

AN IMPERATIVE STUDY OF SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES HAPPENED IN TRIPURA FROM 1940-1975

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Abstract

Tripura is situated in the North-eastern region of India. It shares an international boundary with Bangladesh and state boundary with Assam and Mizoram. Tripura has received a large number of immigrants from erstwhile East Pakistan and now Bangladesh at that period from 1940-1975, this resulted in refugees outnumbering the indigenous tribes who were living in Tripura from times immemorial. The bulk inflow of non-tribal took place at that period marked the inception of many multi-dimensional social and demographic changes in Tripura. A peep into the changes in the population composition of that period tells us that for the first-time indigenous peoples were entitled with the term 'Minority', for instance in 1941 population of Tripura was composed of 62.06% Tripuri and 37.94% Bengali and others and after a decade in 1951 population composition was changed to 48.65% and 51.35%, Tripuri and Bengali and others respectively. Uncontrolled infiltration after the Partition of India in 1947 and at the time of Liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 also severely affected the strong social structure of the indigenous people of Tripura. In this paper, I tried to present a vivid sketch of the causes and outcomes of social and demographic changes happened at that period. It attempts to provide a glimpse of the political and economic scenario of that period of Tripura.

Keywords: Refugees, Minority, Inception, Strong, Tripura, Indigenous.

INTRODUCTION

Tripura is a small hilly state located in the North-Eastern region of India. It has been the abode of many Tribes from the times immemorial. The major tribe communities in Tripura are Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Halam, Mog. Noatia, Kuki, Garo, Munda, Lusai, Orang. Santal, Uchai, Khasia, Bhil, Lepcha, Bhutia and Chaimal. Tripura was a princely state under British India. It merged with Indian Union after independence on 15th October 1949 as group 'C' category state. Tripura became a Union Territory in November 1956. The first elected ministry was formed in Tripura in July 1963 and since then the State has had a government elected on the basis of

universal adult franchise, and on 21st January 1972 it attained full-fledged statehood. The period under this paper witnessed changes in Politics, Society, Demography, Economy and Culture at a large scale. This paper particularly discusses the social and demographic changes took place during that period. The Partition of India, 1947 and the Liberation war of Bangladesh, 1971 forever changed the fate of this state. These are the two events responsible for the highest number of eviction of people from erstwhile East Pakistan and now Bangladesh. These people who have been evicted refugeeed in adjacent Indian states mainly in West Bengal, Assam, Tripura. The benign people of Tripura have given an open arm welcome to these evicted people, they never thought about the pernicious consequences of the large inflow of immigrants. Every society must undergo social and demographic changes over a period of time the same happened in Tripura but striking thing is that the pace of change was highly accelerated in this period from 1940-1975. Tripura speaks for the changes that can happen with a sudden influx of population. Tripura witnessed sudden growth of population due to immigration, decadal growth from 1941-1951 was 24.56 % from 1951-1961 was 78.71 % and from 1961-1971 was 36.28 % these statistics tell us that rate at which people were uprooted from peripheral areas of Tripura and their entrance into Tripura. The economic condition of Tripura was deplorable as previously it was a princely state maximum wealth was in the hands of countable ruling elites and tribes were not indulged in economic activities, they were busy in doing necessary activities for their subsistence. The refugees came to Tripura almost with no tangible wealth it further ruined the economy of the state but the refugees had knowledge about performing economic activities like improved settled agricultural activities and business which they did in their country of origin. It was after their successful settlement economy of the state started improving.

The Political Scenario of that period, maximum of indigenous peoples were not interested in politics and those who were interested they joined two major political parties, Indian National Congress and Left Parties. Politics was mainly a job of the educated urban people. It was after tribal people came to know about the drastic social and demographic changes happened because of the huge influx of non-tribal population which greatly affected their life and marginalized them in every sphere of life, they started organizing political parties with the primary aim of safeguarding tribal interests.

Primarily society of Tripura was coloured by tribal cultures and beliefs though there was the existence of non-tribals too. The non-tribal population was very less in number mostly concentrated in the peripheral areas of the capital city so, they could not successfully influence the tribals for exchange and sharing of their culture. The refugees arrived between 1940-1975 settled in each and every corner of the state especially in the plains because hills were occupied by the tribes. This period marked the genesis of intense interaction between tribals and the non-tribals population of Tripura with the course of time interaction grown and gave birth to several social changes.

SOCIAL CHANGES

No society remains completely static. Society is subject to constant changes. Tripura witnessed the genesis of multi-dimensional change in the society from 1940-1975. It is a well acknowledged phenomenon that immigrants accept the culture and familiarise themselves with the social customs of the host state, this phenomenon is realized when a meagre number of immigrants came to the host state. If a huge number of immigrants came to the host country

outnumbered the indigenous people then this phenomenon fails to prove itself. This is what exactly happened in Tripura. The elementary base of the princely Tripura was its tribal culture and beliefs. Tripura under the Manikya rulers nursed culture of the Bangalees along with its tribal culture and belief. Previous studies by many scholars tell us that the social structure of Tripura demonstrated a harmonious co-existence of various tribal and non-tribal communities. The period under this paper speaks for exertion of unwanted pressure caused due to mass immigration on the rigid social structure of the indigenous people of Tripura. The unhindered inflows of migrants have resulted in happening of incessant transformation in Tripura. At that period Tripura was converted from a tribal state to non-tribal one.

Literacy

Prime factors responsible for widespread illiteracy among the tribes of Tripura were education was never given any importance among the tribes of Tripura, widespread poverty, in case of tribal females' parents did not encourage their daughters for schooling, women have to do most of the domestic works along with their works in the crop field. Illiteracy prevented them from getting any job in private sectors and Government departments. Tripura was dominated by non-tribals especially the Bangalees at that period and most of the Bangalees were educated compared to the tribals which enabled them to get Government and Private jobs. One of the most significant occurrences of that period was an outburst of educational facilities with the outburst of a population. Literacy rate of Tripura increased drastically in 1961 it was 20.24% and in 1971 literacy rate increased to 30.98% what is remarkable here is that literacy rate of the female tribal population experienced a great leap forward i.e., in 1961 it was 2.31% and in 1971 it attained 6.04% this helped to strengthen women in the society. Tripura Rajya Jana Sikhya Samity founded in the year 1945 played an important role in spreading education among the tribes of Tripura. This outburst of educational facilities highly benefitted the tribes of Tripura.

Religion

The festivals and pujas occupy an important role in the life of tribal people. The core of tribal religion is coloured by some superstitions. In the wake of the population explosion, the spread of literacy and cultural contact the very faith in certain religious beliefs and practices are getting eroded. The educated tribals started questioning the practicability of those beliefs and practices. This marks the birth of the religious changes happened.

“The tribal culture is related to religion. It is their Music, Dance, Sculptures, Crafts and Literatures which found expression in religious rites and rituals. So, here in Tripura, the cultural identity and religious identity of tribal people go together” (Bhattacharya, 1994, p.91). Changes in the religious practices resulted changes in the cultural life of the tribes of Tripura.

“the tribal religion is characterised by animism, spiritism, fetishism, ghost worship or ancestor worship, totemism, magic or witchcraft etc.” (Bhowmik, 2003, p21) Statistics tell us that in 1961 Hindus were 76.01% and in 1971 Hindu population was increased to 89.55%, this shows the religion of the non-tribals from erstwhile East Pakistan and now Bangladesh started to shade the rare religious beliefs of the tribes of Tripura. The famous religious festivals like kharchi of tribals no longer remained a tribal centred festival it was opened to all and everyone enjoyed them. There was a mass acceptance of tribal religious practices by non-tribal and vice versa.

Dresses

As tribals came in contact with non-tribal immigrants assimilation of two culture to a great extent took place. The process of acculturation was rapid among the tribes residing in urban areas compared with the tribes in the interior villages. Domination of non-tribals in the state accelerated the process of cultural exchange between tribals and non-tribals. Traditional attire of the indigenous people of Tripura is that women wear 'Pachra' and 'Richa' and men wear homemade dhutis. In this case, a noticeable shift happened i.e., tribals women started wearing saree and blouse and men started wearing mill made dhutis.

“..... Most of the traditional tribal ways of clothing is the simplicity in design, pattern and the same kind of material i.e. cotton being used by almost all the tribes. One reason being, the easy availability of cotton in their Jhum fields since Jhuming was a major source of livelihood attached with the tribal ways of life” (Debbarma, 2018, p.69). Tribes use locally available materials to manufacture dresses in their cottage industries. After the partition of the country and consequent refugee settlement all over the state encouraged the jhum cultivators for settled agriculture for producing more cash and food crops this gradually decreased production of jhum crops like Cotton this made cotton unavailable as a result tribes started discarding habit of cloth manufacturing at home and started purchasing readymade clothes available in markets which differs from their traditional dresses to a great extent and similar to the dresses of non-tribals living in the state.

Housing Pattern

Tribals people used to live in 'Tong' or pile houses it was observed at that period that areas with strong bangalee influence tribals started to prepare Banglaee type of houses. “..... during the princely regime of Tripura. The underdeveloped people in the hills were practically in the dark as their social mobility in every sphere of life was very much restricted” (Bhattacharjee, 1989, p.87). The deplorable condition of houses of these people depicts their economic status. New patterns of building houses were in vogue. Houses with mud walls, tin roofs and pucca buildings were the features of new patterns of houses. Adoption of a new pattern of housing style by the tribes shows economic upliftment of the tribes this happened due to implementation of welfare policies after the association of Tripura with Indian Union in 1949. The merger of Tripura proved to be a major factor for the social upliftment of the tribal population.

Folk Culture

Folk culture reflects the basic characteristics of the people of a society and also deeply associated with customs and traditions. Tripura nurtured the folk culture of tribal and non-tribal from the heyday of the empire.

As J. L Sutradhar opined in his hook Indigenous Music and Culture of Tripura that from 1960-1970 both the folk cultures existed without support from government and non-government level. But after the period 1970, a radical change has been observed, from this period rural folk culture were performed publicly. From the 1980s the work of upliftment of rural folk culture was carried out by the government. The rural folk culture of Tripura saw a major upliftment in the post-merger period.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

Demographic changes in Tripura in the words of Jagadis Gan Choudhury “Long ago the population of Tripura was largely homogeneous, since the last few centuries it is becoming heterogeneous. Excess of immigration over emigration and excess of birth over death, and at the same time shrinkage of territory are leading to increasing density of population” (Choudhury, 2017, p.269). Princely Tripura welcomed immigrants from various provinces of India especially from the eastern provinces like Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Assam. Rajmala, the Royal Chronicle of Tripura depicts many instances of rulers of Tripura favouring immigrant settlements especially Bangalees. These immigrants contributed to bringing change in the demography of the state but not to that extent which took place in the period under this study. Massive immigration from erstwhile Pakistan and now Bangladesh to Tripura affected the demography of the state to a great extent. “.... the floodgates of an influx of population of refugees from East Pakistan that forever changed the demography of the erstwhile Princely Kingdom” (Chakraborty, 2017, p.78). The social and political turmoil in East Pakistan in the 1940s to 1960s under West Pakistani rulers have been the prime push factors behind the huge immigration to Tripura.

Tripura had many pull factors some of the major pull factors are it offered a wholehearted welcome to the refugees, peaceful life in Tripura, the better economic condition of Tripura under Indian Union comparing to East Pakistan etc. A study of decadal growth of the population of Tripura proves Social and political disturbances in East Pakistan triggered outflow. In 1931-41 decadal growth of population was 34.14, in 1941-1951 it was 25.02, in 1951-61 it jumped to 78.71 and then it decreased to 36.28 in 1961-71 here it is worth mentioning that communal tension in East Pakistan after Partition of India is the main reason behind the jump of decadal growth to 78.71 in 1951-61. Tripura is the only state in which immigrants surpassed the number of indigenous populations.

Demographic changes can be understood more vividly with the following statistics. Total population of Tripura was 5,13,010 in 1941 and 6,39,028 in 1951 and 11,42,005 in 1961 and 15,56,342 in 1971. Tribal population of Tripura was 2,56,991, 2,37,953, 3,60,070, 4,50,544, 5,83,920 in the year 1941, 1951, 1961, 1971 respectively and Non-tribal population in Tripura was as follows 2,56,019, 4,01,074, 7,81,935, 1,105,798 in the year 1941, 1951, 1961, 1971. It can be easily assessed from the above-mentioned data that population of Tripura crossed Ten lakh in the decade 1951-1961 and population of non-tribals crossed this mark in between 1961-1971 and it was after several decades in 2001-2011 Tribal population surpassed this mark. The decadal growth of Tripura depicts a greater change. The growth of tribal population was in negative in the decade from 1941-1951 i.e.-7.40% were at the same period growth of non-tribal population was 59.26%. In the decades from 1951-1961 and 1961-1971 growth of tribal population was 51.31% and 25.12% respectively and at these same decades experienced a much greater increase i.e., 91.76% and 41.41% respectively. The period under the study of this paper underwrote a considerable rise in the sex ratio of Tripura. The sex ratio of Tripura was below 900 in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1951 for the first-time sex ratio of Tripura attained more than 900 females per 1000 males. The sex ratio of Tripura was 886, 904, 932, 943 in the year 1941, 1951, 1961, 1971.

The sudden explosion of population resulted in the rampant change in the density of population in Tripura. In 1941, 1951, 1961, 1971 density of population was 49, 61, 109, 148 persons per square kilometer. This rampant change placed Tripura in the top position in the list

of highest density among the North Eastern hilly states of India. It can be said from the changes in the density of population of Tripura that emigrated peoples from plains occupied almost all the corners of the state. A deep look into the changing pattern of urbanization in Tripura tells us that this period 1940-1975 process of urbanization was accelerated.

The establishment of new economic units by the refugees fostered urbanization to a great extent. The urban population of Tripura was 3.4% in 1941 it was almost doubled i.e., 6.7% after a decade in 1951. The total urban population of Tripura in 1961 and 1971 was 9.0% and 10.43% respectively. Tribal urban population constitute a very less percentage comparing to the non tribals. Tribals were interested in living in their coaches in extremely rural areas. Though the percentage of the tribal urban population was increasing but no at an impressive rate. Tribal population in the urban areas was 0.63%, 1.20%, 1.21% of total tribal population in 1951, 1961, 1971 respectively.

It can be understood that these above-mentioned demographic impacts were inevitable if we just assess the refugee movements into Tripura in the year 1971. The total number of refugees entered into Tripura was 1,381,649 as on 15th December 1971. Tripura stands in number two (02) after West Bengal in the list of distribution of refugees in various Indian states. Two significant incidents of world history viz. Partition of India, 1947 and Liberation war of Bangladesh, 1971 responsible for gigantic inflow of refugees to Tripura which redefined the demography of this tiny state of India.

ECONOMIC SCENARIO

“When the economic base of a community’s culture starts changing, the superstructure cannot remain static” (Chaudhuri, 2011, p.65), with the changes in the economy, social life also undergoes many changes this is evident in Tripura. Tripura, an isolated hilly land with minimum accessories of communication with peripheral countries and states. It successfully maintained steady economic growth from the year of its merger with Indian Union to till date. At that period economy of Tripura was basically an agrarian with many disadvantages like it was mostly hilly, indigenous people were only acquainted with a less productive age-old slash and burn type of cultivation named Jhum. Under princely Tripura, tribals were mostly satisfied with their economic condition it was after burdensome penetration of refugees from the plains of East Pakistan shaken the tribal economy. As J. B. Ganguli pointed out “.... Because of the heavy influx of refugees from East Pakistan into the state led to tremendous pressure on the land and natural resources to which the tribals so long had early access” (Bhattacharjee, 1989, p.91).

The tribal economy of Tripura was characterised by less specialization, primitive, subsistence, small and backward economy etc. Immigrants to Tripura possessed improved skills on plough cultivation favouring high productivity from the traditional Jhum cultivation of tribals as result of this “many of them left Jhum cultivation and settled down to plough cultivation” (Khangai, 2013, p.19) as an outcome of this shift plough cultivation reached almost every corner of the state. The successful establishment of Plough cultivation resulted in high agricultural productivity which contributed towards an improvement of the economy of Tripura. “The fruitful results of plough cultivation have become known to the jhumias and the adoption of such cultivation have brought about revolutionary changes in the socio-economic life patterns of the jhumias” (Bhattyacharya, 1992, p.58). Now the fruits of plough cultivation were enjoyed by tribes and non-tribes of Tripura.

In that period there was very limited scope for employment in the service sector and most of the posts in the government and meagre private units were held by the elite class of society. Illiterate bangalees and tribals were the worse sufferers of the miserable condition of the economy of Tripura. S. R. Bhattacharjee opined in the chapter titled Economic Life in his book Tribal Insurgency in Tripura that there was a dire need of housing facilities especially for the poor people in the hills and the plains as well. There was widespread poverty due to uneven distribution of socio-economic developments.

The economic scenario of Tripura can be assessed with frequent looks at these below mentioned determinants of economy, the Per capita income of Tripura in 1971-72, 1972-73, 1973-74 and 1974-75 was 502, 563, 534, 649, 789 respectively and increasing trend of urban population as 6.7%, 9.0% and 10.43% in 1951, 1961, and 1971 respectively, this shows an improving trend of the economy of Tripura.

POLITICAL SCENARIO

Tripura was an independent princely state before its merger with the Indian Union on October 15th, 1949. The period under the study of this paper recorded a vast change in the political scenario of Tripura. After the merger, the traditional administrative machinery was dissolved and introduced a new administrative unit headed by a new class of political administrators. The dominant parties were Indian National Congress (INC) and Left Parties. These parties claimed to have accepted the responsibility to protect the rights of tribals but they failed to materialize what they claimed. Politics of that period greatly influenced by the bangalee immigrants most of the leaders of political parties were bangalees which annoyed tribals because they believed non-tribals would not work for the upliftment of the tribals so, they wanted to take the responsibility of leadership. The government was neglecting the worsening condition of tribals causing mainly due to huge immigration. “The large-scale immigration had not been dealt with a strong hand congress government due to the politics of vote bank, as a result, the interests of the tribals got backseat” (Chakraborty, 2017, p.78).

This was the period when educated tribals came forward to form political parties for the protection of their own interests. They formed many political parties and some represented themselves in the state assembly but failed to climb up the stairs of power to grab the highest position in the state administration. Some of the tribals oriented organizations responsible for tribals movement formed at that period are Seng-Krak founded in 1947 aimed at fighting for tribals predominance in administration, Paharia Union founded in July 1951 it was formed after by the founders of Seng-Krak after it was outlawed, Adivasi Samiti founded in 1952 its founders were from Chakma community, Tripura Rajya Adivasi Sangh founded in 1953 it took anti-refugee stands, Adibasi Samsad founded in 1954 it also took anti-bangalee stands along with movement for more tribals participation in politics, East India Tribals Union its main aims were formation of a tribals state in North East and more tribals district councils, Tripura Upajati Juba Samity founded in 1967 its main objectives were restoration of tribals land, introduction of ‘Kok-Borak’ language in Roman script as state language, Seng-Krak re-established in 1967 with backing of Mizo National Front (MNF), Tripura Sena founded under influence of Mizo National Front (MNF), BarkhiHalam founded in 1964 they stood for promotion of tribals traditions. An analysis study of these organizations it can be said that though they were founded in a different year and under the leadership of different leaders had some common aims which are preservation

and promotion of tribal values and culture, the economic prosperity of tribals, abrogation of immigrants. Commencement of tribals oriented political struggle at that period still continues and they achieved very limited success in their endeavours.

CONCLUSION

Population change is the major reason for the social changes that happened in Tripura in the period under this paper. After the Independence of India followed by the merger of Tripura and settlement of refugees' changes begun to take place in every sphere of life. These new changes provided scope for the development of a different and developed society. This new society was realised when they started working together, this opened the door for close interaction between two diverse cultures and tradition. Interaction thickened between these groups due to some prime factors like matrimonial alliances, wide acceptance and sharing of the religions and religious customs between them, hence a fresh composite society emerged in Tripura. The new society was the mixture of the tribals and non-tribals. Acculturation resulted in bringing changes in the culture of both groups.

The significant features of the economy of Tripura have undergone remarkable changes, from less specialization to moderate specialization, from a domestic mode of production to commercial mode of production, from Jhum to plough cultivation, from food crops to cash crops etc. but the base of the economy remains the same i.e. Agriculture. Upward movement of the economy is a result and a reason for social change.

Changes happened to a great extent in the political sphere mainly because of replacement of royal administration with an administration led by political leaders. Many tribal oriented parties founded. These parties blamed immigrants for marginalizing the tribes in the society. Here, we must understand that immigration was not a fun trip. They leave their homes, occupations to save their life from prosecution. Every community faces social, economic, political problems this blame game will not heal these problems, cooperation, proper implementation of welfare policies and better use of governmental institutions can be used as sedatives to cure these problems. The cultural intermingling at varying levels continues. Social changes are not limited to the above-mentioned changes some are still under development. If we look deeply in today's society also, we will find many social changes reflected in the performance of rituals, festivals and other social relations.

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