

Refugee  
Rehabilitation  
and  
Its Impact on  
Tripura's  
Economy

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Gayatri Bhattacharyya

The refugees have undoubtedly acted as growthbooster in the state. They have been the main source of labour-input—both skilled and unskilled. They contributed significantly to the agricultural development by introducing plough cultivation on a large scale. They also have revived the Cottage industries here as also the tertiary sector which is not adequately developed as yet. They will be the main source of labour input for the future industrial development of the state.

As against these beneficial impacts of refugee rehabilitation it is to be noted that it has caused a tremendous rise in the pressure of population. This pressure coupled with the shortage of lands suitable for wet-rice cultivation has created some problem mainly the problem of alienation of tribal lands. On account of this, the tribal people are opposing further rehabilitation of the refugees in the state. Of course, the Government has taken certain legislative measure like amendments of the Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act of 1960, to protect the interests of tribals in their lands. If the refugees have become affected by economic distress the tribals are not less so. Their problems are, in a sense, common and the main solution of their problem lies in accelerating the economic growth of the state, for which the refugees have a definite role to play and by which both the tribals and the refugees would be benefitted.

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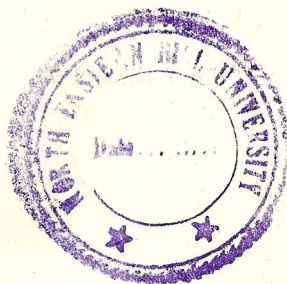
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# Refugee Rehabilitation and its Impact on Tripura's Economy

*Bhattacharya*

GAYATRI BHATTACHARYYA



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**"TO ALL TO WHOM  
I AM OBLIGED"**

## **Foreword**

Rehabilitation of the refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in Tripura in large numbers during the fifties and sixties of this century is of great historical and economic significance. They came to Tripura for settlement in the wake of the partition of India in 1947 and the merger of the princely State of Tripura in the Indian Union in 1949. After a few more decades as the public memory of these events will fade and most of those who were directly involved in the great exodus from their ancestral hearths and homes in search of security, succour and shelter will also pass away, much of the facts about this tragic human drama might be lost, or at best confined in the official files which might be difficult to trace. Therefore Dr. Gayatri Bhattacharyya deserves our gratitude for recording, publishing and analysing these facts in a systematic manner. This will remain an important source to be referred to by the future generation of researchers in this and the related fields.

Bhattacharyya has not only investigated and persented the problems and difficulties of rehabilitation of the displaced persons in Tripura, but has also highlighted the hopeful prospects of this development. She has painstakingly collected and evaluated the relevent data about rehabilitation of the refugees and has objectively examined its impact on the prospects of overall economic development of the State. She has also discussed, as she should, to what extent and in what manner the indigenous tribal peoples have been affected by this development. How have the tribals re acted to it and what has been

done for rehabilitating the landless tribal jhumias have also been studied by Bhattacharyya.

In the epilogue she has appropriately given an account of the ethnic riots of 1980 and has analysed their causes. The important development of the constitution of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council and its activities aimed at protecting the interests of the tribal peoples have also been discussed. Unless the problem of landlessness of the tribal cultivators can be satisfactorily solved, Bhattacharyya pertinently concludes, the rehabilitation of the refugees in Tripura cannot be stabilized and the harmonious relations between the tribals and non-tribals cannot be promoted and preserved.

J. B. Ganguly

## *Preface*

The refugees or displaced persons, often, suffer from an inferiority complex in the new surroundings where they take refuge. But in case of Tripura, the Bengalee immigrants were welcomed here by the Kings of Tripura long before the Partition of the country, for various reasons, such as, for their contribution to the economic development of the State through reclaiming and bringing more and more lands under plough cultivation and the services rendered by them as doctors, lawyers, teachers and civil servants. The Kings were also great patrons, of Bengali language and culture. Even the official language of Tripura, during their rule was Bengali. All this favoured the immigration of landless Bengali peasants into the state who came here to settle in vacant lands.

It was, therefore, natural that after the Partition a large number of displaced person from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, would come here for settlement as both the physical and socio-cultural environment here were similar to those in their home lands. Initially they were welcomed from almost every quarters with a few exceptions. There were only a few stray incidents of conflicts between the tribal people and the refugees.

They got rehabilitation assistance in various forms from the Government of India. Seventy-five rehabilitation colonies of different types were set up under different schemes including 41 colonies, set up directly by the Government. The progress

of rehabilitation in the state has been beset with many difficulties; yet, it cannot be denied that the refugees, who came here, have already become emotionally attached to Tripura as their new homeland. This is, of course, no proof of their successful economic rehabilitation in the state. Signs of distress and extreme poverty in many cases are indications of weakness of the formulation and implementation of rehabilitation schemes. Though the main progress of rehabilitation related to provision of agricultural land, a considerable number of them have been unable to retain their lands and have become landless agricultural labourers.

The refugees have undoubtedly acted as growthbooster in the state. They have been the main source of labour-input—both skilled and unskilled. They contributed significantly to the agricultural development by introducing plough cultivation on a large scale. They also have revived the Cottage industries here as also the tertiary sector which is not adequately developed as yet. They will be the main source of labour input for the future industrial development of the state.

As against these beneficial impacts of refugee rehabilitation it is to be noted that it has caused a tremendous rise in the pressure of population. This pressure coupled with the shortage of lands suitable for wet-rice cultivation has created some problem, mainly the problem of alienation of tribal lands. On account of this, the tribal people are opposing further rehabilitation of the refugees in the state. Of course, the Government has taken certain legislative measure like amendments of the Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act of 1960, to protect the interests of tribals in their lands. If the refugees have become affected by economic distress the tribals are not less so. Their problems are, in a sense, common and the main solution of their problem lies in accelerating the economic growth of the state, for which the refugees have a definite role to play and by which both the tribals and the refugees would be benefitted.

I am highly indebted to my revered teacher, Dr. J.B. Ganguli, Principal, Women's College, Agartala, who kindred

my desire to go deep into the matter and without whose active guidance and help it would not have been possible to complete my work. I am also grateful to Shri A.K. Roy, Principal, M.B.B. College, Agartala, who helped me with books and journals. I am grateful to all my teachers who helped me in various ways in completing the work. My thanks are due to M. Nandi, Asst. Prof. Women's College, for her help in preparing the map.

Needless to mention, all my close relations encouraged and helped me in carrying out the work. At times, my work on this research Project meant neglect of my duties to my family members but all of them have cheerfully endured their inconvenience. But for such a helpful attitude on their part I could not have stuck to my work.

In obtaining the relevant information and papers I have got all co-operation and help from the Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Tribal Welfare Department, Directorate of Census Operations, Industrial Department, Publicity Department, Office of the District Magistrate, West Tripura and Education Department, of the Government of Tripura.

I like to put on records the names of Shri M. Banerjee, J. Roy, N.G. Dev and S. Bardhan who helped me in a number of ways in collecting data in Teliamura Refugee Colony. To all of them I remain over grateful.

**Gayatri Bhattacharyya**

# Contents

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>Forword</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
1. Introduction	1
2. Inflow of Refugees into Tripura	9
3. Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of the Refugees	21
4. Rehabilitation of Rufugees in Tripura	33
5. Progress of Rehabilitation Schemes	60
6. Consequences of Large Scale Immigration-I	92
7. Consequences of Large Scale Immigration-II	110
8. Tribal Development Schemes in Tripura	124
9. The Future	147
<i>The Epilogue</i>	163
<i>Bibliography</i>	171
<i>Glossary</i>	181
<i>Index</i>	183

# 1

## Introduction

### Area and Location

Tripura is a small hilly state, covering an area of 10,477 sq. km. about 60 per cent of which is under forests. It lies between  $91^{\circ}10'$  and  $92^{\circ}21'$  East Longitude and  $22^{\circ}56'$  and  $24^{\circ}32'$  North Latitude. According to the All India Scheme of Natural Divisions, Tripura is included in the Eastern Himalayan Sub-Region. The State is bounded by Bangladesh in the North, West and South and by Lushai Hills of Assam and Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh in the East. It is linked with the rest of India mainly through Assam Agartala Road which runs across four hill ranges in the state.

### Topography

Tripura is mainly a hilly tract, the hills are not very high, highest peak, Belting Sib being about 975.36 m. Six principal hill ranges, beginning from the west, are: Baramura, Atharamura (highest points, Jarimoor 457.20 m and Atharamura 436.17 m approximately), Long Tarai (highest point, Phungpui, 481.88 m), Sakhan (highest point 785.77 m approximately), Unakooti and Jampui (highest point Belting Sib 975.36 m approximately). Besides these hill ranges there are innumerable hillocks scattered all over the state. The low-lying lands, called *loongas*, are very

fertile for paddy cultivation. These ranges have formed valleys between them which are watered by the rivers flowing from the hills. The principal rivers are, the Khowai, Deo, Manu, Juri and Longai flowing north, the Howrah and Gumati flowing west and the Muhuri flowing south. These rivers maintain all the characteristics of hill streams i.e. water level falls to a very low level during winter while overflows the banks when rain comes. They often change their course and bends. For these reasons the rivers are not very navigable. Of course the rivers help much to carry forest products. There are certain natural and artificial *jalas* (Lakes), here and there, which are used for pisci-culture.

### **Climate and Rainfall**

Tripura has a typical tropical climate. In summer the temperature rises to about 40°C while in winter it sometimes falls to 10°C. The climate is very damp. Tripura's average rainfall is about 200 cm per annum. The period from June to August is characterised by heavy rainfall while dry period extends from December to February. The timely coming of rains helps paddy production very much.

### **Soil Composition**

Tripura falls under Himalayan Sub-Region. "It is a region of tectonic or folded and overthrust mountain chains of geological recent origin." (Census of India 1951, p. 15). The hills of Tripura are composed of tertiary rocks and soil. The alluvial soil in the plains is fit for paddy cultivation. Upto 1970-71 total cropped area was 3,45,000 ha. (Govt. of Tripura, 1973, p. 34). Alkaline leaching caused by heavy rains and the boggy and swampy conditions make the soil acidic over a large area. 'The tops of hills have also laterate deposits, which are due to intense soaking and desiccation alternatively in rainy season and summer.' (Ganguly, 1969, p. 15).

### **Forest**

Tripura has an evergreen forest excepting some stretches of sal and deciduous species. The greater part of the forests of

Tripura had been under shifting cultivation in the past. But a large part of the forest now come under Reserve Forests where shifting cultivation is not allowed.

### People

Various tribal groups constituted the original inhabitants of the state. There are now as many as 19 tribes in Tripura. They are as follows: (1) Lushai, (2) Mogh, (3) Kuki including the following sub-tribes (i) Balte, (ii) Belalhut, (iii) Chhalya, (iv) Fun, (v) Hajang, (vi) Jangei, (vii) Khareng, (viii) Khepong, (ix) Kuntei (x) Laifang, (xi) Lentei, (xii) Mizel, (xiii) Namte, (xiv) Pailu, (xv) Rangchan, (xvi) Rangkhole, (xvii) Thangluya, (4) Chakma, (5) Garo, (6) Chaimal, (7) Halam, (8) Khasia, (9) Bhutia, (10) Munda including Kaur, (11) Orang, (12) Lepcha, (13) Santal, (14) Bhil, (15) Tripura or Tripuri, Tippera (~~including Laska~~), (16) Jamatia, (17) Noatia, (18) Reang, (19) Uchai, (Govt. of Tripura, 1965, p. 223). Out of the 19 tribes 5 are the original tribes. They are Tripuri, Noatia, Halam, Jamatia and Riangu. The Moghs, Chakmas and Kukis came later; Moghs and Chakmas from Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Kukis from Lusai and Jaintia Hills. The rest of the non-indigenous tribes came mainly as tea garden labourers from Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh and ultimately settled here. The Tripuras were the most dominant tribe in the state. The ruling dynasty of Tripura belongs to this tribe though the rulers have sought to establish their connection with the famous lunar dynasty. Dr. S.K. Chatterjee in his *Kiratajanakriti* established that the Tripurians are of Indo-Mongoloid origin (Chatterjee, 1950, p. 215).

As different tribes came to Tripura from different parts of the country they do not all belong to the same general group. For example, the five indigenous tribes mentioned above belong to the Indo-Mongoloid group. "South of the Naga Hills, running through Manipore, Tripura and Chittagong Hill tracts, and merging into the Arakan ranges of Burma, live the Kukis, the Lusais, the Lakhers, the Chins etc. many of whom are really overflows of tribes from across the frontiers. In fact along the North East frontier of India, from the Patkoi to the Chin Hills,

there is no clear line of ethnic demarcation between Assam and Burma and the tribes are closely allied, both racially and culturally. These tribes speak language belonging to the Tibeto-Chinese family..." (Guha, 1973, p. 32). "In North Bengal and Tripura and in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam in the Garo Hills and the Kachar District, there are remnants of the great Bodo people, who are an important Tibeto-Burman group of North-Eastern India and have now largely become absorbed in the Hindu masses of North Bengal, Tripura and Assam. There are however, still some tribes which retain their language; the Bodo language is now current among some 361,801 people. But these people have no cultural or literary life, apart from that of the surrounding Assamese or Bengali speaking people" (Chatterjee 1973, pp. 68-69). But the tribal people who came here as the garden labourers, such as, the Santals, etc., belong to the family of Austric language.

Though Tripura was predominantly a tribal area its population comprised a considerable number of non-tribal people, mostly Bengalee immigrants from the neighbouring districts of Bengal. A large proportion of these settlers was Muslim cultivators and agricultural labourers. Many tribal families maintained Muslim labourers for operating their farms. The civil, police, judicial, engineering, education and other service were mostly manned by Bengalee settlers. The businessmen, traders, transport operators and other professional groups, like doctors, lawyers and even some *Raj-Pandits* (Priests who give spiritual prescription to the kings) were of Bengalee origin. It proves that the rulers of the state encouraged the immigration of Bengalees into their state for many decades preceding the partition. Even 1818 fortyfive per cent of the state's total population was non-tribal. There may be certain distant linguistic similarity with the Bengalees of Border areas of Tripura which helps peaceful co-existence of Bengalees and Tripuras. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee shows certain connection of Bengali language with Bodo language. "To the north-east and east Bengali meets dialects of the Bodo group: Boḍo (Bārā) or Kacārī (also known as Kōe, Mēc and Rābhā), Garo and Dimā-Sā as well as Mrung or Tipurā, it touches the area of the dialects of the Naga group;

and dialects of the Kuki-cin and Burma groups". ... "the extreme eastern forms of the Vanga speech in Sylhet, Kachar, Tippera, Noakhali and Chittagong, have developed some phonetic and morphological characteristics which are foreign to the other groups...." The differences in pronunciation and stress, as well as in general enunciation and grammar, which are observable in the Bengali of a Manbhum peasant, and in that of one from Maimansing, are certainly connected with the fact that one is mainly kol (or mixed kol and Dravidian), and the other modified Bodo (Tibeto Burman), by origin" (Chatterjee, 1970, pp. 3 and 138). This natural connection might have inspired the kings of Tripura to welcome the Bengalees with whom they had some linguistic affinity however remote.

Before the partition the progress of settlement of the Bengalees was slow and steady. But after partition specially from 1951 there was a sudden spurt in immigration of the minority community of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. At times the inflow of displaced persons slowed down but following communal troubles in East Pakistan and introduction of passport system it again quickened. Before 1947 the inflow was largely limited to the cultivating class but after 1947 all classes of people came to settle in Tripura. Today the displaced persons far outnumber the tribal population.

### **Political History**

Before the merger in the Indian Union Tripura was a princely state. It was ruled by the Maharajas for about an uninterrupted period of thirteen hundred years. Tripura acceded to the Indian Union on October 15, 1949. In the republican constitution in 1950, Tripura was given the status of a Part 'C' state and was ruled by a Chief Commissioner on behalf of the President of India. After the first election three Advisers were appointed by the President to help the Chief Commissioner. After the Second General Election the Tripura Territorial Council was set up by T.T.C. Act of 1956. The Council consisted of 32 members—30 elected and two nominated by the government under the Union Territories Act. The Tripura Territorial Council and the Tripura administration merged into the Government of Tripura

when the popular ministry of Tripura assumed offices on July 1, 1963 and the Tripura Territorial Council was renamed the Tripura Legislative Assembly. On the 31 January, 1970 the Lieutenant Governor was appointed for the first time. On 21 January, 1972, Tripura became a full-fledged state of the Indian Union under the North-Eastern Areas Reorganisation Act, 1971.

### Resource Endowment

Tripura is not a very resourceful state. Sixty per cent of its lands is under forests. In the past one of the main sources of income of the state was forest products. The tribals were habituated to practising *jhum* cultivation. They used to produce cotton and sesamum, oil seeds and other vegetable besides *jhum* paddy. So the plain lands were not cultivated until the Bengalee immigrants settled here. For all these reasons the revenue of the state was a meagre amount. At the time of Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya Bahadur "as a result of reorganisation of the administration the gross revenue of the state (excluding the Zamindary) increased from Rs. 4,74,468 to Rs. 10,08,536" (Bhattacharjee, 1930, p. 51). According to Consolidated Administrative Report, 1353-1355 T.E. (1943-44-1945-46 A.D., pp. 53-68) we come to know that the revenue collected from toll on forests was Rs. 8,44,872.00 in 1946; income from permit sale was Rs. 1,86,622.00 in 1946; from elephant and buffalo grazing Mahals Rs. 27,541.00 from thatching grass Mahals Rs. 5,005.00, from reserved sal forest Rs. 2,778.00, from tax on cotton and oil seeds, Rs. 92,276.00, from *Kheda* operation Rs. 20,308.00. All these receipts came mainly from the forest products. From the plains receipts from agricultural products was Rs. 1,524.00, from jute export duty Rs. 38,053.00, from tea royalty Rs. 54,471.00. For these three sources of revenue the king had to depend solely on immigrants. The gross receipt in 1946 of Tripura state including Zamindars of Chakla and Roshnabad was Rs. 89,13,029.00 of which a considerable part came from Zamindaries.

The development of the infrastructure was, however, very feeble, transport and communication were very undeveloped; only Rs. 2,55,173.00 were spent during three years from 1944 to

1946 for road improvement works. There were only 21 dispensaries, 156 schools among these 8 being High Schools. This indicates how utterly undeveloped were the resource endowments and economic infrastructure of the state. And for this low level of development also the kings had to depend to a great extent on Chakla Roshnabad and on the immigrants.

### **The Great Influx**

While the state was thus in an utterly backward stage of development, like a gushing stream there started the great influx of displaced persons into the state from the neighbouring districts of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Within a period of about 24 years i.e. from 15, August 1947, to 24 March 1971 the number swelled to 6,09,998 officially. As there were large tracts of land lying unutilised the government found it easy to provide settlement to a large number of refugees within the state.

Rehabilitation of the displaced persons has had far-reaching consequences on the economy, society and the culture of the state. This has both been viewed as an important growth booster and also as a heavy burden on the state's economy in different quarters. Therefore an objective analysis of the whole issue is called for which is attempted here.

### **The Plan of the Work**

The work is divided into nine chapters including the present one which is simply introductory.

Chapter 2 deals with inflow of the refugees into Tripura: the trend of migration to Tripura before and after 1947, the essential differences between the two trends, fluctuations in the flow and their causes and a review of the policy of the government with regard to the refugees.

In chapter 3 the demographic and socio-economic profile of the refugees are analysed. The details are: age distribution, sex distribution, rural urban composition, distribution by literacy

and occupation—comparison of occupational distribution according to 1951 and 1961 Census Reports.

In chapter 4 different information regarding the rehabilitation of the refugees are arranged. It deals with different government schemes number of families covered by different government schemes, details of refugee colonies, number of families rehabilitated outside colonies—business and industrial loan recipients' number, etc.

Chapter 5 reviews the progress of rehabilitation schemes and a detailed survey of an established refugee rehabilitation colony.

Chapter 6 is followed by an analysis of socio-economic consequences of large scale immigration, like changing demographic characteristics of the state, pressure on land, growth of semi-urban centres and urbanisation, contact with the tribal people, known and recorded incidents of clashes and conflicts between the refugees and the tribal people, how far the refugees influenced the tribal people's technique of production, ownership of property system, land tenure system and economic transactions and exchange system and how the refugees have been influenced by the tribal people's social and economic organisations/institutions, etc.

Chapter 7 deals with some important economic consequences of refugee rehabilitation in the state, such as, the refugees' contribution to the state's gross national product, how far the rehabilitation of the refugees has brought about dynamism in the state's economy, to what extent this helps or hinders the future prospects of the state's economic development and how far it has affected the prospects of tribal people's development.

The tribal development plans of Tripura are discussed briefly in Chapter 8 and a comparison is drawn between a Jhumia Rehabilitation Colony and a Refugees Rehabilitation Colony.

The last chapter, i.e. chapter 9 throws some light on the prospects of economic development of the state accepting the large scale refugee rehabilitation in the state as a settled fact.

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