in disputes, polarization, and, in some cases, electoral violence. The introduction of Bengali speaking migrants has significantly altered Tripura's political dynamics, leading to the erosion of land rights and reducing the political representation of indigenous people (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Ghoshal, 2012).

## 2. Literature Review

Tripura transitioned from monarchy to democracy in 1949, leading to significant socio-political changes. The influx of nearly six lakh Bengali Hindu migrants from East Pakistan between 1947 and 1971 altered Tripura's demographic landscape, causing land disputes and cultural tensions (Dasgupta, 2016). This rapid demographic shift raised concerns among the indigenous tribes about their identity, language, and autonomy. Tripura, a historic princely state in India's northeast, was ruled by about monarchs, with the Manikyas considered divine figures in tribal tradition. Post-partition, Tripura confronted challenges from Muslim League National Guards in East Bengal, claiming Tripura as part of Eastern Pakistan (RG, University., 2016). The Indian government

intervened to counter external threats and pre-serve Tripura's integration with India. Tripura stands out in India's Northeast for its enduring left-radical political tradition over a century, contrasting with the region's ethnic political leanings. This book explores Tripura's communist roots, governance, and policy implications, comparing it with neighboring regions and advanced Indian states (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Despite ethnic tensions, the Left in Tripura has maintained its influence, challenging prevailing views on India's Northeast and offering insights into radical left politics in India's state politics and modern history. The paper discusses the rising debates on indigenous rights and development in India over the past two decades, focusing on the classification of indigenous peoples as 'Scheduled Tribes' or 'Adivasis' and

the tensions between protection and assimilation (Shah, 2007). It emphasizes the complexities of indigeneity in India's sociopolitical landscape, calling for a nuanced approach to indigenous protection policies to avoid unintended class-based marginalization. The paper investigates ethnic politics among tribal or indigenous people in northeastern India, with an emphasis on the right to self-determination, which is key to the UN's proposed Declaration of Indigenous Peoples' Rights (Szpak, 2018). It examines the difficulties in turning calls for autonomy into viable political solutions via case studies from the Bodoland movement, the Naga struggle, and the Rabha people's mobilization. The paper investigates the growing desire for recognition as indigenous people among hill communities in Northeast India, taking into account the influence of worldwide indigenous struggles and colonialism on local groups (Kapai, 2020). It examines the official designation of specific Indian tribes as Scheduled Tribes, focusing on constitutional provisions for reservations in education, employment, and politics after British control (Ambagudia, 2019). Despite its widespread use in colonial and post-colonial discourses in India, the idea of 'tribe' remains unclear, with terminology such as tribes, Scheduled Tribes, indigenous people, vanjati, adivasi, and jana being used interchangeably. The word 'empowerment' is relatively new in

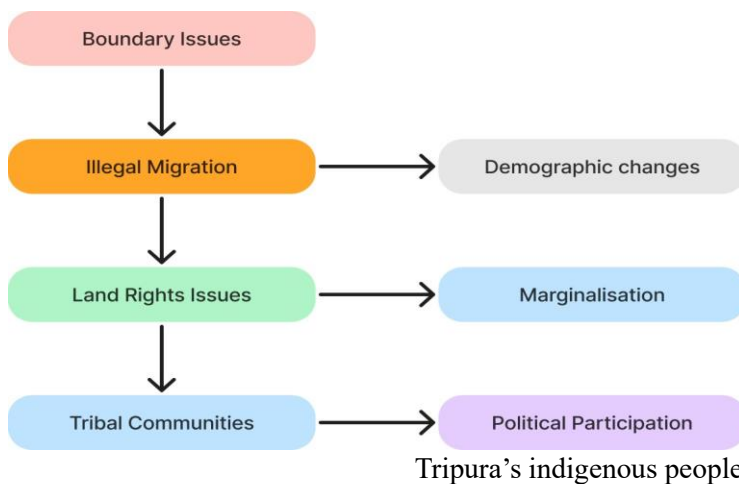
Indian discourse, referring to the conflict between hierarchical social structures and democratic political systems (Sahraikorpi & Bandi, 2021). It encompasses human rights, basic requirements, economic stability, capacity building, skill development, and dignified social life. Due to historical injustices, Scheduled Tribes (STs), one of India's most oppressed populations, rely on the country's political reservation system for empowerment. This essay looks at the historical setting, dynamics of ST reserved constituencies, and the impact of political reservation on tribal groups, finding that it has given both hope and despair to STs. The article looks at the relationship between indigenous politics in India and the country's politics and identity (Imtiyaz & Fakhruz-Zaman, 2019). Despite historical isolation and challenges to their autonomy, tribal tribes in India have continued to campaign for self-rule, highlighting their land rights, identity, and self-governance. The research paper investigates the development of Tripura's political system from a princely state to a democratic administration following partition (Ghoshal, 2017). It investigates the difficulties that resulted from Bengali immigrants' political and cultural control over the indigenous tribal community, as well as how this refugee population became an important role in Tripura's post-partition political environment (Ghoshal, 2023).

**Research Objectives**

- 1) Identify and assess Tripura’s particular border challenges, with an emphasis on its international and surrounding boundaries with Bangladesh and other northeastern states.
- 2) To investigate the effects of illegal migration from Bangladesh on Tripura’s demographic mix,

sociopolitical environment, and overall growth.

- 3) To investigate the barriers to land rights encountered by tribal people in Tripura and examine their consequences for socioeconomic growth and community welfare.
- 4) To examine the relationship between land rights concerns and illegal migration, with a focus on the sociopolitical dynamics, political involvement, and well-being of



**Figure 1. Political Participation Framework**

**Methodology**

This study employs a comprehensive literature review method to understand the complex socio-political dynamics in Tripura. As the research does not incorporate

primary data collection methods such as interviews or surveys, the insights and conclusions are drawn solely from an extensive analysis of existing literature.

**Data Sources**

The data for this study is exclusively secondary, sourced from a variety of scholarly articles, books, government publications, and credible online resources. These

sources provide historical perspectives, contemporary analyses, and scholarly debates surrounding the political, social, and cultural issues in Tripura. The literature was carefully selected to

ensure a diverse range of perspectives on the topics of boundary disputes, migration impacts, and tribal rights within Tripura. The selection criteria

included relevance to the research questions, academic credibility, and the recency of the publication to ensure the data reflects current understandings and theories.

### Data Table

Data Type	Source	Details	Period
<b>Historical Data</b>	Tripura State Archives	Transition from monarchy to democracy	1947–1971
	Books: Bhattacharyya (2018)	Role of Manikya family, Princely state history	Pre-1947, Post-1947
<b>Demographic Data</b>	Census of India Reports (1951, 1961, 1971)	Impact of Bengali migration on population dynamics	1947–1971
	NSSO Surveys	Population distribution, tribal versus non-tribal data	Post-1971
<b>Socio-political Data</b>	Election Commission of India Reports	Voter participation, Tribal representation in elections	1970–2020
	Bhattacharyya (2018)	Influence of tribal politics, rise of Communist parties in Tripura	
<b>Land Rights &amp; Socioeconomic Data</b>	NSSO, Ministry of Rural Development	Land ownership disputes, poverty rates among tribal communities	1970–2020
	The Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act	Legal framework for tribal land ownership	Post-1970
<b>Migration Data</b>	Ministry of Home Affairs	Illegal migration trends, Bangladeshi refugees	1947–2020
	Bhattacharyya (2018), Ghoshal (2012)	Impacts of migration on local politics	1947–1971
<b>Policy &amp; Legal Data</b>	Indian Government Acts	The Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, Tribal land rights	Post-1970
	Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act (2006)	Impact of Forest Rights Act on tribal socio-economic status	Post-2006
<b>Security and Border Data</b>	Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)	Border security issues, migration control,	1970–2020

		conflicts with Bangladesh	
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**Data Analysis**

The analysis involved a thematic review of the literature where themes such as demographic changes, political participation, and land rights were identified and examined. This method allowed for an in-depth understanding of how historical and current events shape the socio-political landscape of Tripura. The gathered data was synthesized to draw connections between the empirical evidence and the theoretical frameworks discussed in the literature. This synthesis aids in understanding the broader implications of the issues faced by indigenous tribal communities in Tripura, guiding the formulation of policy suggestions. Given the nature of the study relying solely on secondary data, ethical concerns primarily involved the correct citation and interpretation of sources. Care was taken to represent the findings of previous studies accurately and to acknowledge the original authors and researchers.

**1. Historical Data:**

Tripura's transition from a monarchy to a democratic state brought significant changes, especially in governance. The Manikya dynasty's traditional rule ended post-independence when Tripura merged with India in 1949. The demographic and political landscape began shifting due to the influx of refugees from East

Pakistan, altering the balance of power and identity in the region.

**2. Demographic Data:**

The inflow of Bengali-speaking migrants drastically impacted the indigenous population. Between 1947 and 1971, nearly six lakh refugees settled in Tripura, pushing the indigenous tribes to a minority (Bhattacharya & Refugee Watch, 2012). Census data from 1971 shows a steep decline in the proportion of tribal people as Bengali migrants gained political representation and socio-economic power.

**3. Socio-political Data:**

The political participation of indigenous tribes saw a decline due to the demographic changes. Election data shows that by the 1970s, the Communist Party gained significant influence, which was initially supported by the migrant population. Tribal representation in local governance structures began to decline, leading to movements demanding greater autonomy, as evidenced by the rise of regional tribal parties.

**4. Land Rights & Socioeconomic Data:**

The NSSO and government reports reveal that land ownership disputes became common post-1970, with tribal lands being encroached upon by migrants. This led to socio-economic marginalization, with high poverty rates among tribal communities. The Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act,

aimed at protecting tribal land rights, had limited success due to loopholes that allowed non-tribal settlement in tribal regions.

#### 5. **Migration Data:**

The Ministry of Home Affairs reports indicate that migration continued well into the 1990s, with both legal and illegal Bangladeshi immigrants settling in Tripura. This exacerbated the demographic shift and resource strain. The socio-political implications of migration include increased competition for political power and resources, which fueled tensions between indigenous tribes and migrants.

#### 6. **Policy & Legal Data:**

Legal frameworks, such as the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act, were put in place to protect tribal rights. However, due to weak implementation, these policies have had limited success in improving the socio-economic conditions of the indigenous people. The continued marginalization of tribal communities highlights the

gap between policy intentions and ground realities.

#### 7. **Security and Border Data:**

Border security remains a significant issue due to the porous nature of the Tripura-Bangladesh border. The IDSA reports emphasize concerns over illegal migration, which not only creates socio-economic pressures but also raises security risks, such as cross-border crime and potential extremist infiltration.

The political participation of indigenous tribal people in Tripura has been deeply affected by historical migrations, land rights disputes, and socio-economic marginalization. While various policies have been implemented to safeguard tribal rights, the effectiveness of these measures remains questionable due to ongoing demographic and political challenges. For a more inclusive and peaceful resolution, policies need better enforcement and a focus on addressing both historical grievances and present realities.

### **Discussions**

The challenges posed by illegal migration, porous borders, and land rights disputes continue to shape Tripura's socio-political landscape. The influx of Bangladeshi migrants has increased competition for land and resources, thereby undermining the political influence of indigenous tribal communities (Ghoshal, 2017). As a result, indigenous people are increasingly marginalized, struggling to preserve their cultural

identities while facing reduced political representation.

However, focusing solely on the negative impacts of migration oversimplifies the complexities of political participation in the region. Migration has contributed to a more diverse political landscape, bringing new voices into the electoral process (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Migrants who have settled in the region for decades are integral to the local

economy and social fabric. Their participation in the political process, while sometimes contentious, is necessary for inclusive governance (Rao, 2018).

At the same time, the core issue remains the disenfranchisement of indigenous people, whose socio-economic development is constrained by limited access to land and political power. This dynamic fosters tensions between indigenous and migrant communities, contributing to electoral violence and regional instability (Ambagudia, 2019). The persistent lack of effective measures to address illegal migration and protect indigenous land rights continues to impede the socio-economic growth and political engagement of these communities.

Tripura's indigenous populations face serious challenges related to cultural identity, language, and local autonomy, exacerbated by population growth and the encroachment on their ancestral lands. The state's concerns over illegal migration and land rights conflicts may have far-reaching implications for the entire Northeast region and India in the near future (Bhattacharya & Refugee Watch, 2012). Key issues include:

1. **Socio-Political**

**Instability:** Demographic shifts caused by illegal migration can lead

**Benefits to Political Participation**

Migration from other nations to Tripura can have both good and bad effects on regional political

to tensions and conflicts over land rights and resources, undermining regional peace and stability.

2. **Security Concerns:** Inadequate border security and uncontrolled migration can result in extremist infiltration, smuggling, and other criminal activities, threatening national security.
3. **Economic Strains:** Increased population burdens resources, hindering economic development and exacerbating socio-economic inequalities.
4. **Cultural and Identity Crisis:** Indigenous tribes' cultural and linguistic identities are at risk due to the influx of migrants, leading to a potential loss of cultural heritage and social cohesion.
5. **Political Implications:** Migration issues may influence political dynamics in the Northeast, shaping electoral outcomes and policy decisions related to identity, rights, and inclusion.
6. **International Relations:** Border and migration issues may strain India's relationships with neighboring nations, making strategic international collaboration necessary to manage these concerns.
7. **Humanitarian Crisis:** The displacement of indigenous populations and the influx of migrants may lead to humanitarian crises, requiring urgent intervention to protect vulnerable communities and ensure their rights and dignity.

engagement. Here's how the surge of migrating individuals affects political participation:



**Diversified Political Landscape :**The presence of migrants from various cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic origins may enrich the political landscape by introducing new viewpoints and ideas to the political debate.

1. **Increased Voter Turnout:** The inclusion of migrants in the political process may enhance voter turnout as new inhabitants become eligible to vote in local and national elections.
2. **Political Engagement and Activism:** Migrants, driven by their

### **Challenges to Political Participation:**

Indigenous people suffer a variety of political participation obstacles when outnumbered by illegal immigrants on their land. These issues are firmly founded in sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors. Here are some of the main challenges:

1. **Marginalization and Representation:** Indigenous people may feel underrepresented in political processes and institutions, as their issues are eclipsed by the bulk of illegal immigrants. This can result in a lack of political representation and influence, which limits their capacity to successfully fight for their rights and interests.
2. **Cultural and Identity Degradation:** The flood of illegal immigrants may result in cultural assimilation and degradation of indigenous culture, identity, and legacy. This can lead to an identity crisis and difficulty in retaining traditional

experiences and interests, may actively participate in political action, advocacy, and community organization, helping to build a strong civil society.

3. **Policy Innovation and Reform:** Migrants' perspectives and experiences may influence policy innovation and reform, resulting in more inclusive and responsive government that answers the interests and concerns of various communities.

beliefs, languages, and customs, compromising indigenous groups' social cohesiveness and togetherness.

3. **Cultural Diversity and Integration:** Migrants can enrich Tripura's cultural environment by promoting intercultural interchange, creativity, and innovation. However, successful integration, mutual respect, and overcoming cultural differences and biases are critical to creating cohesive and inclusive societies.
4. **Political Participation and Governance:** Involving migrants in political processes can broaden political representation and promote policy innovation. However, guaranteeing their effective integration, representation, and involvement while dealing with possible problems such as identity issues, resource allocation, and cultural sensitivity is critical for establishing inclusive and responsive governance.

5. **Social Cohesion and Community Relations:** Fostering social cohesiveness and community bonds between migrants and native people is crucial for preventing divides, disputes, and polarization. Dialogue, education, and community involvement programs may all contribute to the development of cohesive and resilient communities.
6. **Security and Stability:** It is critical to ensure the region's security and stability in the face of population shifts as well as potential socioeconomic and cultural conflicts. To sustain peace, stability, and harmony in the area, border security must be strengthened, appropriate migration policies implemented, and inter-community communication and collaboration encouraged.

### **Limitations**

The absence of primary data collection is a significant limitation of this study. Reliance on secondary sources may not capture current on-ground realities or the nuances of

indigenous perspectives as effectively as direct engagement would. Future research could benefit from incorporating primary research methods to provide more comprehensive insights.

### **Conclusion**

Tripura is at a crossroads, facing a variety of concerns including as boundary disputes, illegal migration, and land rights issues impacting indigenous populations. These linked difficulties have had a substantial influence on the regional sociopolitical scene, governance dynamics, and election outcomes. The failure to effectively address these concerns has resulted in tensions, disputes, and limited resources, impeding indigenous people's socioeconomic growth and political engagement. Addressing these complex issues requires comprehensive solutions that promote indigenous groups' rights, welfare, and participation while promoting peace, stability, and peaceful cohabitation among varied people. Collaboration among government officials, civil society groups, community leaders, and stakeholders is critical in Tripura for developing inclusive solutions, facilitating discourse, and creating resilient communities.

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