



Ethnic Mosaic of Tripura: From Bengalee Majority to Tribal Diversity

Dr. Aparna De

Associate Professor

Department of Political Science

Government Degree College, Kamalpur

Dhalai District, Tripura

Abstract

Tripura, a tiny and hilly state, is situated in the north-eastern region of India. Tripura lies to the south-west of Assam and to the east of Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan. The *Tripuri* dynasty ruled this ancient kingdom for several centuries and at last merged with India in 1949. The Population of Tripura is heterogeneous. Varied ethnic factors can be traced in it. Natives of almost all region of India are found here. The *Bengalees* and the *Scheduled Tribe* people constitute the two major ethnic groups of Tripura, making the major part of the population. The state is densely populated. Tripura is a homeland of different tribes. Altogether there are 19(nineteen) tribes in the state, which made Tripura a land of ethnic diversity.

Key words: Population, Ethnic, Diversity, Tribe, Caste.

Introduction

Tripura, a tiny and hilly state, is situated in the north-eastern region of India. Tripura lies to the south-west of Assam and to the east of Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan. The state is situated between the parallels of $22^{\circ}56'$ and $24^{\circ}32'$ north latitude and between $91^{\circ}10'$ and $92^{\circ}24'$ east longitude. The state covers an area of 10,491.69 sq km. It is a curved strip of land, measuring about 183.5 km in length from north-east to west and 112.7 km width from south to north. Its altitudes vary from 50 to 3080 ft above sea level. There are many streams and a few long rivers. It has rich flora and fauna. The economy of Tripura is agrarian with vast forest coverage. More than 42 percent of its population now depend on agriculture and allied activities for livelihood. The *Tripuri* dynasty ruled this ancient kingdom for several centuries and at last merged with India in 1949.

Objectives of the study: The primary objectives of the study are-

1. To explore the demographic diversity of Tripura.
2. To find out the trends of population growth.

Materials and Methods:

This study is based on quantitative approach. Statistical analysis of datasets from secondary sources like Census India Reports, vital records, and surveys have been employed to understand population size, structure, and changes over time.

Discussion:

Population of Tripura:

The Population of Tripura is heterogeneous. Varied ethnic factors can be traced in it. Natives of almost all region of India are found here. The *Bengalees* and the *Scheduled Tribe* people constitute the two major ethnic groups of Tripura, making the major part of the population. The state is densely populated.

The following table shows the population of Tripura right from 1874 to 2011 census:

Table 1
Population of Tripura

Year-AD	Total Population	Percentage of Decadal Change	Density	Tribal Population	percentage of tribal population to total population	Literacy rate
1874-75	74,523	-	9	47523	63.76	NA
1881	95,637	28.32	10	49915	55	NA
1891	1,37,442	43.71	13	70292	51.09	NA
1901	1,73,325	26.10	17	91,679	52.89	2.28
1911	2,29,613	32.47	21	1,11,303	48.47	4.03
1921	3,04,437	32.59	29	1,71,610	56.36	7.08
1931	3,82,450	25.63	36	1,92,240	50.26	2.84
1941	5,31,010	34.14	49	2,56,991	48.39	NA
1951	6,39,028	25.87	62	2,37,953	37.23	15.50
1961	11,42,005	76.86	109	3,60,070	31.52	20.40
1971	15,56,342	36.28	149	4,50,544	28.94	30.97
1981	20,53,058	31.92	196	5,83,960	28.44	42.12
1991	27,57,205	34.30	263	8,53,345	30.94	60.44
2001	31,91,168	16.03	304	9,93,426	31.13	73.20
2011	36,71,032	14.8	350	11,66,813	31.78	87.75

Source: Census Report of India, Tripura

The above figures indicate that the total population within one and half century has increased more than twenty times. The decadal growth rate shows fluctuations. A fall in the growth rate from preceding figure between census years 1891 to 1901 is probably owing to the spread of epidemics. The 1961 figures show an abnormally high rate of growth. There is a possibility of confusion about the accuracy of the census reports from 1881 to

1951, because of certain difficulties in the census operations like the inaccessibility of the hills, poor communication facility, lack of sophisticated and trained large administrative machinery and the two world war situation. The condition has improved considerably since 1960s. The figures of 1961 and 1971 census are largely reliable. It is assumed that the influx of the Bengali Hindus from East Pakistan is responsible for the high rate of increase of population of Tripura besides high rate of accuracy of Census. During the period, besides the Bengalees, many tribal families also have emigrated from East Pakistan, particularly from the Chittagong Hill Tracts.⁷ Another important feature that is evident in the table is that within the same period whereas the population has increased 20 times, the tribal population has increased only about 10 times. If there is room for confusion for the general figures of census operations before 1961, there is greater room for confusion about the correctness for the census figures about the tribal population. Since 1961, their growth rate is not only steady, but also above the national level. Speaking comparatively, the Indian population increased by 24.57 percent between 1961 and 1971, whereas in case of Tripura it increased by 31.92 percent. The table also shows a gradual decrease in the percentage of the tribal population to the non-tribal population in between 1931 to 1981. Their percentage was above 50 till 1931. The figures are recording a decline since 1941 and continued to 1981, with percentage of 28.44. The cause of this phenomenon lies in the immigration of subjects from plain land of undivided Tripura. A large number of *Bengalees* of Tripura were the *Rajas'* subjects residing in *Chakla Rosonabad* (once the area was under Trupura State).

The growth of literacy has been rather spectacular. The literacy rate increased from 2.28 percent in 1901 to 30.86 percent in 1971 and 87.75 percent in 2011. The number of schools, colleges and other institutions of education have gone up. As per recent study conducted by the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Kolkata, literacy rate stands at 95.16 percent in 2013, including female literacy rate of 82.7 percent.

Population of Scheduled Tribe communities in Tripura:

Tripura is a homeland of different tribes. Altogether there are 19(nineteen) tribes in the State. They could be divided into 2(two) major groups as (i) Aboriginal and (ii) Immigrants. All the aboriginal tribes have been migrated in this territory from a place in between Tibbet, up hills of Burma (Myanmar) like Arakan Hills Tracts and adjacent to China. Aboriginal tribes are Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, Lusai, Uchai, Chaimal, Halam, Kukis, Garos, Mog and Chakma. Other tribes like Bill, Munda, Orang, Santal, Lepcha, Khasia, Bhutias are the immigrant tribes came and settled here for economic reasons. Most of them are Central Indian Tribes and came from Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. Some of these tribes are however Northern-Frontier tribes came from Bhutan, Meghalaya, Sikkim and North Bengal. Chakmas and Mogs are Arakan Tribes entered Tripura through Chittagang Hills Tracts.

The following table gives the numerical strength of different tribes of Tripura:

Table 2

Numerical strength of different *Scheduled Tribe* communities in Tripura

Sl. No.	Tribe	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
1	Tripuri	150971	189799	250382	30872	461531	543848	592255
2	Riang	48471	56597	64722	84003	11606	165103	188220
3	Jamatia	2764	24359	34192	44501	60824	74949	83347
4	Chakma	7277	22386	28622	34797	64293	64293	79813
5	Halam	1644	16298	19076	28969	36498	47245	57210
6	Noatia	1916	16010	10297	7182	4158	6655	14298
7	Mog	3789	10524	13273	17231	31612	30385	37893
8	Kuki	2721	5532	7775	5501	10625	11674	10965
9	Garo	7362	5484	5559	7297	9360	11180	12952
10	Munda	51	4409	5347	7993	11547	12416	14544
11	Lushai	1947	2988	3672	3734	4910	4777	5384
12	Oraon	00	2875	3428	5217	6751	6223	12011
13	Santal	736	1562	2222	2726	2736	2151	2913
14	Uchhai	00	766	1061	1306	1637	2103	2447
15	Khasia	151	349	491	457	358	630	366
16	Bhil	41	69	169	843	1754	2336	3105
17	Lepcha	05	07	177	106	111	105	157
18	Bhutia	19	07	03	22	47	29	28
19	Chaimal	00	50	00	18	26	226	549

Source: Census India report

Out of 19 tribal communities the *Tripuris (Tipras)* constitute the largest tribe. Being the largest tribe, the credit of ruling the state for several centuries goes to them. Six allochthonous tribes, namely *Munda*, *Oraon*, *Bhil*, *Lepcha* and *Bhutia* are numerically insignificant, socially isolated, and politically unorganized. The rest of the communities, such as, *Reang*, *Jamatia*, *Chakma*, *Halam*, *Noatia*, *Mog*, *Kuki*, *Garo*, *Lusai*, *Uchhai*, *Khasia*, and *Chaimal*, who claim to be autochthons and actually immigrated from the greater Assam, Burma and Chittagong Hill Tracts are good in numbers in the state. Formerly, they had a self-subsistence economy based on gathering, hunting, shifting cultivation, domestication of animals, basketry and weaving.

Population of *Scheduled Caste (SC)* Communities:

Table 3
Scheduled Caste Population in Tripura

Sl. No.	Name of SC Community	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
1	Namasudra	46383	74980	114599	NA	NA	215267
2	Jaliya Koibarta	18208	29897	52612	NA	NA	106849
3	Mali	15362	21134	38644	NA	NA	55009
4	Mahishyadas	11994	28733	53751	NA	NA	153034
5	Dhoba	10887	19950	34314	NA	NA	56513
6	Chamar/Muchi	3640	4228	6833	NA	NA	13579
7	Gaur	3523	2877	3720	NA	NA	6854
8	Shabar	2150	2094	3000	NA	NA	4429
9	Patni	1687	2228	3268	NA	NA	7235
10	Kanda	1226	1202	1813	NA	NA	2574

11	Kal	1067	519	528	NA	NA	1079
12	Bhuimali	784	315	798	NA	NA	234
13	Khariya	513	744	914	NA	NA	1409
14	Methar	456	626	1279	NA	NA	1851
15	Koch	366	650	843	NA	NA	815
16	Khasi	327	72	443	NA	NA	204
17	Gor	258	1145	1187	NA	NA	86
18	Bagdi	161	116	239	NA	NA	510
19	Dom	155	144	283	NA	NA	41
20	Keot	133	336	262	NA	NA	302
21	Kahar	125	181	224	NA	NA	357
22	Kayer	118	100	63	NA	NA	102
23	Musahar	52	07	227	NA	NA	327
24	Kotal	51	-	43	NA	NA	9
25	Kalindi	40	30	34	NA	NA	135
26	Kharing/Khandayet	15	-	-	NA	NA	18
27	Kora	15	26	14	NA	NA	117
28	Bandasi	10	-	81	NA	NA	5
29	Dhenuyar	09	01	13	NA	NA	65
30	Kan	05	23	08	NA	NA	27
31	Gunar	04	-	-	NA	NA	86
32	Kanu	01	15	81	NA	NA	49
33	Bhunar	-	475	90	NA	NA	178

Source: Census India Report.

The above table shows the name, number and numerical strength of the Scheduled Caste population of Tripura.

Other Backward Communities in Tripura:

In 1993 the Left Front Government formed a Commission to prepare a list of Other Backward Class in Tripura.. The Commission was formed with top-level bureaucrats. The Commission prepared a list considering different aspects with disciplined manner and submitted the report on 28.02.1994. Total 44 communities were identified and enlisted as Other Backward Class Communities (OBC) in Tripura. Government recognized OBC Communities in Tripura are:

1. Acharja, Ganak
2. Kapali
3. Kanda
4. Karmakar, Kamar
5. Koiry
6. Kumbhakar, Kamar, Rudrapal
7. Kuri
8. Kurmi
9. Gara
10. Gareri
11. Goyala, Gop, Jadab, Ahir
12. Chauhan

13. Jhara
14. Telenga
15. Tati, Tanti
16. Teli(Uriya)
17. Desad, Doshad
18. Nat, Natta
19. Napit, Shil
20. Nayek
21. Nepali (Limbu, Mathoyali, Rai)
22. Nuniya, Nunaiya
23. Pangal (Manipuri Muslim)
24. Pan
25. Panki, Painak
26. Pashi
27. Banshi
28. Bauri
29. Badyakar, Dhuli, Nagarchi,Sabdakar
30. Barujibi
31. Bin
32. Bind
33. Baishnab
34. Bhar, Rajbhar
35. Bhumij,Bumij
36. Manipuri, Bishnupriya Manipuri
37. Marar
38. Modak
39. Jogi, Jugi, Nath
40. Rai(Uriya)
41. Reili
42. Lohar
43. Sutradhar
44. Hela Das, Halla Das, Haluya Das.



Religious population in Tripura

The following table shows the distribution of the population according to various religions in Tripura:-

Table 4

Religious population in Tripura

Year	Hindus	Muslims	Buddhists	Christians	Jains	Shikhs
1941	3,47,792	1,23,570	7724	382	-	-
1951	4,80,662	1,36,940	15,403	5262	-	-
1961	8,67,998	2,30,002	33716	10,039	195	49
1971	13,93,689	1,03,962	42,285	15,713	375	318
1981	18,34,218	13,8,529	54806	24872	NA	NA
1991	23,84,934	19,6,495	12,8,260	46472	NA	NA
2001	27,39,310	2,54,442	98,922	1,02,489	477	1,182
2011	30,63,903	3,16,042	1,25,385	1,59,882	860	1070

Source: Census Reports of India, Tripura

The *Hindus* constitute the major religious group in Tripura. Most of the *Bengalees*, *Tribals*, *Marwaris*, *Manipuris*, *Malayalis*, *Nepalis*, and *Orias* residing here are the Hindus. The *Muslims* were once very powerful; even today they have strong holds in Sonamura, Kailashahar and Udapur and Bishalgarh. Many of them have left after exchanging property with the *Hindus* of East Pakistan. The major portion of *Mogs* and *Chakmas* are *Buddhists*. *Christianity* is fast taking roots among the *tribal* population.

Conclusion:

There is diversity among the people of Tripura. Several factors have combined to bring the ethnic groups here. The search for resourceful forests, inter-tribal feuds, and many uncanny incidents might have been the reasons for the immigration of the tribal communities. The Partition of India, the shortage of land, population pressure, poverty, political oppression and religious persecution were the spur to the immigration of the plains people. In addition, the land-grants by the *Rajas* and opportunity for jobs and business induced many plains people to come and settle down here. Moreover, a large number of them were the *Rajas*' subjects residing in *Chakla Rosonabad* (once the area was under Tripura State).

References:

1. Bodhjung, R (1943): *Tripura Consolidated Administration Report 1937-1940*; Government of Tripura, Agartala.
2. Chakrabarti, P. K. (1990): *The Marginal Men*; Lumiere Books, West Bengal.
3. Chakrabarti, M. (ed.) (1994): *Administration Reports of Tripura State*, vol. 4; Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi.
4. Chaudhuri, S. & Chaudhuri, B. (ed.) (1983): *Glimpses of Tripura*; Tripura Darpan Prakashani, Agartala.
5. Cumming, J. G. (1997): *Survey & Settlement of the Chakla Roshnabad in the District of Tippera & Noakhali, 1892-1899*, Shillong, 1907. Reprinted by Government of Tripura, Agartala.

6. Datta, B. C. (1972): *Tripura Rajya Tiris Bachar: Kailashahar Bibhag, Khowai Bibhag*; Education Directorate, Government of Tripura, Agartala.
7. Debbarma, S. C. (1343 T.E. 1933 AD). *Census Bibarani* (Census Report of Tripura State of 1340 T.E. (1931), Tripura State Press. Agartala.
8. Debbarma Samarendra (1998): *Survey Settlement of the Chakla Roshanabad 1892-1899 (Reprint)*: Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute & Museam, Govt. of Tripura, Agartala.
9. Debarman, Suren (1997): *Tripurar Adibasi Jiiban O Sanskriti* (Bengali); Parul Prakashani, Agartala.
10. Gan Chaudhuri, Jagadis (1979): *Tripura: The Land and Its People*; Leeladevi Publications, Delhi.

