



# The Demand For Greater Tipraland: Its Socio-Political Impact On Tripura's Society

Abhijit Nama\*

Guest Lecturer of Department of Political Science,  
Government Degree College Teliamura, Khasiamangal, Teliamura, 799205, Tripura, India

**Abstract:** The demand for Greater Tipraland—a self-governing region for the tribal communities in Tripura—has steadily gained momentum over the past two decades. This rise in support stems from a growing sense of ethnic pride and long-standing feelings of marginalization within the tribal population, particularly in light of historical changes that followed India's Partition. This study explores the roots of the Greater Tipraland movement and examines its social and political impact on inter-community relations, while also assessing its potential to ignite conflict. The research adopts a multi-method approach, combining insights from news articles, reports with data from a structured survey conducted among students at Tripura University, representing both tribal and non-tribal backgrounds. A total of 70 individuals were surveyed, revealing a significant divide: 88.6% of tribal participants supported the demand for Greater Tipraland, in contrast to only 2.9% of Bengali respondents. The call for Greater Tipraland highlights the political inequalities that persist in Tripura. To preserve peace and ensure sustainable development, policymakers must approach this issue with sensitivity and inclusivity. Addressing the historical grievances of tribal communities, while promoting equitable growth for all, will be key to fostering harmonious relationships among the diverse groups in the region.

**Key words:** Greater Tipraland, Ethnonationalism, Tribal Autonomy, Tripura, Conflict Resolution, Indigenous Rights, Intercommunity Relations

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Greater Tipraland demand has exposed deep-rooted fault lines between Tripura's tribal population and its largely Bengali migrant non-tribal population. This call for a separate tribal state was first made in 2000 by the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), citing historical marginalization and cultural erosion. Tensions escalated with the launch of the TipraMotha Party in 2019, which expanded the

demand for Greater Tipraland beyond the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) region.

Bengali migration has resulted in a significant demographic imbalance, creating tensions between the communities. This paper examines the origins of the demand for Greater Tipraland, its socio-political implications, and the potential consequences if this sensitive issue is not handled delicately, keeping in mind the complex relationship between the tribal and Bengali communities.

## II. Aims and Objectives

This research provides a comprehensive assessment of the demand for Greater Tipraland and its impact on Tripura's society. The objective is to suggest strategic and policy directions that can guide Tripura toward sustainable peace and development, ensuring that the interests of all stakeholders are addressed.

## III. RESEARCH QUESTION

- 1/ Is Tribal-Bengali relations further deteriorating over the demands for greater Tipraland?
- 2/ Is The Demand of 'Greater Tipraland' could ignite another phase of conflict in the state?

## IV . Literature Review

### a. Historical Context

The roots of ethnic tensions in Tripura trace back to the Partition of India in 1947, which saw a large influx of Bengali refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), reducing the indigenous tribal population to a minority. Ethnic nationalism became a dominant political discourse among the tribal population. Scholars such as Bibhakar (2021) and Singh (2014) highlight how the marginalized tribal community, excluded from major economic activities, political representation, and land ownership, turned to ethnic exclusivity as a means of asserting their identity.

### b. Ethno-Nationalism and Identity Politics

Walker Connor's theory of ethnonationalism helps explain the demand for Greater Tipraland, which stems from the tribal community's desire to protect their cultural heritage. Parashar (2023) notes that, feeling economically and politically neglected, the tribal population has embraced identity politics as a pathway to achieving self-rule.

### c. Political Responses and Governance

Government responses to the Tipraland demand have been inconsistent, oscillating between centralization and granting limited autonomy. Bhattacharya (2023) argues that the failure of the IPFT-BJP alliance to meet tribal aspirations has paved the way for new political players, such as the TipraMotha Party, which advocates for a more expansive "Greater Tipraland."

## V. Gap filling

From the above-mentioned brief review of literature, it may be concluded that the area of study which has been proposed here does not specifically address the impact of the demand of greater tipraland on society and how it may could ignite another phase of conflict between tribal and Bengali in the state if not handled tactfully, and also not gave any kind of propose strategies and policy recommendations that ensure the future trajectory of Tripura towards sustainable peace and development, considering the interests and well-being of all its inhabitants. Hope, this proposed study shall attempt to fill up that caveat gap in the existing literature.

## VI. Theoretical Framework

Walker Connor's theory of ethnonationalism offers a lens to understand the tribal demand for Greater Tipraland. Connor argues that ethnic consciousness gains political significance when a community perceives itself to be under threat. In Tripura, indigenous tribes fear the erosion of their traditions by the Bengali majority, leading to the ethnicization of politics. Connor's theory helps clarify what tribal communities seek to achieve through their demands, and the risk of violence if their grievances remain unaddressed.

## VII. Methods

### 1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining secondary and primary sources. Secondary data were obtained from online articles, newspaper, authors, relevant websites and existing studies, while primary data were gathered through a structured questionnaire survey conducted at Tripura University over two days (June 21 and 22, 2023).

### 2. Data Sources

#### a. Secondary Data

Secondary sources include online articles, newspapers, academic publications, and websites related to the Greater Tipraland demand and its implications. These resources provided historical context and critical insights for the research.

## **b. Primary Data**

Primary data were collected through a questionnaire survey of respondents from various departments at Tripura University. The targeted departments included the Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policies, the Department of Rural Development, the English Department, and the Political Science Department.

## **3. Sample Selection and Size**

A random sampling technique was used, comprising a total of 70 respondents—35 from the Bengali community and 35 from the tribal community. Among these, there were 24 females and 11 males in each group.

## **4. Data Collection Procedure**

Data were collected by visiting Tripura University and distributing the questionnaire to selected participants. The questionnaire covered topics related to the demand for Greater Tipraland and its societal impact. The researchers were available to clarify any doubts during the data collection process.

## **5. Data Analysis**

After collecting the completed questionnaires, the data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data described the demographic profiles of the participants, while quantitative data analyzed the participants' opinions and behaviors. The analysis sought to understand public opinion regarding the demand for Greater Tipraland and its broader societal implications.

## **VIII. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DEMAND OF GREATER TIPRALAND**

### **1. EMERGENCE OF ETHNONATIONALISM IN TRIPURA**

The British presence in the Northeastern region of India began with the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, which allowed the British to annex Assam. Following the 1857 revolt, they expanded their administrative control to other regions and merged several kingdoms with Assam. However, their approach towards Tripura was different. While they conquered the state, the Manikya dynasty, which had ruled Tripura since the 14th century, was allowed to retain some authority under British paramountcy. This dual arrangement allowed the monarchs of Tripura to continue ruling the hill region while also serving as British subjects and zamindars in the plains of Chakla Roshnabad, which was then part of British Bengal.

The royal chronicle of Tripura, called Rajmala, documents various uprisings against the princely policies that occurred in the hill state. These included the Kuki revolt (1860-61) against feudal exploitation, the Jamatia revolt (1863) against forced labor, and the Reang rebellion (1943-1945) against the taxation system of Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya. These uprisings were not primarily motivated by tribal identities but rather by issues such as tax collections, oppression by officials, and economic disparities between the tribals and Bengalis.

During the late 19th century, the preference of the Manikya kings for educated Bengalis in administrative positions led to growing discontent. This, along with the economic disparities between the tribals and Bengalis, further exacerbated the tensions. While the tribals practiced jhum farming (shifting cultivation) in the hills, the Bengalis engaged in settled cultivation in the plains. The landownership and taxation systems differed between the two regions, with the king collecting taxes from plough cultivators in the plains. The monarchy appointed sub-farmers, who were predominantly Bengali, to collect these revenues. In some cases, the kings granted lands to these sub-farmers, creating a class of intermediaries that included both Bengalis and elite tribals.

The demographic composition of Tripura changed significantly during and after the Partition of Bengal. Between 1947 and March 24, 1971, approximately 609,990 people migrated to Tripura from Bangladesh. This influx of Bengali refugees supported by successive Congress governments had a double impact on the state. First, the population tripled between 1951 and 1981. Second, the tribal population, which was the majority in 1941, became a minority.

Reports and research have highlighted two major factors behind this demographic transition. Firstly, the rehabilitation and settlement of Bengali refugees on tribal lands, facilitated by the government, led to the alienation of tribal lands. Secondly, Bengali moneylenders gained control over the lands previously used by tribals for shifting cultivation, further exacerbating the land problems. The influx of displaced persons adversely affected the tribals and accelerated their marginalization.

The land offered to Bengalis caused animosity among the tribals, who had previously lived in harmony with them despite cultural differences. The dominance of Bengali Hindus influenced the tribal communities to engage in Hindu practices and ceremonies. The early political organizations, influenced by communist ideologies, aimed to foster unity between tribals and peasants based on class rather than ethnicity. However, their efforts did not gain significant traction.

In the mid-1970s, ethnonationalism started to emerge in Tripura with the formation of the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS), primarily composed of Christian tribals who had received Western education and drew inspiration from neighboring states engaged in identity-based struggles. The TUJS advocated for an autonomous district council for the tribes, restoration of tribal lands, recognition of the Kokborok language, and the adoption of the Roman script.

TUJS initially pursued a parliamentary path but eventually turned to militancy. The Congress, known for supporting Bengali refugees, continued to settle Bengalis on tribal lands, while the Left parties did not actively champion tribal rights. Frustration over the failure to mobilize people through parliamentary means led to the emergence of militant organizations like the Tripura Sena and Amra Bangali, which targeted each other's communities, leading to violent clashes and massacres. The conflict led to one of the most unfortunate incidents in the history of Tripura, known as the Mandai massacre. On June 8, 1980, at Mandwi village, near the state capital of Agartala, at least 300 Bengalis were butchered by insurgent tribal groups. The riots, reports shows, led to the killing of at least 1000 people across the state.

## **2. VARIOUS AGREEMENTS AND COUNTER-INSURGENCY CAMPAIGN TO RESTORE PEACE BY GOVERNMENT OF TRIPURA**

### *a. Formation of an Autonomous Region*

An Autonomous Region, with an area of about 7,132 sq km or 68 per cent of Tripura's land, was constituted after the passing of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Act, 1979. The region is governed by the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council. The council in turn is answerable to the Government of Tripura. The first election of the council was held in 1982. The region enjoys limited autonomy offer by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

### *b. Peace agreement with TNV*

The first peace agreement was concluded between Indian state<sup>1</sup> and TNV in 1987 in which the former promised to take stringent measures to prevent further immigration of Bangladeshi nationals, reserve 20 territorial constituencies for Scheduled Tribes in the Tripura Legislative Assembly, restore land once belonged to the natives and redraw the boundary of Autonomous Region. In return, the TNV offered to call off their 'independent' movement for a country of Tripura and surrender firearms. Consequently, TNV made unsuccessful foray into electoral politics. But, the purpose of the agreement has not yet been achieved.

### *c. Peace agreement with ATTF*

It was signed between Government of Tripura and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) in 1993 in which the latter agreed to surrender arms and support policies undertaken by Government. On the other hand, the Government agreed, among others, to take action to prevent 'illegal' immigration from across the border, restore land once belonged to the natives, introduce inner-line permit and promote local languages such as Kokborok. It too did not produce significant impact.

### *d. Government declares Tripura 'Disturbed Area'*

A large parts of Tripura (40 of the 70 police station limits) which were affected by armed violence were declared 'Disturbed Area' in 1997 and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 was promulgated in order to grant armed forces personnel as much freedom as possible to carry out anti-insurgency operations.

As per this law, the armed forces are given 'special powers' in the locality officially declared as 'Disturbed Area'. It shall remain in force not more than six months from the date of its application unless it is extended. However, in June 2013, the Government of Tripura had decided to revoke the 'Disturbed Area' from eight police stations limits.

*e. 20 soldiers kill in an ambush*

In one of the deadliest incidents of violence, unidentified insurgents shot dead altogether 20 policemen and wounded several others in an ambush at Hirapur in West Tripura district in August 2002.

*f. Unpopular' peace agreements of 2004*

A breakaway group of NLFT signed an agreement with Government of Tripura in April 2004, in which they agreed to surrender arms and cooperate with the Government. In return, the Government promised to provide them with adequate employment and land. In the same year, another peace agreement was signed between Government of Tripura and another NLFT faction. Accordingly, the insurgents offered to surrender arms and adjure political violence while the Government promised to rehabilitate former insurgents and undertake development works in Borok concentrated areas. But, neither of these agreements had positive results

*g. 16 soldiers kill in ambush*

Heavily-armed insurgents killed at least 16 Territorial Army personnel and wound three others in an ambush at Agumabari in South Tripura district in December 2004. The incident occurred when they were escorting labourers engaged in road construction in two vehicles. They had also reportedly looted 15 AK-series rifles and one light machine gun.

**86 insurgents surrender** On 2 September 2005, at least 86 insurgents surrendered before the police at Agartala, the Tripura's capital, and deposited several firearms.

***Engineer abducted***

An engineer was abducted by insurgents in April 2008 while he was supervising a construction work in West Tripura district. As a result the workers had temporarily suspended work to press for more security. Police rescued the engineer a month after his abduction.

*h. Kokborok became second official language*

The Government of Tripura recognised Kokborok as the second official language of the State in 1979 while it has been the official language of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council since April 1999.

However, peace eventually returned to Tripura through a successful counter-insurgency campaign led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front government, which employed unique strategies not witnessed in other insurgency-afflicted states.

### 3. FATALITIES IN TERRORIST RELATED VIOLENCE IN TRIPURA 1992-2019

#### INSURGENCY RELATED KILLINGS 1992-2019

#### Annual Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Tripura, 1992-2019

	Civilians	Security Force Personnel	Terrorists	Total
1992	59	18	21	98
1993	148	28	7	183
1994	206	22	10	238
1995	178	34	45	257
1996	140	31	18	189
1997	205	50	19	274
1998	214	25	26	265
1999	240	41	22	303
2000	453	16	45	514
2001	239	31	42	312
2002	94	43	38	175
2003	195	39	61	295
2004	66	38	63	167
2005	34	8	31	73
2006	11	19	30	60
2007	10	5	21	36
2008	7	4	17	28
2009	9	1	1	11
2010	0	2	1	3
2011	1	0	0	1
2012	0	0	2	2
2013	0	0	0	0

2014	2	2	0	4
2015	0	0	0	0
2016	0	0	0	0
2017	0	0	0	0
2018	0	0	0	0
2019	0	0	0	0
<b>Total*</b>	<b>2511</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>3488</b>

\*Data till till June 23, 2019

#### Fatalities 2019\*

Month	Civilians	Security Force Personnel	Terrorists	Total
January	0	0	0	0
February	0	0	0	0
March	0	0	0	0
April	0	0	0	0
May	0	0	0	0
June	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

\*Data till till June 23, 2019

Source: South Asia Terrorist Portal, www.satp.org (last accessed on 01/07/2023)

#### 4. Emergence of Tipraland Demand in Tripura

In 2000, the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) emerged and advocated for the creation of Tipraland, a demand that was met with acceptance by the tribal people residing in the state, accounting for approximately 32% of the total population. However, Major political parties like BJP, CPI(M), and Congress

did not prioritize this demand instead continued to highlight development programs and integration across the state. After establishing a government with IPFT, the BJP seemed disinterested in the agitation for Tipraland. To such a posture, Pradyot Deb Barman established the Tipra Motha Party in 2019, and he continues with his demands for formation of the Greater Tipraland.

## 5. *What is Greater Tipraland*

Greater Tipraland has been the central aspiration of the TIPRA Motha, a political party in Tripura. Before the 2023 Assembly elections, the Tipra Motha party had released its Vision stating that the party was committed to seeking a solution that respected the rights of the indigenous people of Tripura in accordance with the Indian Constitution. The main objective is to form a new state for the 19 indigenous tribes that live in Tripura through the provisions provided in Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. Such a state would extend beyond the boundaries of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council TTAADC, including villages that s with significant populations of Tiplasa (indigenous people of Tripura)..

Also, TIPRA Motha claims to form task forces that will reach Tiplasa people in India and abroad, focusing on their linguistic, cultural, social, and economic progress . While the party emphasizes the plight of indigenous peoples, the leadership of the party strives for peace with non-tribal people. Pradyot Manikya, founder of the party, has stated in various media interactions that the party plans to take an all-inclusive stance and reach out to all sects of society in Tripura.

## 6. **WHAT IS THE GENESIS OF THIS DEMAND?**

The demand for Greater Tipraland appears to have its roots in the earlier demand for Tipraland put forth by the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) . However, Jagadish Debbarma, a leader of the Motha group, disagrees with this perception. He explains that while the previous demand aimed to create a separate state for the tribal population of Tripura from the areas governed by the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), the present demand goes beyond the TTAADC boundaries. It encompasses additional villages, approximately 36 in number, where the tribal population ranges from 20% to 36%. Importantly, this expanded demand does not exclude the Muslim population, which constitutes around nine percent, or the majority Hindu population residing within these areas.

The genesis of the demand can be traced back to the demographic changes that occurred in Tripura following the influx of refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in the aftermath of the 1947 partition. The 1941 Census indicated that the tribal and non-tribal populations in Tripura were almost evenly balanced. However, due to the arrival of approximately 150,000 refugees between 1950 and 1952, the tribal population decreased to just over 37% by the subsequent Census. The influx of refugees caused tensions and conflicts between the tribal and non-tribal communities, which escalated into armed insurgency in 1980.

Initially, the demands revolved around autonomous regions or separate statehood but later evolved into aspirations for sovereignty and independence.

After a political truce was reached between the Tripura state government and the rebel groups, the demand for statehood was revived. It is within this context that the present-day demand for Greater Tipraland has emerged, seeking to extend the territorial ambit beyond the TTAADC areas and incorporate additional villages with significant tribal populations.

## IX . Results and Discussion

### 1. Awareness and Support for Greater Tipraland

Among tribal respondents, 88.6% supported the creation of Greater Tipraland, citing the need to preserve their culture and attain self-rule. In contrast, only 2.9% of Bengali respondents supported the demand, with the majority opposing it in favor of the state's unity and development.

### 2. Perceived Impact on Tribal-Bengali Relations

Survey responses showed a significant divergence in views on how Greater Tipraland would affect tribal-Bengali relations. A majority (71.4%) of tribal respondents believed it would improve relations by providing tribal autonomy and balancing the population. Meanwhile, 34.3% of Bengali respondents expressed concern that it would deepen the ethnic divide.

### 3. Potential for Conflict

Both tribal and Bengali respondents voiced concerns about the potential for conflict if the Greater Tipraland demand is mishandled. Over half of the respondents from both communities feared that poor management of the issue could lead to renewed violence. Many participants emphasized the need for political decisions that respect tribal rights while maintaining the state's integrity.

### 4. Broader Issues of Governance and Ethnic Identity

The demand for Greater Tipraland raises larger questions about political governance and ethnic identity in Tripura. Tribal leaders see this as an opportunity to redress historical injustices and increase their political influence. Non-tribal residents, however, fear that the creation of a separate state would fragment Tripura and slow its socio-economic development. Walker Connor's theory of ethnonationalism suggests that demands for autonomy emerge when a group feels culturally and politically threatened. In Tripura, this demand reflects the tribal community's response to the dominance of Bengali speakers. It is unlikely that the demand for Greater Tipraland will disappear soon, so any approach to addressing it must consider the rights of all Tripura's people. Failure to resolve tribal grievances may lead to further unrest.

**X. BASED ON THE FINDINGS, THE RESEARCH QUESTION IS ADDRESSED AS FOLLOWS:****1. *Is Tribal-Bengali relations further deteriorating over the demands for greater Tipraland?***

Yes, the findings suggest that Tribal-Bengali relations are indeed experiencing strain and potential deterioration over the demands for greater Tipraland. While the tribal community shows strong support for the demand, the Bengali community largely opposes it, indicating existing divisions and tensions.

**2. *Is the demand for 'Greater Tipraland' likely to ignite another phase of conflict in the state?***

The findings indicate that there is a possibility of another phase of conflict in the state of Tripura due to the demand for Greater Tipraland. Both tribal and Bengali community participants expressed concerns regarding the potential escalation of conflicts if the issue is not handled tactfully.

**XI. Conclusion**

The demand for Greater Tipraland poses a significant challenge to Tripura's political and social future. The strong support for the demand among the tribal population reflects deep-seated grievances that the state has yet to address adequately. On the other hand, opposition from the non-tribal population highlights the complexity of the issue, as the creation of a separate state could lead to conflict.

To ensure lasting peace and stability, policymakers must engage in meaningful dialogue with tribal leaders, address economic disparities, and implement governance reforms that allow for greater autonomy while preserving the unity of Tripura. Without a careful and inclusive approach, the region risks further ethnic unrest.

**XII. Recommendations****1. Dialogue and Inclusive Governance**

A key step in resolving the Greater Tipraland issue is fostering open and inclusive dialogue between the tribal and non-tribal communities. The government should facilitate forums where both groups can discuss their concerns and aspirations in a structured and respectful manner. This inclusive approach will help build mutual understanding and trust.

**2. Economic Development**

Addressing economic disparities is crucial for reducing tensions. Investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure in tribal regions is essential to combat the feelings of marginalization among the tribal

population. Economic empowerment of tribal areas will promote balanced development and foster goodwill between the communities.

### 3. Conflict Prevention Mechanisms

Establishing conflict prevention structures, such as local councils or community-based committees, can help address issues between the two communities before they escalate. These bodies should be equipped to mediate disputes and ensure that tensions are resolved peacefully.

### 4. Cultural Preservation

Efforts to preserve tribal cultural identity should be encouraged, while also promoting respect for the diverse cultures of all people in Tripura. This will foster a sense of pride and belonging among the tribal population while maintaining harmony within the broader society.

### 5. Educational Initiatives

Introducing educational campaigns that promote cultural diversity and understanding between different ethnic groups is crucial. Programs should encourage inter-tribal and inter-community exchanges, helping both tribal and non-tribal populations appreciate each other's histories and contributions to Tripura's heritage.

### 6. Peaceful Coexistence Programs

Support programs that promote goodwill, partnership, and friendly interaction between the tribal and non-tribal communities. These initiatives should aim to strengthen relationships and foster peaceful coexistence.

### 7. Media and Communication Strategies

Utilize media and communication platforms to spread positive narratives and build a sense of unity between the different communities. Public campaigns should focus on promoting social harmony and reducing prejudice.

## 8. Long-term Vision for Tripura

Develop a long-term, inclusive vision for Tripura's socio-economic development that reflects the aspirations of all its people. This strategic framework should aim to harmonize the interests of tribal and non-tribal populations, ensuring sustainable peace and development for the state.

### References

1. Bhattacharya, A. (2023). *Can Indigenous People and Bengalis See Eye to Eye in Polls? Outlook India*.
2. Bibhakar, P. (2021). *The Demand for Tiplal and Its Impact. Journal of Northeast Studies*.
3. Singh, M. A. (2014). *Conflicts in Tripura. NIAS Backgrounder on Conflict Resolution*.
4. Parashar, U. (2023). *From Tiplal to Greater Tiplal: Tripura's Tribal Politics. Hindustan Times*.
5. Bhattacharya, S. (2023). *Explained: The Demand for a Greater Tiplal by the TIPRA Motha. The Hindu*.
6. Insurgency related killings in Tripura 1992-2018. (n.d.).  
[https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/tripura/data\\_sheets/insurgency\\_related\\_killings.htm](https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/tripura/data_sheets/insurgency_related_killings.htm)

