



Research Paper

Role of Twipra Students Federation (TSF) for the Social Change in Tripura

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ABSTRACT: Tripura is one of the seven states of north-eastern part of India. Being a tribal state, the majority of the people are non-tribal in Tripura. The demography of the state immensely changed due to migration from neighborhood country Bangladesh. The demographical change impacted on the socio-political background of the tribal people. This demographical change created a fear for the identity loses among the tribal people of the state. Here, the student organization TSF came forward to save the identity of the tribal people and also to save them from evil practices which have been continuing for long days. TSF stands to Protect the traditional code and symbol of dress, Improve the morale of the tribal people, 'Improvement of education among the tribal community, Protest against 'Laskar', Recognizing Kokborok as the second official language, Fighting against the 'witchcraft practice' etc. Therefore, the work is very important to know the role of the TSF to protect the cultural identity and for correction of the tribal people of the state. To conduct the work both primary and secondary data has been used.

KEYWORDS: Tribal, Migration, Demography, Identity, Kokborok.

Received 28 Mar, 2022; Revised 06 Apr, 2022; Accepted 08 Apr, 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Tripura is the third smallest state of India having 10,491 km² of its area. It is surrounded by Bangladesh border is about 856 km on its north, south and west side and only east side it connected with the mainland of India i.e. with Assam border is about 53 km and with Mizoram border is about 109 km. [1] Tripura is known as tribal State. According to the Census 2011, Tripura constituted 11, 66,813 (31.78%) tribal people out of 36, 71,032 total population in Tripura. There are 19 groups of tribe who claim themselves as 'the sons of the soil'. They are Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Halam, Mog, Munda, Noatia, Garo, Orang, Kuki, Lushai, Bhil, Santhal, Uchai, khasia, Lapcha, Bhutia, Generic Tribes. According to the 'Rajmala' scribed by Kailash Chandra Singha (1896) the name of the State has come from the words Tui (water) Pra (near) meaning land adjoining water. Kok-Borok is the major language which talks about 8 major groups of tribal are- Tripuri, Reang, Noatia, Jamatia, Rupini, Kolo, Uchai and Murasing. The word kokborok comprises two words 'Kok' means language and 'Borok' means man. Thus, kokborok means language of man. [2]

The State has been ruled by 184 tribal kings. Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya was the last ruling Maharaja of Tripura before merged with India in 1949. On 15 October, 1949, it joined with Indian Union as a 'C' category state. It later became the Union territory on 1 November, 1956. Thereafter, it attained fully statehood on 21 January, 1972. [3]

Although Tripura is known as a tribal state, the tribal people here now forming hardly 30% of the total population seems to defy the tribal state entitlement. The fast growing demographic imbalance between the tribal and non-tribal population at 70:30 ratio mainly as a result of large scale migration into the state from erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) created a perceived fear of identity loss among the educated tribal youth of the state. After merging with the Indian Union the state has been flowing huge Bengali migrants into the state. The Bengali culture, tradition, beliefs etc. impacted on the tribal culture and their life style. Likewise, the tribal society has been under developed due to superstitions, illiteracy etc.

To protect the tribal people from different threatening forces, the educated tribal elite of the state formed the Tribal Students' Federation on 25 October, 1968, which was renamed as the Twipra Students' Federation (TSF) in 1996. The constitution of TSF also reflects the social issues in the aims and objectives like- "to foster unity, integrity among all section of tribal students of Tripura as well as tribal students of different parts of the Country, to uplift Social, Economic, Literacy, and Cultural condition of tribal community of

Tripura, to boost the National Unity, National Integrity and common harmony of the country, to preserve Tribal Culture, traditions and other cultural heritage of the State, to fight against all kinds of superstition, obsolete tradition, Social stigma, and backwardness, to propagate the message of Education, Literacy and civilisation among all tribal communities of Tripura State.” [4] The following table has shown the demographical scenario of Tripura.

Demographical scenario of Tripura

Year	Total Population	Non-tribal population	Tribal Population	Percentage of tribal population	Percentage of non-tribal population
1881	95637	12,380	83,257	87.06	12.94
1891	137442	33,328	1,04,114	75.5	24.25
1901	173325	43894	1,29,431	74.68	25.32
1911	229613	81653	1,29,950	64.34	35.66
1921	304437	96686	2,08,051	68.34	31.66
1931	382450	1,14,383	2,68,067	70.09	29.91
1941	513010	1,94,651	3,18,359	62.06	37.94
1951	639928	3,28,082	3,10,946	48.65	51.35
1961	1142005	7,81,935	3,60,070	31.53	68.47
1971	1556342	1105796	4,50,544	28.95	71.05
1981	2053058	1469138	5,83,920	28.44	71.56
1991	2757205	1903860	8,53,345	30.95	69.05
2001	3199203	2205777	9,93,426	31.05	68.95
2011	3671032	2504219	11,66,813	31.78	68.21

*Sources: 1. Reports from Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute & Museum.
2. Census Reports 2011.

The above table is showing the difference between pre and post- merger of population among the tribal and non-tribal people of Tripura. The table is showing up to 1941, the tribal population was majority in the state. But, from the year 1951, the demographical scenario is looking very opposite. From 1951- 1971 the non-tribal’s increased very first in the total population. In contrast, the tribal became minor. According to the 1881 census, the percentage of tribal population was 87.06% and non-tribal was only 12.94%, but in 1981 the tribal population came down up to 28.44% and non-tribal increased up to 71.56%. Though, from the year 1991- 2011 the tribal population gradually increased and non-tribal has decreased. In 1991, the tribal population was 30.95% and non-tribal was 69.05%. Finally, in 2011 census, the tribal increased up to 31.78% and non-tribal decreased up to 68.21%.

II. Book Review

Pasle Malngiang’s, ‘*Students and Politics in Meghalaya*, tried to understand the working process and various student welfare issues taken up by the various students organisations in Meghalaya, such as- KSU, MPGSU, NSUI, AKJSU, AISF, etc. and to examine the background and political recruitment and the problems of political participation of the student leaders and the process as to how students are drawn to politics in Meghalaya. [5]

In her book “*Student Revolution in Assam: 1916-1947 (A Historical Survey)*” S. Bora explained about the involvement of the students in the freedom struggle led by Congress against the British rule in India. The work also emphasised the role of the students led by Assam Chatra Sanmilan for bringing about cultural; social and educational changes in the state. [6]

Manas Paul in his book “*The Eye Witness: Tales from Tripura’s Ethnic conflict*” respectively shown a violent period of Tripura’s history. The author discussed the reasons for conflict among the Tribal and non-tribal, which was resulted a riot on 1980; emergence of ethno-centric politics led by TUJS, emergence of insurgency groups, etc. [7]

In his article “Youth Movement for Social Reformation in Tripura” Jagat Jyoti Roy traces the origin of social movements in Tripura directed against the feudal institutions. He argues that movement launched by the *Tripura Janasiksha Samiti* gave certain ideological and cultural shape in the tribal society along with a gradual process of socio-economic transition. The movement helped eradicate the tribal superstitions, illiteracy etc. [8]

Suchintya Bhattacharyya, in her book ‘*Genesis of Tribal Extremism in Tripura*’ exemplified the research findings of the militant politics of the state of Tripura. While dealing with the tribal uprisings, the author focuses attention burning issues of the TNV insurgency and its aftermath. The basic quest of the author has been not only to find out how to strike a balance between the tribals and non-tribals but also to build bridges understanding amongst them. [9]

III. Objectives of the study:

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To analyze the causes of TSF movement in Tripura.
2. To know the different changes came in tribal society.
3. To evaluate the role of TSF to protect the identity of the tribal people in the state.

IV. Methodology

The proposed study has relied on both the primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources are include data collected from Government publications such as the Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Tripura, Census Reports, Statistical Reports of Tripura, and Reports from the Tribal Research Institute and Publications of the TSF such as the organizational proceedings. Primary sources also included information to be collected through fieldwork which will include interviews with the leaders of TSF. The interview has based on both structured and unstructured questionnaires.

The secondary sources are include the data drawn from published and unpublished works, newspapers, journals, magazines, and other printed materials.

V. Social change led by TSF

The guardian roles of TSF towards their social issues are reflected in many of their action oriented activities. These have been discussed on the following:

a. Changing the organization name from ‘tribal’ to ‘twipra’

Their move to change the organization’s name from ‘tribal’ to ‘twipra’ clearly indicates a sudden spur in their indigenous ethnic sentiment, language protectionism and also tribalism to protect their identity. The word ‘tribal’ has been changed in the ‘Member of the Central Committee’ (hereafter MCC) conference held in Jampuijalla on 1996. They feel that their name ‘tripuri’ or ‘tippera’ is a mistaken appellation for the Kokborok speaking people of Tripura. They assert that according to Kokborok etymology their name originated from two words-- *tui* (water) and *pra* (near), meaning people of river valleys. Thus, they claim their name to be ‘twipra.’ The implication of this is manifested when on 29 June 2012, the TSF submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh through the Governor of Tripura, demanding, *inter alia*, “a special constitutional status with the rights of the tribal people of Tripura over land, natural resources and their identity”. [10]

b. Protect the traditional code and symbol of dress

Again, after the joining of Tripura with the Indian Union in 1949, most tribes of Tripura, especially the Hindu groups such as the Tripuris broke loose of their original social formations based on tribal ideas, images, symbols, rituals, beliefs, customs, myths, and legends, which were all related to their simple non-surplus generating subsistence mode of production much due to powerful influence of majority Bengali culture. [11] Such degeneration of the Tripuri tribe could also be attributed to the influence of modernization. For example, young tribal girls started wearing ‘sari’ that Bengali women wear in place of their ‘*rignaiborok*’ or ‘*pachra*’ which is their traditional code and symbol of dress. In this case the TSF played a ‘guardian role’ to correct such imperfection in Tripuri society. They urged the Tripuri girls to follow and protect their traditional dress. In this regard, a TSF slogan became popular – ‘*rignaiborok ma kanai*’ [all have to wear *rignaiborok*]. [12]

c. Improve the morale of the tribal people

At one point of time a part of Bengalis criticized the tribal language for that tribal community felt foreigner themselves in their own land. The situation had started during the decade of 60th when, Bengalis had became the majority in the state. But, the condition became very worse after the communal riot held in 1980. Even, they got abused by the Bengalis. Kokborok is the main language in the majority of tribal people of the state. Bengali language was new to them. A major part of the rural tribes was not able to speak and understand the language very well. So, they had been criticized by the Bengalis. Even, there was a situation took place when the urban tribal also felt shy to speak their own language.

Moreover, a part of the Bengali people like-Rickshaw puller to general educated person criticized the tribal people. The tendency has shown among the school and college teachers also. There were many instances where the college or school teachers enjoyed by calling the tribal students as ‘Mama’. The tribal students felt shame due to this behavior of their teachers. Therefore, students complained against their teacher to the higher authority but no result. So, students obliged to leave their study in between the session or took admission in shillong for their higher study. [13]

The tribals had been deceived in the markets in many ways by the Bengali Money –lenders for example, in weight, cost & wrong Audit. Many Bengalis were enjoying themselves in doing this. When any Bengali seller cannot betray them in bargaining then they said “now the tribals also have become clever”. [14]

The Indigenous people have been called Pahari or tribal by the Bengalis, which hurt their sentiment. Though, the people were called as Tripuri khatris by the king Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikay Bahadur. Here, once again TSF stood with the tribal people to improve their morale. [15]

d. Using the ‘Achai’ instead of the ‘Brahman’

The increasing number of Bengali affected the religious practices of the tribal people of the state. The religious practices of the tribal community were controlled by the ‘Achai’ (tribal priest), later the practices controlled by the Bengali Priest (Brahman). The Brahmans exploited the tribals in many ways by describing the religious rules and practices for their own interest. For instance, in a tribal family if anybody die the Brahman demanded more land. Therefore, the TSF came forward to save the tribal people from the exploitation of the Brahmans and aware the tribals to use the ‘Achai’ instead of using the Brahman for their socio and religious practices. [16]

e. Improvement of education among the tribal community

TSF understood that the development of tribals is not possible unless they become educated. Therefore, since the emergence of the TSF, they have been trying to aware the tribal people regarding the importance of education. Rightly speaking the improvement of education is one of the central aims of the TSF movement in Tripura. By the development of education the tribal people get self-reliant, aware of their rights and removed many superstitions from their society. Even, for inspiring the tribal students for education, the TSF distributes Books, Papers, Pens, or other study materials in the tribal hostels. Likewise, for increasing the interest in education the TSF used to give award to the tribal students who secured good marks in the Madhyamik, Higher Secondary and graduation and Post-graduation examination. Moreover, till now the TSF helps the tribal students who want to take admission in other colleges out of the state. Since, the emergence of TSF they had demand to establish more schools in the tribal rural areas. Even, they had another demand to establish a degree college in the Khumlung, ADC. Finally a college was established on 2007 in Khumlung. [17]

f. Protest against ‘Laskar’

Another change which has conveyed by the TSF movement in the tribal society is “Laskar” issue. “Laskar” is a title like Debbarma, Rupini etc. Few people call them ‘Desi Tripuri’ also. [18] Again, it has shown that when any Bengali boy gets married with a tribal girl, then their child entitled ‘Laskar’. These people collected ST certificate by affidavit from the SDM on the basis of ‘I am Schedule Tribe’. During the second coalition govt. under the Chief Minister of Radhika Gupta, ordered to treat the Laskar’s as Schedule Tribe (ST).

According to Aghore Debbarma *“Laskars enjoyed all the ST facilities, since the time of congress government in the state. Due to this, the real ST’s got less opportunity in the government jobs. Specially, during the period of Congress government under Chief Minister Mr. Sachindralal Singha the non-tribal’s recruited in the vacancies of the ST by the excuse of shortage of tribal candidates.”*

Therefore, TSF raised against the Laskar’s who were enjoying the ST facilities, which was constitutionally reserved for ST people and demanded to stop for granting the Laskar. [19] Here, the TSF with the collaboration of Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (hereafter TUJS), Tripura Upajati Karmachari Samity (hereafter TUKS), and Tripura sundari Nari Bahini (hereafter TSNB) formed a ‘Consultative Committee’ on November 1988. The Committee submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister Sudhir Ranjan on 7th December 1988. In response of the memorandum the Tribal Welfare Department clarified by a letter (NO.F.6-4(L.D) TW/Part-iv/27537-40) to ‘Consultative Committee’ that the govt. stopped to provide ST certificate to ‘Laskar’ community from 28 November, 1978. [20]

g. Recognizing Kokborok as the second official language

The Kok-Borok language considers as the mother tongue of the eight major Tibeto tribals of Tripura. The tribes who speaks in kok Borok are, Tripuri, Reang, Noatia, Jamatia, Rupini, Kolo, Uchai and Murasing. Its literal meaning is the language of man. ‘Kok’ means language and ‘Borok’ means man. [21] By this term the native people want to assert that their language is not confined to the people in the hills alone but it is universal and it transcends the barriers of space and tribal affiliations. The implication in this meaning is the feeling that all types of human emotions can be expressed through it and it is capable of becoming as rich as any other national language. This is become a new found faith among them. The tribal leaders realised that language is the best channel of reaching the heart of the people. So, they began to fight for the recognition their own mother language and started reviving it. The demand for Kok-Borok started immensely on 1968, when the State Government declared Bengali as the Official Language. [22] However, by the continuous movement of the TSF the state government led by CPI (M) in 1978 recognized Kokborok as the second official language of the state in 1978. [23]

h. Development of kok-Borok in education

Moreover, since the inception of TSF movement, they focused on the development kok-Borok in education. Article 350 (A) of the Indian Constitution also emphasized *education for mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority group*. However, during the regime of Congress government led by the Chief Minister Sukhamoy Sengupta in 1972, formed 'Tribal Language Cell' under the department of education. The aim of the Cell was to write text books for the primary level in Kok Borok language. But, due to proper examination arrangement, the attempt for providing education in mother tongue i.e. KokBorok could not gain success in this phase. Though, later on the process for providing education in mother tongue helped very much to achieve its success. [24] However, during the regime of communist government in 1978 the ex- education minister Dasarath Deb took initiative for developing the education in kokborok. Tribal students get facilitates in taking education in their mother tongue up to class five. [25] Later, Kokborok has been included in the syllabus as a language subject at the stage of school education. Tripura University has introduced a) six month Kokborok certificate course in 1994, and one year kokborok Diploma course in 2002, b) Kokborok Foundation course of 50 marks in a number of Degree Colleges from the session 2010-2011, c) Kokborok as a Elective subject in the Degree Colleges from the session 2012-2013 and d) MA in Kokborok on 2015. [26] The introduction of Kok-Borok in the higher education brings a new social dimension among the tribal's of Tripura.

i. Fighting against the 'witchcraft practice'

Another social dimension of the TSF movement is fighting against the 'witchcraft practice'. The tribal society was captured by this superstition for long time. The practice especially is prevalent in the rural areas of the state. The tribal believes that the 'witch' is responsible for any kind of epidemics, famine or any other incurable diseases of the village. If any person fall ill or suffer from any disease they used to go to the exorcists. The exorcist used to treat them by charms and incantations. But the exorcist cannot cure the sick person rather they earn money from that person. After becoming failure in curing that person they indicate any male or female figure of that village as 'Witch'. Then the exorcist orders the people to remove or kill the person (witch). So, the people of the village used to force that person or the family to leave the village. Here, TSF come forward to aware the tribal people regarding this superstition and to protect their society from this kind of cruel, harmful and illogical activities. TSF has been trying to understand the tribals for taking medical facilities instead of indulging in charms and incantations. [27]

VI. Conclusion

However, from the above discussion it has cleared that the migration of non-tribe and fear of identity are the main causes of TSF movement in Tripura. The organization has been playing very important role for protecting the culture and tradition of the tribals of Tripura. But, in the tribal society many superstitions and other ill practices are still existed. So, it needs to be considering for the TSF for long-term movement for changing the tribal society.

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