

Land Question in **TRIPURA**



Dipannita Chakraborty

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The Land Question in Tripura deals with the connection between land systems and population growth in the State. The study is made in an historical perspective analyzing the relation during the 19th and 20th Centuries. It also explores the various manifestations arising out of the abnormal population growth, a result of the massive refugee influx along with giving away of land for several economic and ecological necessities.

Particular emphasis has been given on identifying the causes and effects of the problem of land availability and the ultimate shrinking of cultivable land. In analyzing these relations the study offers a new vista of observations—simply recasting the agrarian sector cannot remove the problems relating to land question since land is a stagnant factor and its productivity is subjective. Hence land classification, depending on its capability, is the need of the hour to rejuvenate the state economy. Perhaps then only can the 'question' be answered, i.e. balancing the additional pressure of population and the availability of cultivable land.

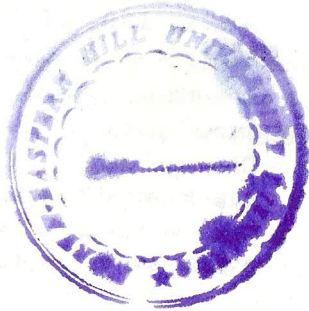
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Preface

Tripura, a tiny state in the North-Eastern Region of India has an area of 10,491 square kilometres and a large population base comprising of 31,91,168 persons (according to the 2001 Census). The economy of the state is heavily dominated by the primary sector and hence population pressure on land is inevitable which manifests in decline in the size of holdings. There existed a dual cultivation method since the previous century, shifting in the hills and settled in the plains. A harmonious blending of these two methods as well as those who practised them was a noticeable feature of the state. But this honeymoon was shortlived. The British overlords who till 1850s did not bother about this hilly state started showing much interest in its strategic location during the late 19th century. They craved for higher revenue returns and so introduced certain administrative reforms. Agriculture, the mainstay of the population of the state was moulded accordingly and new settlements encouraged which expanded plough cultivation in the vast fertile plain tracts available, though shifting remained the cultivators had to retreat to remoter parts of the state to pursue the same.

However, the partition of the sub-continent and the following upheavals led to an unprecedented rise in the state population resulting in an imbalance in the agrarian structure of the state, which gave vent to social, economic and political problems arising out of land-related issue. Land which was abundant a few years back gradually shrunk rendering a large number of people landless, productivity declined as population increased unchecked and the state economy was thrown out of gear.

The present study investigates into the causes which led to this low availability of cultivable land both in the hills and the plains,

in an historical perspective. It highlights the various manifestations of the land systems evolved by the princely regime and thereafter by the subsequent state government and analyses its impact on land. The time horizon spreads over 19th and 20th centuries, but the early 19th century witnessed the predominance of the primitive cultivation in the Hill Tipperah region which involved neither land tenure system nor any individual ownership right on land. The crisis of land availability cropped up when population began to rise i.e. towards the end of the century and plough cultivation spread over extensive areas and land began to be individually owned.

I owe a great deal to several persons and institutions whose exhaustive list is impossible to draw up here. I am greatly indebted to Dr. H.K. Sur, Reader, Tripura University, Agartala without whose able guidance this pursuit could not have been completed.

I express my deep sense of gratitude to Dr. Mahadev Chakravarti, Professor, Department of History, Tripura University and Dr. D.K. Chaudhuri, Registrar, Tripura University for their valuable advice and vast stock of information so generously placed at my disposal.

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I am thankful to the Librarians of the National Library, Calcutta, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, Tripura University, Agartala. The Tribal Research Centre, Agartala and the Tripura Legislative Assembly, Agartala for providing necessary library facilities. I also acknowledge my gratitude to the staff of the State Archives of West Bengal, Calcutta and the Secretariat Archives, Agartala who helped me in collecting all the available reports of the Political Agencies as well as some rare documents, notifications, official promulgations etc. Thanks are due to several officers, departmental heads and staff of the Directorate of Land Records and Settlement, Land Use Board, Forestry, Rubber Plantation Corporation, Refugee Rehabilitation, Statistics, Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, Land Acquisition and Land Revenue Departments for their unstinted cooperation extended to me.

I am greatly indebted to Sri K.K. Chakraborty, Assistant Teacher, Barpathari High School with whose help the field studies in the Belonia sub-division could be conducted smoothly within a short span. My special thanks are to Dr. M.L. Das, Asstt. Professor, Women's College, Agartala, who, despite his busy schedule helped me to complete the thesis.

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	v
<i>List of Tables</i>	xi
1. Introduction	1
2. Classification of Land	20
3. Population Pressure on Land	30
4. Shifting to Plough—A Transition in the Economy	54
5. Ziratia Land	77
6. Impact of Forest Conservation	92
7. Impact of the formation of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council	113
8. Land Alienation	132
9. Observation and the Need of the Hour	156
<i>Bibliography</i>	173
<i>Index</i>	185

List of Tables

2.1. Land-Use Classification in Tripura	25
3.1 Growth of Population during the Decades of 20th Century (in percentage)	32
3.2 Tribal Immigrants to Tripura, 1931 Census	35
3.3 Religion—wise distribution of Population	38
3.4 Trend of Population of Tripura	40
3.5 Sources of Revenue (in Rs.)	44
3.6 Rural and Urban Population Distribution in Tripura (1881-1921)	45
4.1 Shifting Cultivation in the North-East Region	56
4.2 Sample Size Characteristics	71
4.3 Category-wise Distribution of Sample Households by Mode of Cultivation	72
4.4 Mode of Labour used in Cultivation	72
5.1 Ziratia cases Awaiting Disposal (1958)	85
6.1 Forest Cover of North-East Region (1980-85)	95
6.2 Opening up of Land From Forests	101
6.3 Number of Workers (Tribal and Non-tribal in Rubber Plantation)	106
8.1 Trend of Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers in Tripura (As a percentage of the total population)	146
8.2 Size of Agricultural Holdings and Their Area	148
8.3 Agricultural Holdings After Ceiling Imposition	150

1

Introduction

Prelude

Land, in a fundamental sense is the most valuable endowment of nature, as it meets the two basic requirements of mankind i.e. food and shelter. Besides providing us with forests which maintains the ecological balance; land caters to our non-agricultural needs too. Importance of land in a historical perspective may be traced to the time when early man first began to utilise land for his livelihood. He needed food to eat so learnt to grow crops and giving up his nomadic nature, settled on a plot of land which was till then a general property of mankind. Land now became a transient property for him who used it and thus acquired a sort of ownership. Next, the early man decided to pursue agriculture, an activity by which he sought to make use of available land and tried to accelerate and improve upon the natural growth so that the process helped him to yield more crops. Land, during this time had a two dimensional use, since only the area (i.e. length and breadth of the surface) was actually needed for pastures, agriculture and settlement. A third dimension was added since the Industrial Revolution when the minerals beneath the surface of the earth acquired much importance. When mankind increased in number a conception of domination—a permanent ownership pattern on land ensued wherein the individual could own it for a long period uninterruptedly hence rights over this natural resource was acquired. Agriculture has remained with human civilization all along, and population has affected the land utilisation pattern at the same time,

the relation between these two factors makes the subject matter for land question.)

Land, according to its uses, can be divided into several categories like the flora and fauna, agriculture, forests, mines and settlements (industries, roads, towns etc.). Of these, cultivable land is quite limited in supply as not all available land is cultivable. In fact, only a third of the land surface is actually cultivable. The cultivability of land depends upon the soil temperature, water availability and landforms which are the physical frontiers of land. The natural vegetation of land too determines its cultivability since it restores fertility as well as arrests erosion. With the progress of time, man by his will and wisdom has been able to increase production of this limited resource by adopting several means viz., irrigation, manure, high quality seeds, technology etc. as well as reclaimed fallow land. Several studies on farm management have shown that there is an inverse relationship between the size of the farm and its productivity, hence land reform enactments have come into effect. Here too rural land is regarded as important because of its resource base (timber and food production) which is strategic for agricultural self sufficiency. With industrialisation, urban use of land gained magnitude and such planning pattern overlapped at times. Land is thus, an essential factor in the human society subject to its uses and with civilization the dimensions of land use keeps on increasing. Recognition of the value of land in its heritage context and in ecological terms has given rise to an expanding interest in the conservation of land which has become a point of great concern not only in deep rural areas but also on the urban fringes. Land, it should be remembered is to be protected, managed and developed too so that it is safeguarded as the basis for human life and environment. Hence, the area available to a region, coupled with the pattern of utilization is of much importance as the need of the hour is optimum use of land for maximum benefit.

In India, agriculture stands to be the mainstay for millions of its inhabitants as industrialisation is still a far cry. Even in the last lap of 20th century any major shift of the population from agriculture to industry seems bleak which could have released the pressure

on land to a considerable extent. The north-eastern region of the country is nature's veritable arcadia but its hilly terrain and certain complexities (relating to socio-cultural life, traditional knowledge, technology, infrastructure etc.) have made it lag behind the other states of the country in this context, making the situation rather grim. It adjoins three countries—India, China and Myanmar in the east and flanks two other countries, Bhutan and Bangladesh on the west. It is a geographical conglomerate of seven states namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura inhabited by Tibeto-Mongoloids. This sector has a combined potential of becoming the richest segments of the country yet it remains under developed. Independence saw the North-east as a war ravaged, economically unstable, politically weak, but ethnically potent area and ideal for development with a huge natural resource base but apathetic treatment by the centre and disinterest shown by the state government have been culpable for non-development. North East India accounts for 7.76 per cent of the geographical area of the country where the hills constitute about 70 per cent of the total land area.¹ Forests, which have a definite claim on the available land are spread over 46.9 per cent of the area.² Agriculture is the predominant occupation of the people and shifting cultivation (locally known as Jhum) is widely practised. About 5.7 per cent of geographical area remains under shifting cultivation at one time or the other involving a total of 4,43,336 families.³ The population of the region is 31,547,314 accordingly to 1991 census which has grown by 2.38 per cent during the last decade where as that of the country was -0.87 per cent portraying the fact that the growth is much above the national average.⁴ The pressure on land, thus, is very high and is rising further as a consequence of growing population in this region particularly in Assam and Tripura.⁵ Such a trend obviously has an adverse impact on the north-eastern economy where hills form a major share in the topography of the area. Several man-made activities viz. road-making, developmental projects, habitation, institutions, security purposes etc. have grown along time taking up large chunks of land area leaving a net cultivated area of 14,75,000 hectares (All India Bulletin on Agricultural Census 1985-

86. Basic Statistics 1991) only which is quite low in proportion to the population of the region, thus explaining the high density of population.⁶ These factors, taken together reveals the paucity of land available in the region for cultivation purposes and thus accounts for meagre land productivity which hardly suffices for subsistence even, putting forth the moot point of land question. The situation in Tripura, one of the seven states of the north-east poses certain distinct complexities regarding the land question of the State.

[The state of Tripura, formerly a feudal state, is essentially a frontier region. Except for an irregular strip to the West and South and smaller pockets of flat lands entering the hills to the North West, it consists of a mountain range between Brahmaputra and Chindwin Irrawady river system.] A tiny and hilly state Tripura physiographically represents the western fringe of the typical 'ridge and valley' province commonly known as Indo-Burman Ranges. Hence geo-strategically it is quite a vital cardinal area of the nation. [Like the other north-eastern states, its topography too is undulating and characterised by numerous hillocks, plains, valleys, lungas, rivers, rivulets etc. other than the vast forest cover.] The flat land constitutes 40 per cent of the total area and accommodates two-thirds population. The state experienced spurts of population growth at one time or another, but the interesting fact is that Tripura's growth rate has always maintained a higher rate, higher than that of the country even during the first half of the present century. While India's percentage increase of population was 51.50 that of Tripura's was an astounding 273.41⁷. Being predominantly an agricultural state, this unusual growth of population obviously raised eyebrows regarding accommodation of the people both physically and economically. It should also be borne in mind that Tripura's population, like the other states of the North-east, is not of the same ethnicity. The kings invited the plainlanders initially but soon this invitation took the shape of mass influx following political turmoils which put the agrarian economy of the state in a dismal condition. The autochthons felt discriminated against so reserves were created while at the same time the displaced people needed shelter so rehabilitation projects were established. Forest land had to be conserved for maintaining ecological balance, simultaneously land

was needed for accommodating the people. Autonomous Council was set up which reserved quite a huge chunk of the land which had a tribal majority and this time the plainlanders felt discriminated against. Widespread shifting cultivation rendered a vast region uncultivable due to loss of soil fertility, erosion and to top it all, land alienation took place in various ways. This has made the state's land question unique in comparison to the rest of the region.

A Glimpse into the Annals of Tripura

Tripura was earlier known as 'Independent Tipperah' and later as Hill Tipperah' till 1920, a nomenclature earned during the British period owing to its physiognomy. Its name was changed to Tripura at the request of the rulers. It possessed a total area of 3870 sq. miles⁸ and the hills covered most of this area. The hills commenced from the western side and gradually rose towards the eastern side, the valleys in between were broken up by rough and irregular ridges of low hills. Dense forests covered the hills while the valleys were swampy. Geographically, the state was attached to Samatata or East Bengal and did not have any independent status, since the ancient period.

The history of the state during the previous centuries was intertwined with East Pakistan, a region roughly corresponding to the present district of Sylhet, Noakhali & Chittagong⁹. The king of Tipperah possessed the plains which included Sarail, Bardakhat, Gangamandal and Pattikera districts along with Chakla Roshanabad¹⁰. However, these districts except Chakla Roshanabad were lost to them as an aftermath of family feuds. Turning back the pages of history, it is known that Vainya Gupta, a descendent of the Guptas is said to have made a land grant in Tripura¹¹ (6th century A.D.). There are also epigraphic evidences showing the rule of Khadgas¹² (late 7th century A.D.) followed by the Ratas and Devas, till 10th century A.D.¹³ Then ruled the Chandras¹⁴ while the Palas controlled the regions between Lalmai-Mainamati hills till the outbreak of Kaivarta revolt. The Varmans, who ruled Dhaka-Faridpur extended their sway over the land. Thus we find that most of the western and southern parts of the state were politically attached to East-Bengal under various dynasties in the

ancient times. The Tipra tribe were confined in the hilly regions. At and around the same time, one Jujharu Fa conquered Rangamati (Udaipur) and Bishalgarh, defeating Samachardeva a Deva ruler of Samatata. The conquerer belonged to the Tipra tribe and gradually spread his authority in the adjoining areas, where he grew powerful and extended political influence; he even gave up the title of 'Fa' (15th century) being influenced by Hindu society and culture¹⁵, thus started a close relationship between the state of Tripura and the neighbouring Samatata (East Pakistan). The next noted king of the land, Ratna—Fa, is said to have requested the Sultan of Gaud (Barbak Shah) to send some Bengali families to his state, which again confirms a change in the royal social outlook. About 4,000 Bengali families¹⁶ are said to have settled in Tripura, of whom some even became ministers by dint of their capability.

However, with the coming of the Mughals, the kingdom of Tripura received a set back as Udaipur was occupied (1584), garrisoned (1618) and later converted into a Sarkar¹⁷. Interestingly, the low land was captured and not the entire kingdom, as it could fetch regular rents, and the hills were left to the kings. The Muslim Zamindars, who were entrusted with the plainsland often interfered in the state administration in making and unmaking kings. In the Revenue Records of Bengal Suba (1658) Sarkar Udaipur was recorded as a revenue paying centre.¹⁷ Meanwhile, a revenue clerk of Chakla Roshanabad region became the virtual ruler of the area by defeating the king of Tripura in 1748 A.D.¹⁸ The revenue of Chakla Roshanabad increased manifold as he tried to introduce administrative reforms and regulations. He even granted rent-free land to the Hindu and Muslim inhabitants of Roshanabad. However opposition from the royalists brought about his downfall in 1760. The British followed suit, after taking over the administrative reins of Bengal (Burdwan, Midnapur and Chittagong) in accordance to a secret treaty with Mir Jafar, the Nawab of Bengal. They cast their covetous eyes on Tripura, Verelst sent a troop (1761) against king Krishna Manikya in answer to the Nawab's call for help and the king gave in without a fight. The British flag flew over the plains of Tripura and the revenue was directed towards the British exchequer, the king was required to bear the troop's maintenance

charge too.¹⁹ Curiously, Tripura never had any treaty relations with the British, though they had acquired the privilege of “investing” the royal heir to the throne with the insignia of kingship since 1809.²⁰ A controversy rose regarding the right of the king to levy transit duties on hill produce, wherein the Deputy Governor of Bengal clarified the fact that the king of Tripura has full right within his hill territory to levy any duty he pleases, thus stressing on the independent status of the king of Tripura even during the hey day of the Raj.²¹ Independent status of the kings of the state was proved as the kings got a free hand as to taxation, absolute powers over subjects etc. but such independence was practically dependent in submission to the British paramount power.

Land Systems During the 19th and 20th Centuries: An Overview

[The ruling elite of the state, though considered “Independent” in their own hilly territory were often embroiled in border disputes since long. Previous to the Muslim conquest of the Northern portion (Sylhet) of the state the Tipperah kingdom is said to have extended over the valleys which were covered mostly with dense forest and impassable swamps. Cultivation which was quite extensive earlier was stopped during 19th century perhaps due to pestilence, wild beasts or petty warfare and the cultivated land again turned into swamps.²² Cultivations were spread with Muslim conquest and the kings asserted their rights on the land giving rise to land-disputes. Arbitrarily large chunks of ‘settled’ land was taken away by the British on the flimsy plea of unauthentic documents. The Kings had already granted these lands to several tenants as talooks, but inability to prove that the lands were not included in the arbitration the claims of the king on such land were dismissed. Maharaja Birendra Kishore Manikya naturally felt dejected as is seen from his letter to Sir William Marris, Governor of Assam where he laments after the boundary demarcations—“The land has not been wrested from the Rulers of Tripura by right of conquest of annexation for any misrule or misconduct on their part, but gradually absorbed in British India for reasons unknown to the Durbar”²³

Conspicuously enough the hills were left untouched by the British overlords, perhaps they did not find them worthy from commercial point of view yet, being covered with forests and marshes. The kings had to fall back upon these hitherto neglected hills of the state with mounting pressure of revenue exactions. Though land was abundant, there were hardly any takers as no proper land tenure was evolved and the raiyats (tenants) could not get proper occupancy rights, or any guarantee even which they could secure under British Government elsewhere.²⁴ The King now began leasing out the hills and available plains to the indigenous chiefs (Thakurs) in lieu of low or no rent at all. Land in the British district which belonged to the kings of Tripura were under exclusive rights of the British who settled it themselves. The chiefs in the Tripura state later distributed the land in the hills to the autochthons or other tribes who pursued the rudimentary method of shifting cultivation, while the land on the plains were sub-let to the neighbouring Bengali or Manipuri cultivators at high rentals.

[In a land abundant thinly populated state like Tripura, the Manikyas introduced a revenue oriented tenurial system without taking into consideration either its development or consequences.²⁵ In due course land revenue formed the greatest source of wealth for the rulers. The rate of revenue varied from 12 annas (0.75p) to Rs. 8 to Rs. 9/-, the average being Rs. 3/- per acre,²⁶ the leases fetched immense revenue initially. The state revenue rose from a mere Rs. 2.4 lakhs in 1881-82 to Rs. 4.6 lakhs in 1892-93 recording a total rise of almost 100 per cent in a decade²⁷ of which land revenue contributed a substantial amount. Rent was increased every year and a large quantity of unaccounted land was discovered. However, a large portion of revenue was lost to the royal treasury due to this leasing procedure, as the land was neither measured nor rentals ascertained. The tenants often withheld the dues when the lessees enhanced the rentals without the king's knowledge. Leased lands too were comparatively small due to the system of settling waste lands on rough estimates without initial survey. The revenue returns were not regularised and the king seemed to remain unpertrubed too, levying various other taxes such

as toll taxes, taxes on forest products, duty on cotton exports, ghar chukti tax on shifting cultivator etc. to enhance his treasury.

Owing to a steady influx of the neighbouring erstwhile East Pakistani nationals in search of fertile land, as well as shifting cultivators of the eastern region, population began to rise. The customary rules had to give way to new rules and regulations setting the state's agrarian system awry. Two distinct land use patterns emerged, plough in the plains and shifting in the hills pursued by two different ethnic races plainlanders and tribals, prevailing in two regions. Land could be owned by both the segments of the population unlike several other North-eastern states and this resource being exhaustive could not endure the increasing pressure, hence productivity began to decline in comparison to the population levying a direct physical impact on this typical agrarian economy.

There existed a dualism in the land tenure system of the state owing to the strange geographical situation and the increasing spate of population growth. The king was the sole owner of both the hills and plains, while no rent could be collected from the hills, to enable fair collection of rentals from the plains, three kinds of tenures existed.²⁸

- (i) A farm (izara) for the collection of rent for a term of years.
- (ii) A talook (miyadi) with a rental subject to revision after fixed periods; and
- (iii) A permanent talook (Kayemi) the rental of which was fixed forever.)

The holders could make their own settlements with the cultivators. The cultivators were lease holders and so did not acquire rights of occupancy. Rents were fair, terms on which leases of waste land were granted were also such as to attract settlers. However, there are evidence that without the king's knowledge the talukdars used to sub-let a part or whole of his holding to one or many under-raiyats at higher rents. These under raiyats were usually cultivators who came across the borders and

after harvest often went back even, which meant a loss of revenue again.)

During the middle of the 20th century, the land system underwent slight changes. Three classes of talukdars (landholders) remained, though their leases and the rent changed.²⁹

- (i) Kayemi taluks, revenue of which was fixed in perpetuity,
- (ii) Taskhichi taluks, mainly plantations or land granted for special purposes, the rent of which was subjected to revision after 10/15 years, and
- (iii) Niskar taluks, which were revenue free estates granted to brahmins as gifts for religious purposes etc.

It is important to point out here that all these systems were applied for the plainland only and catered to the non-tribal population. But with the rise in population of both the segments problems arose regarding settlement of the indigenous people too, who seemed even eager to take up ploughing. Thus tribal reserves were created in 1931 and 1943 for five specified tribes, namely Puran Tripura, Noatia, Jamatia, Riang and Haram. However, these measures were undertaken in much haste and therefore, no proper surveys were made, reserve boundaries were loose and transfers went on unchecked, and so even among the classless autochthons a certain class of talukdars became the owners of vast tracts of land without paying revenue for the same, and simultaneously number of landless cultivators were also on the rise.

Not until 1960 was the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reform Act (TLR and LR) was passed wherein all old tenures and laws were abolished, and many tenants became actual raiyats.³⁰ However, despite the government's efforts to create a single predominant class of peasant cultivators in the typically agrarian society a three-tier structure of owner-tenant-owner-cum-tenants features the land tenure system still portraying the inadequacy of the said Act. The peculiarity found in Tripura's case is not the land system evolved but the connection of land availability with the state's population increase, which leaves the land question unanswered. A class struggle thus seems to have ensued since

the beginning of the present century—which explains the bearing of land on the development of agrarian economy. The principal elements in this struggle can be pointed out here, viz., the declining ratio of tribal-non-tribal populations along with the number of landed properties; the emergence of a new class of tribal/non-tribal rich peasants, money-lenders which was non-existent so far and the alarming rise of poor, marginal peasants and landless labourers. Perhaps, this picture reveals what a devastating impact the land systems, population and governmental policies have had on the economy of the state. One cannot deny that the recent upheaval in the socio-economic-political arena of this once peaceful state is the outburst of the autochthons' pent up feeling of hatred. Ugly provincialism has raised its head in the form of protecting their interests, which naturally has to be at the expense of the other segment of the population. The pre-existing bonds of solidarity among them are not immutable they are historically evolved and as such, are bound to change with the changing times. But the change has not been smooth, not being ushered by the own conscious efforts of those involved, or by identifying themselves as one with the distressed, displaced people which has adversely affected the socio-economic fabric of the state.

Approach to the Problem

It appears from the above analysis land was the only source of sustenance to the bulk of the state's population during the princely regime. Plough cultivation fetched higher returns and so this mode was encouraged while restrictions were imposed on the free access to land for those practising shifting cultivation. The plainlanders were being invited which ultimately proved to be a serious burden as land availability started diminishing. The kings ventured upon tea plantations to utilise the slopes of hills as well as lessen the pressure on land. Thus land was leased out for tea plantations in 1882 for nominal returns, and within a span of a decade forty gardens sprang up, which aimed at employment generating too along with better utilisation of land.³¹ Shifting was prohibited here, which ousted hundreds of shifting cultivators from their jobs, and the plantations could not lure them too. Thus coolie labourers came from outside the state adding to the pressure on

land in due course of time leading to a scarcity of cultivable land. During this time, 850 sq. miles of fertile land between Langai and Dhaleswari rivers were taken away for campaigning against the Lushais.³² Demarcation of border took a long time for arbitration and some land were lost in dispute. A considerable extent of fertile land was fleeced off by the British policies reducing the area of the State to half of what it was two hundred years back.

Reduction of the state's geographical territory, leasing out of invaluable hill gradients for tea cultivation, giving away land to the learned men or for religious purposes, shifting cultivation, reserves for autochthons, along with unprecedented population increase led to the present crisis in land availability in the state of Tripura. Ethnicity came to be divided into two categories as immigration increased. Land had to be provided to both simultaneously for livelihood as well as cater to their non-agricultural needs. Therefore, the land factor became a vital issue in the state's economic development. Hence the need of the study Land question in Tripura, in a historical perspective and analysing the impact of the connection between land and population growth seems to be rational in the present context.

Against this backdrop, the study undertakes to depict the various manifestations of the land systems of the last and present century and assess the historical reasons of the amazing rise of population in the state and the devastating impact on its economy. The study also tries to get a clear picture of the nature of land ownership and the different tenures, analyse the various systems of reservations (forests, autonomous districts, rehabilitation projects) and observe their impact on the land question. The study reflects how the economic evils of continuous land transfers, land alienation through covetous means or governmental anomalies have adversely affected the socio-economic fabric of the state. In its concluding part the study suggests a few alternatives, how to utilise land economically and ease the pressure on land as well as cater to the need of the people.

Methodology and Sources

The methodology adopted is basically descriptive and analytical in its narration. It has highlighted the problems relating to the land

viz., availability, utility, modes of cultivation, size of holdings, distribution etc. which are the effects of high concentration of population on land. The structural changes in land systems and its economic effects and implications have been studied in an historical perspective keeping in view the interest of the users of land irrespective of ethnicity or class. Discussing these issues in a historical perspective entails a thorough study of the land systems, data on land ownership, rehabilitation projects, reserves for forestry, autonomous bodies etc. during the princely government and those following it. Hence both primary and secondary sources have been made of relevant topics, seminar papers, reports, notifications, promulgations, documents of the princely regime as well as those of the subsequent state governments and various books by distinguished authors consulted for preliminary observations.

The records at the Tripura Secretariat Archives, Agartala and the West Bengal State Archives both at the Writers' Building and College Street have been consulted, confidential letters, notes administrative reports and documents lying at the former have been of great help to get a knowledge of land distribution, land acquisition, as well as various acts and policies on land.

The journals found at the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, Annexe Building of National Library, and other historical journals throw some light on the ancient history of the State. Certain epigraphic evidences have been collected from these. Articles in contemporary magazines, journals, newspapers have been consulted which touched upon issues relating to land alienation, land systems, forestry or granting of autonomy in the state.

Materials were collected from several state government offices for information regarding land system of the post independence period. The Census reports gave an idea of the increase of population in the state; Statistics Department provided the records relating to land holdings, agriculture, land allotments, purposes etc. The Refugee Rehabilitation Department was consulted for information of land allotment for refugee rehabilitation purpose and Chakma influx (1980s). The Land Settlement Department came up with several reports/records on the land systems, purpose of

land settlement etc. The offices of the Autonomous District Council was consulted for the total area, reserved forests therein, cultivable area falling within its limits etc. Various government gazette notifications, the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act (1960) its later amendments, the Forest Conservation Acts, policies were consulted and found useful for the present work.

Issues like transition occurring from shifting cultivation to plough cultivation, jiratia land (border areas cultivated by British Bengal subjects) forest land and land alienation needed personal attention. Therefore, visits were made to Hetalia and West Paikhola villages in Belonia sub-division to get a first hand knowledge of shifting cultivation and the transitional process. Villages on the borders, Ishanchandranagar, Barpathari Samarendra Chandra Nagar, were visited and information gathered from some original buyers of such land even. Forestry, an absolute necessity to maintain ecological balance also means giving up arable land, so visits were made to Trishna Reserve Forest (in South Tripura) to find out the extent of reservations or opening up of such forests. Plantations, another project of the government to maintain the greenery as well as release pressure on cultivable land were also visited (Rubber Plantations in the Kanchanmala-Sekerkote area). Lastly, land alienation, the inevitable effect of the ongoing land scarcity needed to be studied in details, therefore, visits were made to mixed villages to get a thorough knowledge of the causes of land alienation and its effects. Field data thus collected revealed a lot of currently known and unknown facts. Both published and unpublished books on allied topics on North-East were consulted too to get an idea of the uniqueness of land question of Tripura.

Design of the Study

Broadly the entire work has been divided into nine chapters including the present one which introduces the main theme of the study alongwith a brief history of the state highlighting the crisis in cultivable land in the state. The rationality of the study, methodology adopted and source exploitation have been explained in this chapter.



The second chapter deals with classification of land in Tripura according to its agrarian utilisation pattern. It reveals the tenurial system being followed in the state since the last century and accounts for the fall in man-land ratio. It also envisages a plan as to how most advantageous use of this limited resource can pace up productivity and simultaneously solve the land scarcity problem.

The third chapter presents the grim picture of population increase in the state, its causes and effects. Emphasis has been laid here to show how population pressure on land alongwith enthusiastic rehabilitation schemes, afforestation programmes made available land reach its saturation point leading to misdistribution of land.

Chapter four gives a thorough insight into the rudimentary form of agriculture which is still widespread in the state. The process of transition from shifting to plough is described and its socio-economic implications analysed. The governmental schemes to smoothen the transitional phase has been examined in this chapter and its pros and cons analysed.

Jiratia land, a peculiar outcome of the princely land system is the subject of discussion of the fifth chapter. The border land of the state used to be cultivated by peasants from across the border who went back to their motherland after independence. A detailed study regarding the extent of this land, their ownership rights, the beneficiaries of this land after they abandoned them and the present utilization of the land has been made.

Chapter six contains a discussion on the role of forestry in the state economy in general and the peasants' economy in particular. The role of forestry has been appraised against the background of the National Forest Policy of the government as it affected the economic development of the area and the population of the state. The continuous process of preservation and destruction have been portrayed which accounts for the dilemma of whether to preserve forests for ecological balance or rehabilitate the scores of people. An answer to dilemma has been attempted by putting forth a suggestion of a judicious policy of afforestation, community management growing of crops and trees together.

Chapter seven deals with the formation of the Autonomous District Council as an attempt to salvage the indigenous masses from economic hardships. A detailed analysis of tribal movements have been made and land identified as the bone of contention. The work done by the Autonomous District Council in this direction has been evaluated critically and the need for a micro-level planning for a faster development of the tribal areas emphasised.

Chapter eight forms the core of the thesis, as land alienation is the ultimate effect of the land crisis discussed so far. This comparatively new phenomenon set-in due to imprudish land system of the yester-years have been discussed in details to detect the causes. The tenancy legislations of princely regime as well as the contemporary land reforms are examined and their shortcomings brought to light. Credit institutions, nexus between money-lender and traders and the legislations enacted to stop alienations are also analysed and their inadequacy in protecting the peasants stressed upon.

The epilogue tries to put forth certain suggestions and recommendations in an attempt towards solving the land scarcity problem. Stress is laid on how to rejuvenate the state economy with limited resources and utilising land to its optimum capacity which can play a significant role in the land question of the state.

Limitation of the Study

The present study encompasses the land question of the state during the 19th and 20th centuries. The main theme of the study i.e. cultivable land scarcity problem has acquired huge magnitude during the second half of 20th century, but to understand the background of this acute crisis one has to delve into the land systems of the yester-years, specially the previous century since both shifting and settled cultivation gained a stronghold along with increase in population in the state. However, a strange dearth of land records or settlements documents of the early 19th century put forth certain obstacles in pursuing the study. Undoubtedly, the archival records do throw some light but these dates from the late 19th century, when the Annual Administration Records of the Political Agency of Hill Tipperah are published, beginning from

1872. Even the first available authentic census data in W.W. Hunter's book "A Statistical Account of Bengal" (1876) is based upon these reports mostly. The kings possessed the hilly eastern part (which happens to be present Tripura) and those inhabiting the hills practised the nomadic tillage called jhum (shifting cultivation) widely, no tenurial pattern could be evolved there of and hence no concrete land system was strictly followed. In the kings Zamindari estate of Chakla Roshanabad comprising of parts of Comilla, Sylhet and Noakhali (now all in Bangladesh) plough was prevalent and the land was farmed out to landlords (talukdars) on leases and the British system was adhered to. The manifestations of the land systems during the said period and its impact on the land of the state is the subject of analysis in the present study. There are several phenomena pertaining to the land question which cropped up in the recent times have been given due weightage. Paucity of records (e.g. Jiratia land) had to be substantiated by personal interviews so the analyst had to depend upon the details furnished by them which may be biased to some extent too. Official records are simply the official version of the events and reveal nothing which may help one to constitute history. These are adhered to and read between the lines to get some knowledge of the subject matter.

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1. *North-Eastern Council: Basic Statistics of North Eastern Region*, 1984, Shillong.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *North Eastern Council: Basic Statistics of North Eastern Region* 1995, Shillong (Data collected by a Task Force on shifting cultivation, Ministry of Agriculture, 1983).
4. *Government of India : Census of India*, 1991, series-1, paper-2 of 1992.
5. Not all land is required by the mankind, only those which can produce crops are utilised. The ratio between such (effective) land area and the total population is known as land-man ratio.
6. The density of population of the different states of the North-East in 1991 are as follows: 10 persons per sq.km in Arunachal Pradesh, 286 persons per sq. km in Assam. 82 persons per sq.km in Manipur, 79 persons per sq. km in Meghalaya, 33 persons per sq. km in Mizoram,

73 persons per sq. km Nagaland and 263 persons per sq. km in Tripura (Census of India 1991, series 1, part-II of 1992).

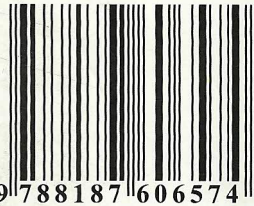
To take the North-East as a whole, the density of population is more glaring—30 persons per sq. km in 1951 increased to 77 persons per sq. km in 1971 and shot up to 123 persons per sq. km in 1991. This should be judged in the light of the fact that only 30 per cent of the total area of the region is suitable for cultivation and hence productivity only caters for subsistence

It should be remembered that, the density of population implies the average number of persons living in per square km area and not the interpretation of total population divided by total effective land area.

7. Percentage increase of population in Tripura as compared to India during the period 1901 to 1951 (Census Handbooks, Govt. of India, various issues).
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The Sultan agreed and about 1000 families settled at Rangamati (Udaipur) and Ratnapur 500 families at Yasopur and the rest at Hirapur. This event reminds us of the practice of making big collective land grants to the Brahmans and such invasions led to the opening of flood gates of the state for future incursions.
17. Webster, J.E.: *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteer*, "Tippera" Allahabad, 1910, p. 82. We learn that Shah Shuja settled the Udaipur Sarkar (only the plain districts) with Kalyan Manikya for Rs. 99,860/- leaving the hill country.

18. This was Shamsar Gazi, ruler of Dakshinik, who rose from obscurity to power by his ability, Singha, K.C., Rajmala, 1896, pp. 123-126.
19. The king now had to pay Rs. 1,00,001/ as original revenue and Rs. 45,563/ as troops charges alongwith Rs. 1,11,191/ 6 annas 3 paise in thirteen instalments. Khan, A.M. : The Transition in Bengal: Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 39.
20. On a question of succession the incumbents Ramganga (son of the deceased king) and Durgamani (Yubaraj designated) resorted to the court's decision. In 1809 the Sudder Diwani Adalat gave judgment in the latter's favour, declaring the Zamindari 'an integral portion of an impartible raj'. The Government gave him the insignia of kingship regarding the hills while the Courts gave him possession of the lands of the plains. Since 1809 every king had to receive an investiture from the British government and required to pay the usual nazar (tribute). A. Mackenzie; A History of Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes, Calcutta, 1884, p. 274.
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