

## **A Brief Analysis on the Tribal Development Policies in Tripura**

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### **Abstract**

The history of princely Tripura vividly had shown that no significant measures were taken for the development of the indigenous people who were the inhabitants of the hill areas of the region. On the contrary many unjust taxes and laws were imposed on them and those lead towards the several uprisings during different periods of time. This scenario was changed a little with the Jana Sikhsa Andolan in 1945 which was organised by the young leaders like Dasarath Debbarma, Sudhanya Debbarma and Himanta Debbarma. They started to educate the unprivileged indigenous groups of hill Tripura. Aboriginals of Tripura after facing several plights like refugee influx after partition of India and dearth of food or formation of Reserved Forest land etc. some Tribal development policies were initiated by the then state government which were directed by Dhebar Commission. Several attempts were made to secure the land and economic condition of aboriginals of this state. Even when insurgency started in Tripura various attempts were taken to bring back the tribal insurgents into normal life. Hence, this paper would analyse all the development policies which were taken to develop the socio-economic and political sphere of the indigenous mass of Tripura from 1945 to 2005. All these development policies not only changed the condition of the 19 indigenous groups of Tripura but also have shaped the overall dimension of the state.

**Key words:** Tribal, Policy, Development, Reform, Dhebar Commission, Janashiksha Andolon.

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### **I. Introduction:**

With 705 types of aboriginal groups, India has 8.6% of tribes among the total population of the country according to 2011 census. At present Tribal Development in India become an important issue for social science researchers. As the issue of tribal development is becoming increasingly important, the public policies associated with the area, in these recent years are under continuous investigation.

The United Nations Organization's seminar was held on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1992 in Geneva and independent 26 human rights representatives were attended that. The timeline of 2004-2014 was declared as the 'Tribal decade' and also the day, 9<sup>th</sup> August was acknowledged as the 'International Day of the World's Indigenous People'. Nevertheless, after all these steps taken, the ethnic communities in India are underdeveloped and do not have access to all socio-economic rights. Not only that but they are also exploited as they do not have any idea about fundamental rights. Hence they are easily deprived of socio-economic benefits, health benefits, and even administrative benefits and also cannot enjoy the right to education. As the forest is the main source of their livelihood, deforestation, and land capturing are taking a toll on their lives.

### **Origin of Indian Tribes:**

During the era of Dharmashastras, Brahmanas attributed the term Nishadas to the Tribal people. They were not mentioned in the Varna system as they were left out and used to staying in the forest. They were hunters and gatherers and had their customary systems. However, according to the research, Indian scheduled tribes are originated from Proto-Australoids. They practically covered the entire country. The origin of Indian tribes also trailed from Mongolians and they are located in the North-East. Another ethnic origin is detected as Negritos who have curly hair and settled in the Andaman and South-West India. Nevertheless, the knowledge about the advancement of tribes is somewhat vague and even the subsequent history of the numerous aboriginals of India is not clear to the scholars and researchers. However, it is now an undoubted fact that the indigenous groups in India mostly came from the pre-historic groups. And they are the mixtures of the different races.

### **Indian Tribes during Pre-Independence Era:**

During British rule, the forest areas which were inhabited by tribals came under the British government due to their inaccessible condition. They did not give much attention to these areas. The normal way of administration that persisted in provinces or the plain areas, was not extended to the tribal areas. Rather they established a single line administration where a single person would vest with all powers and during inevitable circumstances would be handled by judicial interventions. Outlying of the ethnic communities began with the initiation of the 'Government of India Act' in 1870. Regions like Bengal, Madras, Orissa, Bihar, Assam were declared as "scheduled areas" according to this Act. In 1874 'The Scheduled District Act' released and according to that Act these areas were should not be covered by the rule of British civil agents. And due to this process of isolation, these areas remained undeveloped. There were deliberate efforts for not developing communications into these tribal areas. Only some ways of communications were developed which were beneficial for the Raj. Few roads for invigilation or the access to exploit the forest were enabled. Thus tribal people were not in touch with plain lands and they had their administrative system into their own communities.

### **Indian Tribes during Post-Independence Era:**

During the starting years of Independence, there was a chronic dilemma in making tribal development policy. There was sensitivity at the senior policy level as they could not decide isolation or assimilation. Policymakers were even in confusion that the road construction would be for up-gradation of aboriginal habitations or these roads were structured basically to exploiters who were interested to manipulate lands and mineral wealth of those areas.

Lastly, The Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, led by U.N. Dhebar (1960) was originated to elaborate the system of unification and attempted to restore the peace of life of the tribals and also was attentive to its improvement. This commission also tried not to impose anything upon the tribal. Besides this commission tried hard to make them a part and parcel of the country.

The most important step by the Indian government in tribal development is The Five Year Plans which was launched included several types of special programs for these people. These plans focused on removing different barriers imposed by the colonial government. The programs under Five Year Plans tried to change the traditional system of agriculture by modifying existing institutions and also focused on the promotion of secondary and tertiary sectors to increase income and employment. Adequate social facilities like education, health, housing, communication, etc. were also taken into consideration for all-around development.

#### **An overview on Tripura and its Tribal Population:**

Tripura was a princely state before it was integrated into the Indian Territory as a "C" category state on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1949. From the early part of the 1950s tribal people started to become the minorities of this state. The partition of India changed the demography of the state with the inundation of non-tribal covering the border from Bangladesh, former East Pakistan. In 1970 the State Department of Welfare for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes was inaugurated to upgrade the condition and remove the economic backwardness. In 1982 the State Tribal Welfare Department had begun as an autonomous body for integrated socio-economic development of tribal people.

Tripura is consisted of 19 tribes with non-tribal community. It has Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Lusai, Mog, Garo, Kuki, Chaimal, Uchai, Halam, Khasia, Bhutia, Munda, Orang, Lepcha, Santal, Bhil and Noatia.

### **Tribal Development Policies in Tripura:**

Since the time of history, Tripura's economy is based on jhum cultivation as it is a hilly state with an abundance of forest resources. If we pay some attention to the history of Tripura we can see that during the period of Maharaja Birchandra Manikya Bahadur there were several reformative steps were taken for the development of the region and its people. Unfortunately, these development measures failed to impact the lifestyle or the situation of the underprivileged section living in the interior areas depending on the jhum cultivation. All the reformative measures were highly related to the people living near plain areas or in the capital. Again, the section that was dependent on basically jhum field was always oppressed by the officials of the monarchy basically for taxation. The history of famine and rebellions are the testimonies of those oppressions. They hardly managed basic needs like food and shelter. Even the monarchy had payed much attention to improve their condition.

However in the year 1945 the 'Gana Shiksha Andolon' was started by three young leaders of Tripura, named Dasarath Debbarma, Sudhanya Debbarma, and Himanta Debbarma. And during that period they spread the revolution of education in the oppressed section without any wages even many Bengali students from Dhaka University came forward into this work.

After the independence, Tripura became a part of India in 1949 as a “C” category state. And it was that time when the Dewani rule started and Levy tax became an issue and rebellion started against it. In repercussion to that Kumari Madhuti Rupashree of Padmabil, Khawai became martyrs on that fight against the unjust.

Again, this was not the end of the plights for the tribal in Tripura. After independence, there was an influx of Bengali refugees due to partition which affected the indigenous life in many ways. An entire demographic change happened in the state which made tribal people politically more vulnerable. Even it had its impact on their lifestyle, food, culture, and even on their habitation.

In 1952 the first general election happened in Tripura and both east and west constituency Communist Party of India won. And voters also elected 30 members of an Electoral College which also selected a particular member for Rajya Sabha. On 1<sup>st</sup> November 1956, Tripura became union territory with an advisory committee for the chief commissioner. In the 1957 and 1962 elections, the voters of Tripura elected 30 members to the territorial council. Territorial Council was dissolved in 1963 and the members were transferred to the newly organized Legislative Assembly.

1967 was the year when the first election to the Legislative Council has occurred. After attaining statehood, the legislative council’s members were enlarged to 60.

In 1963, after the first legislative election, Indian National Congress formed the Government in Tripura. After coming into power, the newly formed government declared 60% of forest areas in Tripura as Reserved Forest land. They further stated that this step had been taken to curb jhum cultivation and started controlling the forest dwellers, especially the poor jhumias and their women. And that created havoc on the hill areas as their livelihood was depended on the forest for woods, food, and other essential things. Police and forest officials started torturing women and at that period Mohini Tripura from Mwatai, Belonia, who was also the Vice President of Ganatanrik Narisamiti, Belonia branch, was martyred by the forest officials. Mohini Tripura was fighting for the right of the people and against the oppression of the ruling government.

However, after all these nuisances, things started to change. Under the recommendation of the Dhebar Commission Tribal Development Blocks were formed like Chamanu, Damboornagar TD blocks, etc. And through these TD blocks, the then government implemented a Tribal Rehabilitation scheme. In this scheme, the government used to give near about 500rs programs to each family like supplying Banana trees, mini coconut trees, etc. but this program was also not successful because without proper education the mass of the population did not even know how to utilize this program. Consequently, a negative impact was seen as there was an immense growth of begging, snatching, and starvation among the indigenous mass in the state. This scheme continued till 1977 and ended with 2000rs per family.

In 1978 the ruling government changed in Tripura. The left front came into power in the legislative assembly election. The first left-front government was led by Nripen Chakraborty. This government’s priority was tribal rehabilitation. They understood that education is the crying need and tribal people’s participation in administration is very much needed to protect their rights. So, spreading education and Tribal rehabilitation were the priorities of the government at that period.

Another challenge for that government was to secure the land rights of the tribal people. There was a huge influx of Bengali people from Bangladesh during the 1947 partition. Again, during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, there was a huge migration of Bengali mass in Tripura. And that incident redefined the demographic situation in Tripura. Bengalis started to occupy the plain areas and that had a huge impact on the lifestyle, culture, and existence of the ethnic community in Tripura. Eventually, this led to the shaping of the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council (TTADC). The Parliament of India passed this act in 1979. As a result of the democratic uprisings by the ethnic communities, this evolution had happened under the 7<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Indian Constitution in the beginning. TTADC was initiated in Tripura on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1982 and the members who were elected took swear on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1982. The main objective of this autonomous district council was emancipating aboriginals so that they can be in charge of themselves and also preserve rights, literature and culture, custom, traditions, etc. Later by the 49<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment act 1984, TTADC was upgraded as the 6<sup>th</sup> schedule of Indian Constitution. It came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1985. Then a fresh election was donend and the new TTADC government newly began from the month July 1985.

During this time changes were brought into the village governance system also, as previously Pradhans of the village were elected by raising hands. This process was changed and the electoral voting system was started. Also, a new scheme called Food for Work was introduced by the then government. This was somewhat similar to MGNREGA where people of certain economic groups used to get paid jobs and that became a way of income for poor people who were economically unstable. However, economic stability gave people interest in administration and politics, and democracy as poor tribal mass understood that monetary stability was giving them some ground to express their rights.

To enhance the education system in Tripura schools were established in every place possible even in the remote hilly areas. But again due to the dearth of plain areas, there was a scarcity of markets for jhumias to sell their products and earn profit from that.

Again Tripura has its history of Rubber Cultivation since 1963 for rehabilitating the jhumias for economic growth. But the prospects of Rubber Plantation in Tripura were recognized during the 1970s. In 1979 with the setup of the Rubber Board, the rubber plantation in Tripura acquired its full swing. Tripura Rehabilitation Plantation Corporation (TRPC) and Tripura Forest Development & Plantation Corporation Limited (TFDPC) are working on that jointly. And initiation of subsidies as an inducement started giving in 1980 for new plantations, had seen ultimate thrive in a rubber plantation in Tripura. It is a profitable economic investment for every section of people. There were not only full-time cultivators but also full-time investors. The emergence of rubber plantations in Tripura experienced acceleration with the initiation of the "Tripura Block Plantation Project" along with the Rubber Board and the 'Department of Tribal Welfare, Govt. of Tripura' in 1992-93. Even, a fund from The World Bank is available for rubber plantations since 1992. The main objective of all efforts was to give a developed life to the jhumias and also to restore the rural economic system in Tripura.

Not only that, Tripura is a traditionally tea-plantation area. This state has 55 tea gardens widening in the area of 6430 hectares which produce more than 5500 tonnes per annum. Good blending quality is the main feature of the tea that grows in Tripura. Production of bio-tea without any chemicals is a great venture here. Land and climatic conditions are also great here which offers possibilities for the up-gradation of the tea industry in the region. Rehabilitation of the shifting agriculturists also attached to these activities which are based on plantation. Balanced growth of the state is possible when there is a growth of every stratum of people in that state.

But a huge problem called insurgency in Tripura started during the 1980s. Especially a bigger portion of the rural indigenous mass was involved in that for several reasons and their main motto was to make a separate land for ethnic communities. Several efforts were made by the Tripura Government to bring them back into the mainstream of life. For instance in Tripura State Government and ATTF accord 1993, "MEMORANDUM OF SETTLEMENT". According to the accord, it was fixed that there would be the restoration of alienated lands, and suspected Bangladeshi foreign nationals who have come to Tripura after 25<sup>th</sup> march 1971 and do not have well-founded documents would be sent back. Again, there would be the inclusion of tribal majorities in TTADC. Secured accommodation and escort for Office Bearers, amplification of seats for Sch. Tribes candidates in the TTAADC, Jhumia re-settlement, etc. would be taken into consideration, etc.

There were many developments happened in security measures in Tripura during that period. Even Tripura State Rifle (TSR) was an outcome of that period. With all these measures and considerations finally, in 2005 the insurgency problem in Tripura was ended up.

Even it should be mentioned that Tripura has an astounding achievement in literacy rate and is acknowledged as one of the most literate states in the country. Kokborok language has its growth here. Several works are going on to rejuvenate this language and its rich literature.

## **II. Conclusion:-**

After all these successful policies also there are some dark areas where development and welfare cannot reach due to many unavoidable reasons. Lack of communication, education, and insurgency are some major causes for that. Some areas in the Dhalai district, for instance, are still underdeveloped. The main challenge for Tripura is fighting against drugs nowadays. Most of the tribal young generation is now the prey of this bad influence. Lack of industries and markets are also a vital reason for the lack of jobs and backwardness of this state. But again, Tripura has a great human resource, if the state government utilizes this human resource with the help of the central government then it can be beneficial not only for the ethnic community but for the whole population in this state.

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