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Forest Land Rights of Tripura with special reference to Scheduled Tribes: A Legal Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Forest land rights are of immense importance to the socio-economic, cultural and traditional life of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) of Tripura. Forests have been an integral part of the life of the Tripuri people in the State, providing income, culture, shelter, food, spiritual comfort and identity. Colonial forest policies, post-independence land policies, deforestation and developmental activities, however, have adversely affected the forest rights of the Tripuri people. To secure and assert the rights of forest-dwelling STs and other traditional forest dwellers, the Parliament of India enacted the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, a landmark legislation. This paper critically reviews the forest laws in Tripura in relation to the forest rights of the STs. It examines the constitutional safeguards under Articles 14, 15, 21, 46 and 244 and the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution, the statutory protections under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and the relevant environmental and land laws. It also evaluates the effectiveness of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) in protecting tribal land and forest rights. The paper further outlines important obstacles to the implementation of forest rights, including land alienation, displacement, administrative delay, lack of awareness, environmental limitations and tensions between conservation policies and the livelihood rights of tribes. Government responses and measures concerning tribal welfare and forest governance are also highlighted. This study finds that, although there are legislative provisions safeguarding tribal forest rights, the implementation of these provisions remains lacking in effectiveness. Greater institutional accountability, awareness creation, community engagement and policy reform are needed to ensure social justice, ecological sustainability and the realisation of the constitutional rights of the STs in Tripura.

Keywords: Forest Rights, Scheduled Tribes, Tripura Tribal Communities, Forest Rights Act 2006, Constitutional Protection, TTAADC, Digital Forest Governance.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In India, forests have been a fundamental part of tribal peoples' socio-economic, cultural and traditional life for centuries. Tripura has a considerable tribal population, among whom the STs have relied on forests for their livelihood, dwelling, food security, medicine and cultural identity for generations. Tiprasa societies and forests are closely connected, bound together through customary practices, traditional knowledge and community-based resource management systems. However, post-independence land administration, developmental activities and environmental legislation have significantly affected the traditional forest rights of tribal communities. The growing displacement of forest communities, alienation of land-use rights and limitations on forest rights made the recognition and protection of forest rights a significant legal and constitutional issue. This historical injustice was redressed by the Government of India through the enactment of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, also referred to as the Forest Rights Act, 2006. The legislation aims to acknowledge the rights of individuals and communities over forest lands and forest resources and to include tribal communities in forest governance and conservation. This paper discusses the legal issues regarding forest rights in Tripura, specifically as they pertain to the STs. It examines constitutional protection, legislation, judicial interpretation and institutional arrangements relating to Tribal Forest Rights (TFRs), and also considers the difficulties in implementation and the importance of effective legal protection, sustainable development and social justice for the tribal inhabitants of Tripura.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF FOREST GOVERNANCE IN TRIPURA

Tripura has a distinctive history of forest governance, in which the State forest administration and forest communities have engaged with the Tiprasa community in a dynamic manner. The forests of Tripura were traditionally managed through customary forest management practices among the Tiprasa people and a community-based forest management system. Forests played a significant role in the lives of the STs of Tripura in matters of livelihood, shifting (jhum) cultivation, food, medicine, shelter and the maintenance of culture. Forests were considered common property and were managed by traditional tribal institutions and customs.¹ Forests became increasingly important administratively and economically under the princely rule of the Manikya dynasty. Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya introduced the first formal forest regulation in 1296 Tripura Era (1886 A.D.), which asserted State control over valuable forest resources

¹ Ayesha Khosla & Prodyut Bhattacharya, *Tracking the Implementation of Forest Rights Act, 2006 and Its Impact on the Livelihood of Forest Dependent People in the State of Tripura, India*, 23 IOSR J. HUMAN. & SOC. SCI. 1 (2018).

such as sal, garjan, agar and other commercial timber species, marking a first step towards centralised forest administration in Tripura.² Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya was the first to urge cultivators to switch from traditional jhum cultivation to modern farming practices, and in 1939 he reserved land for the native tribes of Tripura, a measure later regarded as a crucial component in the establishment of the Autonomous District Council.³ When Tripura merged into India in 1949 and gained statehood in 1972, its forest governance became more organised, based on national forest laws and policies. Access to forest land and resources was significantly affected by large-scale migration, population growth, deforestation and settlement expansion. Colonial-style forest administration practices were applied to forest-dependent communities, who were treated as encroachers, resulting in socio-economic marginalisation and land alienation.⁴ Tribal areas in Tripura are administered with autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution through the TTAADC, which was formed in 1985.⁵ Later, participatory approaches such as Joint Forest Management (JFM) were adopted in Tripura in 1991 to engage local communities in forest conservation and management.⁶ A major step in forest governance was the Forest Rights Act, 2006, which seeks to address the “historical injustice” done to forest-dwelling tribal groups by granting them rights over their forest resources and land, and which has contributed significantly to enhancing the role of tribes, livelihood security and decentralised forest governance in Tripura.

III. CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY SAFEGUARDS FOR STS AND FOREST DWELLERS

The Constitution of India offers wide protection for and advancement of the interests of STs and forest dwellers, acknowledging their distinct cultural identity, socio-economic status and reliance on forests for livelihood. These safeguards protect tribal autonomy, guard against exploitation and seek to retain tribal land and forest rights. Article 46 mandates the State to promote the educational and economic interests of the STs and to protect them from social injustice and exploitation, and is regarded as the basis for tribal welfare policies in India. The Sixth Schedule is relevant to the tribal areas of Tripura, providing special administrative

² Koushik Majumdar & B.K. Datta, *Forest Type Classification of Tripura, Northeast India: An Overview on Historical Aspects and Present Ecological Approaches*, in PLANT DIVERSITY IN THE HIMALAYA HOTSPOT REGION 590 (Abhaya Prasad Das & Subir Bera eds., Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal Singh 2018).

³ Sanjana Ray, *Tripura Royal Family: All You Need to Know About Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, the Father of Modern Tripura*, GQ INDIA, <https://www.gqindia.com/> (last visited May 16, 2026).

⁴ Khosla & Bhattacharya, *supra* note 3, at 4.

⁵ TRIPURA TRIBAL AREAS AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL, https://ttaadc.gov.in/history_ttaadc (last visited May 15, 2026).

⁶ INDUCTION TRAINING PROGRAMME OF PANCHAYAT EXECUTIVE OFFICERS: FOREST DWELLERS' RIGHTS AND LAW, <https://panchayat.tripura.gov.in/> (last visited May 15, 2026).

arrangements, including the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs), with powers over land, forest administration, customary laws and local governance.⁷ The TTAADC is a crucial body for guaranteeing the rights of tribal people and upholding their traditions and customs. Further, Article 275 provides for grants-in-aid from the Union Government for tribal welfare and development programmes, while Articles 330 and 332 ensure political representation of Scheduled Tribes through the reservation of seats in Parliament and the State Legislatures.⁸

The Constitution also provides a safeguard through the establishment of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST),⁹ which is tasked with monitoring constitutional safeguards, investigating complaints of the deprivation of tribal rights and advising the Government on tribal welfare measures. In addition, Article 19(5) allows the State to impose reasonable restrictions for the protection of tribal interests in the Scheduled Areas.¹⁰

Besides the constitutional safeguards, certain statutory safeguards have been established for forest dwellers and tribal communities. The Forest Rights Act, 2006 is a significant piece of legislation that acknowledges the rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes over forest land and forest resources, including community rights and rights over minor forest produce, grazing lands, community forest resources and traditional habitation.¹¹ Forest dwellers may not be evicted under the Act until the recognition and verification of rights is completed, as provided in Section 4(5).¹²

The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) and the Forest Rights Act together seek to balance environmental protection with the livelihood rights of tribes.¹³

The judiciary has given significant importance to safeguarding tribal and forest rights. In *Orissa Mining Corporation v. Ministry of Environment & Forest* (the *Niyamgiri* case),¹⁴ the Supreme Court upheld the religious and cultural rights of the Dongria Kondh tribe and recognised the authority of Gram Sabhas to determine issues relating to the use of forest resources, thereby safeguarding the rights of tribes.¹⁵ Similarly, the Court has emphasised the need to protect tribal rights from arbitrary displacement and to ensure proper rehabilitation.¹⁶

⁷ INDIA CONST. art. 244.

⁸ INDIA CONST. arts. 275, 330, 332.

⁹ INDIA CONST. art. 338A.

¹⁰ INDIA CONST. art. 19, cl. 5.

¹¹ The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, § 3, No. 2, Acts of Parliament, 2007 (India) [hereinafter Forest Rights Act].

¹² Forest Rights Act, *supra* note 13, § 4(5).

¹³ The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, § 4, No. 40, Acts of Parliament, 1996 (India).

¹⁴ *Orissa Mining Corp. v. Ministry of Env't & Forest*, (2013) 6 S.C.C. 476 (India).

¹⁵ *Id.* (the *Niyamgiri* case).

¹⁶ *Banwasi Seva Ashram v. State of U.P.*, (1986) 4 S.C.C. 753 (India).

Consequently, the legislative enactments, the provisions of the Constitution and the verdicts of the courts together form a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of the rights of Scheduled Tribes and forest dwellers in India, including in the State of Tripura.

IV. THE FOREST RIGHTS ACT, 2006: OBJECTIVES, RECOGNITION AND IMPLEMENTATION IN TRIPURA

The Forest Rights Act represented a turning point in forest governance in India, as it placed forest dwellers as legitimate stakeholders in forest conservation and management.¹⁷ Previously, Indian forest governance had been guided primarily by laws such as the Indian Forest Act, 1927, which emphasised State control over forest resources and often resulted in the displacement and marginalisation of tribal populations that relied on forests for their livelihood and cultural identity.

The key objective of the Act of 2006¹⁸ is to secure livelihood, social justice and food security for forest-dwelling communities as forest right holders, while simultaneously enhancing efforts towards the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources. The Preamble to the Act explicitly recognises the “historical injustice” faced by forest dwellers and aims to redress it by recognising their rights through law.¹⁹

The Act acknowledges the forest rights of both individuals and groups. Section 3(1)(a) recognises Individual Forest Rights (IFR), namely the right to use forest land for habitation or self-cultivation, and protects tribal communities from the alienation of forest land. Shifting (jhum) cultivation is an important part of the livelihood of tribes in States like Tripura, so the recognition of individual rights over cultivated forest land is particularly meaningful. The recognition of community rights under Section 3(1) also includes rights over grazing grounds, fishing areas and water bodies, seasonal access to forests, and rights over the collection of minor forest produce, all of which are significant given the close association of Tripura’s tribal communities with forests in their socio-cultural traditions, religious practices and livelihood activities. Community rights also empower the Gram Sabha and local tribal institutions to engage in forest governance and biodiversity conservation. The FRA thus provides a participatory, decentralised system of rights recognition. Section 6 of the Act empowers the Gram Sabha to initiate proceedings to determine and verify forest rights claims, based on the principles of democratic decentralisation and participatory governance.

¹⁷ The Indian Forest Act, 1927, No. 16, Acts of the Imperial Legislative Council, 1927 (India).

¹⁸ Forest Rights Act, *supra* note 13, § 3.

¹⁹ *Id.* pmb1.

Another important feature of the FRA is its bar against the eviction or forcible displacement of forest-dwelling tribes from forest land until the recognition and verification process is completed by the authority.²⁰ To integrate community involvement and tribal rights into the conservation of wildlife, biodiversity, forests and ecological balance, the conservation of biodiversity is incorporated in Section 5 of the Act.

The judiciary has played a significant role in strengthening the implementation of forest rights in India. In *Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh*,²¹ the Supreme Court reaffirmed the protection of tribal land and forest resources under the Constitution and held that their exploitation could not override the constitutional protection afforded to the autonomy of the tribes.

In the *Niyamgiri* case, the Supreme Court clarified that the Dongria Kondh community had rights over the forests and granted the Gram Sabhas the power to decide issues affecting tribal cultural and religious rights in forest areas.²² The Court noted that the Forest Rights Act and the Constitution protected the cultural and religious rights of the STs. The judgment is regarded as a milestone in recognising the role of tribal people in environmental governance and decision-making relating to forest resources.

In Tripura, the application of the FRA assumes particular importance given the large population residing in forest and hilly areas. Forests are the traditional source of livelihood, materials and support for indigenous communities such as the Tripuri, Jamatia, Reang, Halam, Chakma and Mog, among others, and play a significant role in forest-based activities, including medicine and religious rituals. The TTAADC, established under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, also has an important role in protecting tribal interests and providing effective governance in tribal areas.

In implementation, Forest Rights Committees are formed at the village level and Gram Sabhas are engaged in the verification process in Tripura. Tribal families have been recognised as individual forest rights holders over forest lands they have cultivated for generations, and, through recognition of community rights, tribal communities have gained access to and control over forest resources via community institutions. The FRA thus plays a role in improving livelihood security, land security and community involvement in forest management.

²⁰ *Id.* § 4(5).

²¹ *Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh*, (1997) 8 S.C.C. 191 (India).

²² *Orissa Mining Corp.*, *supra* note 16.

A number of challenges nevertheless remain in implementing the FRA in Tripura. Lack of awareness of the legal procedures and entitlements is a major hurdle for tribal communities.²³ Documenting their use and occupation of forest land is difficult for many forest dwellers who hold and use such land in traditional ways. Delays in processing and inconsistencies in administration have also impeded effective implementation. In certain areas, community rights over forest resources are not well understood owing to procedural difficulties and a lack of institutional support.

A further challenge concerns maintaining forest conservation policies alongside the livelihood rights of tribes. Conflict often arises because forest and wildlife laws restrict tribal communities from practising shifting cultivation. With the assistance of the FRA, efforts to harmonise conservation and tribal rights have been made, but coordination between forest authorities and local governance institutions on implementing this balance remains limited.

The Forest Rights Act, 2006 is nonetheless a milestone in the preservation of tribal rights and a step towards democratic forest governance in India. The acknowledgment of individual and community forest rights has substantially advanced social justice, livelihood security and the conservation of indigenous identity in Tripura. Effective implementation through awareness initiatives, comprehensive verification of claims and improved institutional assistance will further strengthen the empowerment of STs and sustainable forest governance in the State.

V. ROLE OF AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCILS IN TRIBAL FOREST GOVERNANCE

The TTAADC plays a pivotal role in protecting the interests of the Tiprasa people.²⁴ The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution grants the TTAADC a special status, conferring autonomy to administer and oversee the Tiprasa regions of Tripura, particularly in matters such as local government, economic growth and the preservation of Tiprasa culture.²⁵ The general authority and duties of the TTAADC may be summarised as follows.

Legislative authority. The TTAADC has the power to enact legislation on a variety of subjects relating to forest land rights, including the use and management of land within the ADC area. To safeguard the land rights of Tiprasa communities, the Council may control the allotment, use and transfer of Tiprasa land; it may regulate the preservation and management of forests within its purview, including the issuance of permits for forest products; and it may legislate for the

²³ MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOREST RIGHTS ACT (2012), <https://tribal.nic.in/fra.aspx> (last visited May 12, 2026).

²⁴ TRIPURA TRIBAL AREAS AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL, https://ttaadc.gov.in/history_ttaadc (last visited May 22, 2026).

²⁵ The Tiprasa people, indigenous to Tripura, possess a rich cultural heritage; their traditions, music, and dance are rooted in a tribal way of life reflecting a close connection with nature, spirituality, and community living.

advancement of agriculture, including the regulation of shifting (jhum) cultivation on forest land.

Protection of Tiprasa interests. The principal goal of the TTAADC is to protect and preserve the rights and interests of the Tiprasa people within the Sixth Schedule areas. This includes preventing land transfers to non-Tiprasa persons and ensuring the protection of Tiprasa land rights, as well as preserving and promoting the cultural heritage, traditions and customs of the Tiprasa communities of Tripura.

Conservation of the environment. Within the ADC areas, the TTAADC works towards the conservation of the environment, with a particular focus on the protection of forests and wildlife, which play a critical role in the life of the Tiprasa. By administering and protecting Tiprasa land, the Council seeks to secure the identity of the community and to support its cultural and economic growth, infrastructure and education.

VI. CHALLENGES IN THE PROTECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF FOREST LAND RIGHTS OF SCHEDULED TRIBES IN TRIPURA

The preservation and execution of the forest rights of Scheduled Tribes in Tripura continue to face many legal, administrative and socio-economic hurdles, notwithstanding the adoption of the Forest Rights Act, 2006. The Act was created to remedy the “historical injustice” faced by indigenous groups reliant on forests for their livelihood and cultural identity.²⁶ However, the practical realisation of these rights remains constrained by several structural obstacles.

One significant concern is the lack of information among indigenous populations regarding their legal rights under the FRA. Many forest dwellers in remote tribal areas are unaware of the procedures for filing claims and obtaining recognition of Individual Forest Rights (IFR) and Community Forest Rights (CFR).²⁷ Illiteracy, inadequate legal assistance and limited institutional outreach further weaken the implementation process.

Another important problem is bureaucratic delay and procedural complexity in the verification and validation of claims. The claim-settlement procedure involves Gram Sabhas, Sub-Divisional Level Committees and District Level Committees, which can lead to delays and the rejection of genuine claims for want of documentary proof. Tribal populations practising shifting (jhum) cultivation often find it difficult to demonstrate continuous occupation of forest land owing to the absence of official land records. Studies on FRA implementation in Tripura

²⁶ Vajiram & Ravi, *Problems Faced by Tribal Communities in India*, <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/problems-faced-by-tribal-communities-in-india/> (last visited May 29, 2026).

²⁷ Khosla & Bhattacharya, *supra* note 3, at Issue 3.

reveal that erratic implementation and administrative shortcomings have considerably undermined the stated aims of the Act.²⁸

Conflict between forest conservation policies and indigenous livelihood rights also poses major challenges. Forest authorities may continue to apply colonial-era forest restrictions, such as those under the Indian Forest Act, 1927, and prioritise conservation over tribal rights, resulting in limitations on traditional forest use.²⁹ This occasionally leads to friction between forest officials and indigenous communities. Inadequate recognition of Community Forest Rights further hampers the participation of indigenous communities in forest governance and sustainable resource management.

NLU Tripura, through its Centre for Tribal Studies & Social Justice, organised a two-day workshop titled “Forest Rights, Legal Safeguards and Tribal Governance” in collaboration with the Tribal Research & Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura. The workshop highlighted the importance of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 in addressing the historical injustice towards forest-dwelling tribes. The speakers noted the continuing challenges of forest rights implementation, such as lack of awareness, procedural hurdles and insufficient institutional coordination, and emphasised the need for effective legal protection, greater community involvement, training and capacity-building programmes, and a balanced constitutional approach to the protection of tribal rights and access to forest resources. The workshop also underscored the importance of legal education, research and policy interventions in enhancing tribal governance and fostering social justice for tribal people in Tripura and across India.³⁰

The courts have played a significant role in safeguarding indigenous forest rights. In *Sri Dharmacharan Tripura v. State of Tripura*,³¹ the Tripura High Court emphasised the protection of the rights of forest dwellers under the FRA, 2006 and recognised the importance of the proper implementation of forest land allotment procedures for tribal communities.

In *UCO Bank v. Dipak Debbarma*,³² the Supreme Court examined the protection of tribal land in Tripura under Section 187 of the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960, which

²⁸ Ayesha Khosla & Prodyut Bhattacharya, *Use of Composite Index to Critically Assess the Post Rights Recognition Impact of Forest Rights Act, 2006: A Case Study from the Tribal State of Tripura, India*, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666719320300236> (last visited May 17, 2026).

²⁹ Jocelyn I. Lee & Steven A. Wolf, *Critical Assessment of Implementation of the Forest Rights Act of India*, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264837717311705> (last visited May 17, 2026).

³⁰ Abhishek Dey, *NLU Tripura Centre for Tribal Studies & Social Justice Holds a Two-Day Workshop on Forest Rights, Legal Safeguards and Tribal Governance*, TRIPURA CHRON. (Apr. 26, 2026), <https://tripurachronicle.in/> (last visited June 1, 2026).

³¹ *Sri Dharmacharan Tripura v. State of Tripura*, W.P.(C) No. 561 of 2023 (Tripura H.C.).

³² *UCO Bank v. Dipak Debbarma*, (2017) 2 S.C.C. 585 (India).

restricts the transfer of tribal land to non-tribals, against the central Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

In *Wildlife First v. Union of India* (2019),³³ the Supreme Court considered challenges to the FRA, 2006. The petitioners claimed that the statute jeopardised the conservation of forests, and concerns were raised over the forest rights of the tribal peoples. The Court directed the State authorities to properly verify the land records and to examine the rejected claims before any process of eviction of forest dwellers.

In Tripura, increased developmental activity, population pressure and deforestation threaten the traditional dependence of tribal communities on forests. Despite the improvements in livelihood security and legal protection brought about by the FRA, there remain shortfalls in information, transparent claim-settlement mechanisms, the active involvement of Gram Sabhas and coordination between forest and tribal-welfare offices. To ensure sustainable forest governance and the protection of the STs in Tripura, it is essential to involve the community and respect customary forest rights.

VII. FOREST LAND ALIENATION, DISPLACEMENT AND TRIBAL LIVELIHOOD IN TRIPURA

Land and forests are the basis of tribal identity, culture and way of life. Beyond its commercial value, land is also a form of social security, cultural heritage and traditional governance for tribes. Historically, the 19 indigenous tribes and sub-tribes of Tripura depended on agricultural fields and forests, and land alienation and displacement have dealt a severe blow to their socio-economic condition. Despite constitutional protections and specific statutory rights enabling tribal communities to retain access to their forests and land, they continue to face the loss of land, restricted forest access and diminished livelihood prospects.

A. Land Alienation among Tribal Communities

Land alienation refers to the transfer of ownership of tribal lands to non-tribals by legal or illegal means, through which tribes lose ownership of their land. The control or alienation of tribal land by powerful entities has become a recurring occurrence across indigenous territories in the country.³⁴ In Tripura, extensive demographic change following large-scale immigration after

³³ *Wildlife First v. Union of India*, 2019 SCC OnLine SC 238 (India).

³⁴ RAJIV TEWARI, LAND ALIENATION IN TRIPURA: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS (Inst. for Soc. & Econ. Change, Bangalore).

Partition substantially altered the land-ownership pattern of the State.³⁵ The landholdings of many tribal households have diminished over time, and tribal families have lost their ancestral lands owing to settlement expansion, the absence of land records and economic compulsion.

The issue of land alienation not only restricts access to agricultural land but also weakens traditional tribal institutions and their customary frameworks for resource management. The acquisition of tribal land has adversely affected the economic freedom of tribal communities as well as their cultural integrity, with indigenous people of Tripura losing ancestral land and, with it, economic independence and cultural identity.

B. Development-Induced Displacement of the Tiprasa People

Development-induced displacement (DID) refers to situations in which people are forced to abandon their lands or relocate because of development.³⁶ Projects such as road construction, urban expansion, public infrastructure and industrial activity have contributed to displacement in tribal areas. While development is necessary for economic growth, inadequate rehabilitation and resettlement measures often create hardships for affected communities.

In Tripura, several tribal families have experienced displacement owing to infrastructure projects and changes in land-use patterns. The Dumboor (Gumti) Hydroelectric Project, commissioned in 1976, is one of the most significant instances of development-induced displacement in Tripura. The dam submerged about 46.34 sq. km. of fertile land in the Raima Valley, a predominantly tribal area of high agricultural productivity, displacing thousands of tribal families from their lands, homes and livelihoods. According to official records, 2,117 families in the tribal area were displaced, but independent estimates placed the number at 8,000 to 10,000 families, affecting nearly 60,000 to 70,000 people. Many displaced families were not entitled to compensation or rehabilitation owing to the absence of formal documents and their reliance on customary land-ownership systems. As a result, a considerable number of affected households relocated to nearby hilly regions and resumed jhum cultivation in difficult conditions. The project not only caused poverty and destitution among tribal people but also deepened their sense of marginalisation; it is a notable example of how development projects can adversely affect the land rights, livelihood security and socio-cultural identity of tribes in

³⁵ U.A. Shimray, *Tribal Land Alienation in the North Eastern Region: Laws and Land Relations*, N.E. SOC. RSCH. CTR. & INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S FORUM OF N.E. INDIA (Guwahati, May 25, 2006), <https://iwgia.org/> (last visited June 1, 2026).

³⁶ Jay Drydyk, *Unequal Benefits: The Ethics of Development-Induced Displacement*, 8 GEO. J. INT'L AFF. 105 (2007).

the absence of adequate rehabilitation and consultation.³⁷ By some estimates, between 10,000 and 15,000 tribal people were displaced from the area submerged by the Dumboor dam.³⁸ Such displacement frequently results in the loss of agricultural land, reduced access to forests and the disruption of traditional livelihoods, leaving families struggling to adapt to new environments and to secure sustainable sources of income.

C. Impact on Traditional Livelihoods of the Tiprasa

In many tribal households of Tripura, agriculture and forest-based activities remain the primary livelihood sources.³⁹ Traditional activities such as fishing, animal husbandry, jhum cultivation and the gathering of minor forest produce are the main economic sources in rural tribal areas. Land alienation and displacement have adversely affected these livelihoods. The decline in arable land is compelling many indigenous households to turn to wage and seasonal work, and there is a risk of the loss of traditional knowledge and cultural practices associated with land and forests as younger generations migrate to cities in search of employment.

D. Forest Dependence and Livelihood Security

Many Tiprasa households in Tripura rely on forest resources for both subsistence and income, including food, medicinal plants, bamboo and other non-timber forest produce. Restrictions on forest access, declining forest cover and the inadequate recognition of community forest rights have affected the economic security of forest-dependent communities. The implementation of the FRA, 2006 seeks to address historical injustices by recognising the rights of forest-dwelling STs and other traditional forest dwellers; however, challenges relating to awareness, documentation and administrative procedures continue to limit the effective realisation of these rights in many tribal areas.

E. Socio-Economic Consequences

Land alienation and displacement carry significant socio-economic consequences for tribal communities. The loss of land typically results in poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and indebtedness, and families displaced from their traditional villages may face reduced access to education, health and public services. Women are among the worst affected, as they are closely involved in agriculture, forest collection and the management of household resources; the loss

³⁷ Gourishwar Choudhuri, *Land Alienation and Its Impact on Jhumias: A Case Study of Tripura*, 6 INT'L J. MULTIDISCIPLINARY RSCH. & DEV. 87 (2019).

³⁸ Debbarma Khakchang, *Internally Displaced Persons in Twipra*, in DIMENSIONS OF DISPLACED PEOPLE IN NORTH EAST INDIA 277 (C. Joshua Thomas ed., Regency Publ'n 2002).

³⁹ Gourishwar Choudhuri, *Land Alienation and Its Impact on Jhumias: A Case Study of Tripura*, 6 INT'L J. MULTIDISCIPLINARY RSCH. & DEV. 184 (2019).

of access to forests and common resources increases their workload and economic vulnerability. The issue of land alienation thus has far-reaching implications for gender equity and community well-being.

F. Protective Measures in Tripura

Various legal and institutional measures have been introduced to safeguard tribal land rights in Tripura. The TTAADC plays an important role in protecting tribal interests and promoting self-governance in tribal-majority areas, while the constitutional protections under the Sixth Schedule provide a framework for preserving tribal customs, land rights and traditional institutions.

VIII. LANDMARK JUDICIAL RESPONSES RELATING TO FOREST RIGHTS IN INDIA

The Indian judiciary has contributed significantly to the balance between forest conservation and the rights of the STs and other traditional forest dwellers. Across a number of landmark decisions, the courts have given considerable attention to protecting tribal livelihoods, customary rights and community involvement in forest governance, thereby shaping forest-rights jurisprudence and its impact on the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 in India, including in Tripura.

In *Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh*,⁴⁰ the Supreme Court ruled that tribal land in Scheduled Areas cannot be transferred or leased to private mining companies or non-tribals. It underscored that the primary benefits of natural resources in tribal areas should accrue to the indigenous communities and that constitutional guarantees should be read in favour of tribal welfare. The judgment reinforced the principle that the land and forest resources of tribes must be protected from exploitation.

The series of orders in *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India*⁴¹ advanced environmental protection and controlled forest diversion, while also raising concerns about the effect on forest-dependent communities. The litigation ultimately brought to the fore the need to balance ecological conservation with the rights of the tribal and forest-dwelling population.

The Supreme Court has acknowledged the importance of safeguarding the rights of forest-dwelling communities while taking environmental considerations into account, noting that the

⁴⁰ *Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh*, (1997) 8 S.C.C. 191 (India).

⁴¹ *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India*, (1997) 2 S.C.C. 267 (India).

forced removal of tribal people should not be carried out without proper rehabilitation and protection of their rights.⁴²

In *Mataram Reang v. State of Tripura*,⁴³ the Tripura High Court considered a question concerning the felling of trees by Mr. Reang, a tribal landholder. Although the petitioner had earlier been permitted to fell a tree on his own land, the competent authority imposed a 25% royalty. The Court addressed the rights of tribal landholders while ensuring compliance with forest conservation laws, and directed that Mr. Reang pay the 25% royalty within the stipulated period of 15 days, after which he could extract the timber. The judgment illustrates the Court's attempt to balance the right of tribes to extract resources from their own land with forest conservation.

The judiciary has thus played a crucial role in protecting forest rights and ensuring that environmental preservation and tribal welfare are balanced. Important rulings have supported the Forest Rights Act, 2006, its just implementation, community involvement in forest governance and protection against land alienation. These principles are especially pertinent to Tripura, whose forests remain an essential component of the indigenous people's way of life, culture and identity.

IX. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND POLICY MEASURES IN TRIPURA FOR FOREST RIGHTS OF THE TIPRASA PEOPLE

Tripura has emerged as one of the important States in the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006. In recent years, the State Government has adopted several policy measures to strengthen the recognition of forest rights, improve tribal livelihoods and promote participatory forest governance.

A. Launch of the Northeast's First Digital Forest Rights Act Atlas (2026). The launch of the Digital Forest Rights Act Atlas by the Governor of Tripura in May 2026 was a significant recent development. Developed with the support of the Tripura Space Application Centre (TSAC), the Atlas digitally maps recognised forest rights and assists in transparency, monitoring and planning in the implementation of the FRA. The initiative is expected to enhance evidence-based policy-making and to better safeguard tribal land rights.⁴⁴

⁴² *Banwasi Seva Ashram v. State of U.P.*, (1986) 4 S.C.C. 753 (India).

⁴³ *Mataram Reang v. State of Tripura*, W.A. No. 71 of 2012 (Tripura H.C.).

⁴⁴ *Committed to Tribal Dignity: Tripura Governor Launches Northeast's First Digital FRA Atlas*, WEB INDIA NEWS (May 29, 2026), <https://news.webindia123.com/> (last visited May 30, 2026).

B. Recognition of Individual and Community Forest Rights. The State Government continues the process of recognising Individual Forest Rights (IFRs) and Community Forest Rights (CFRs) under the FRA. The Government has pointed to Tripura as a successful model of FRA implementation, with a substantial number of Tiprasa households legally recognised over forest lands traditionally used by them.

C. Tribal Development Atlas and Data-Driven Governance. The Tribal Welfare Department of Tripura has introduced a Tribal Development Atlas alongside the Digital FRA Atlas, combining information on tribal settlements, socio-economic indicators and development schemes. This is intended to enhance policy targeting and to deliver the benefits of government schemes to forest-dependent tribal communities more effectively.

D. Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan and Outreach to Remote Tribal Areas. The State has organised a programme called the Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan to ensure that government welfare programmes reach remote Tiprasa villages.⁴⁵ The programme emphasises strengthening governance delivery, raising awareness of legal rights and increasing access to development benefits for tribal communities. It aims to train 20 lakh grassroots leaders, set up Adi Sewa Kendras, create Tiprasa Village Vision 2030 plans and effectively implement tribal welfare and development schemes.

E. Capacity Building and Legal Awareness on Forest Rights. In 2026, the National Law University, in collaboration with State institutions, organised a workshop on “Forest Rights, Legal Safeguards and Tribal Governance”.⁴⁶ Such efforts seek to raise awareness of the provisions of the FRA, the constitutional protections for tribal self-governance and the mechanisms enabling tribes to govern themselves.

F. Protection against Displacement. The Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, Jual Oram, has stated on several occasions that eligible tribal and other forest dwellers will not be evicted until the recognition and verification process is completed, in accordance with Section 4(5) of the FRA.⁴⁷ This reflects continued policy work to protect tribal communities against forced eviction and to ensure adherence to statutory protections.

G. Strengthening Forest Governance through Geospatial Technology. To enhance digital forest governance and sustainable forest management, the Forest Department of the

⁴⁵ PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU, ADI KARMAYOGI ABHIYAN: RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME ENVISAGED AS THE WORLD’S LARGEST TRIBAL GRASSROOTS LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, <https://www.pib.gov.in/> (last visited May 30, 2026).

⁴⁶ Dey, *supra* note 32.

⁴⁷ PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU, DISPLACEMENT FROM FOREST LAND, <https://www.pib.gov.in/> (last visited June 1, 2026).

Government of Tripura, under the Tripura JICA Project (SCATFORM), launched the Forestry Integrated Geospatial Solution (FIGS).⁴⁸ The platform draws on advanced geospatial forest mapping, monitoring and data management. FIGS is intended to increase transparency, improve decision-making, ensure the protection of biodiversity and support the effective implementation of forest policies, including those that benefit forest-dependent tribal communities and promote participatory forest governance.

Overall, there has been a transition towards technology-based implementation of the Forest Rights Act, improved recognition of forest rights, livelihood promotion and strengthened tribal governance mechanisms in Tripura. State initiatives for awareness creation and institutional strengthening, together with the launch of the Digital FRA Atlas and the expansion of tribal welfare programmes, reflect the State's commitment to inclusive development and the protection of the rights of the STs. Nonetheless, issues concerning the full recognition of community forest rights, effective implementation and livelihood security in Tripura require continued policy attention.

X. MAJOR FINDINGS AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

A. Major Findings

There has been substantial progress in the recognition of forest rights. Tripura has taken significant measures to implement the Forest Rights Act, 2006, under which the individual and community forest rights of the Scheduled Tribes and other forest-dwelling groups have been recognised, helping to restore historic rights to forest lands and resources. Community Forest Rights (CFRs) have strengthened the position of the Gram Sabha in forest governance and given forest dwellers an opportunity to use, manage and conserve forest resources. Tripura's efforts to use technology for transparent and efficient forest administration are reflected in projects such as the Digital FRA Atlas and the Forestry Integrated Geospatial Solution (FIGS). The State has gradually linked forest rights implementation with livelihood, education, skill-development and welfare programmes, helping to empower tribal communities in socio-economic terms. While progress has been made, problems persist with delays in the verification of claims, lack of awareness among claimants, bureaucratic difficulties and the inadequate recognition of Community Forest Resource rights.

⁴⁸ Our Correspondent, *Tripura Launches FIGS Digital Platform to Revolutionize Forest Governance*, TRIPURAINFO, <https://tripurainfo.com/> (last visited June 2, 2026).

B. Legal Analysis

The legal regime applicable to forest rights in Tripura is essentially a framework comprising the Constitution of India, the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and associated policies. The FRA seeks to address the historical injustice of excluding Tiprasa communities from their traditional forest lands as a result of colonial and post-colonial forest laws. Articles 14, 15, 21, 46, 244 and 275 of the Constitution protect the rights of STs through the principles of equality, social justice and the protection of tribal interests, while the Fifth and Sixth Schedules acknowledge the importance of autonomy and the protection of tribal resources. Despite the Sixth Schedule, effective coordination between the State Government and the TTAADC is needed for the successful implementation of forest rights in Tripura. The FRA is more than a change in the way forests are managed: it represents a shift from a State-centred model of forest management towards a rights-based, community-oriented model. The Act places Gram Sabhas at the heart of the process of claiming and verifying forest rights, thereby bolstering participatory governance and democratic decentralisation. Across its decisions, the Supreme Court has consistently emphasised the need to balance forest conservation with the rights of tribes.

New initiatives that adhere to the principles of open, accountable and good governance include programmes such as FIGS and the Digital FRA Atlas. However, the success of such efforts depends on execution, oversight, legal awareness and the participation of indigenous groups. Greater attention is therefore required to fulfil the vision and aims of the Forest Rights Act and the constitutional protections for the STs, even though the FRA and the constitutional provisions have given Tripura a commendable impetus in the recognition and preservation of forest rights.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To promote, protect and effectively implement the forest rights of the indigenous people of Tripura, the following measures are recommended.

A. Enhance the powers of the TTAADC. Forest land rights should be effectively implemented among the STs in Tripura by conferring greater administrative, financial and supervisory powers on the TTAADC. Strengthened powers over claim verification, monitoring and inter-governmental coordination would improve the protection of Tiprasa land rights and increase community involvement in forest governance.

B. Strengthen implementation of the FRA, 2006. The State Government should ensure the speedy verification and disposal of pending forest rights claims through effective monitoring and coordination among the implementing agencies.

C. Strengthen recognition of Community Forest Rights. Greater focus is needed on the recognition of Community Forest Rights (CFRs) and Community Forest Resource rights, so as to strengthen tribal community forest governance and conservation.

D. Promote legal awareness. Awareness programmes should be organised regularly across the Tiprasa areas to sensitise communities to their rights and entitlements under the FRA, 2006 and other relevant laws.

E. Empower Gram Sabhas. Gram Sabhas should be involved more actively in decision-making relating to forest management and the use of forest resources, supported by capacity-building programmes.

F. Strengthen inter-institutional coordination. Effective planning and coordination among the Forest Department, the Tribal Welfare Department, the Revenue authorities and the TTAADC are necessary for the effective implementation of forest rights.

G. Use digital technologies effectively. Digital tools such as the Digital FRA Atlas and the Forestry Integrated Geospatial Solution (FIGS), and emerging technologies including artificial intelligence, should be scaled up to enhance transparency, reduce administrative delays and maintain accurate records of forest rights.

H. Link forest rights with sustainable livelihoods. The recognition of forest rights should be coupled with support programmes for sustainable livelihoods, such as support for the bamboo industry, agroforestry, skill training and the marketing of minor forest produce.

I. Ensure gender inclusion. Special measures should be implemented to involve Tiprasa women in forest governance and to empower their rights to claim forest land.

J. Improve grievance redressal. Access to, and the effectiveness of, grievance-redressal mechanisms should be improved to resolve conflicts, the rejection of claims and other implementation issues.

K. Balance conservation and tribal rights. Forest conservation policies should be formulated so as to balance the rights, traditional knowledge and cultural values of the STs with the conservation of forest resources.

These measures can contribute to the effective realisation of forest rights, strengthen Tiprasa self-governance and promote sustainable and inclusive development in Tripura.

XII. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that forests are a fundamental part of the life, culture and identity of the Scheduled Tribes of Tripura. The implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 has played a significant role in delivering justice to the tribes by granting them access to forest land and resources, while the Constitution provides protection for tribal interests and for the role of the TTAADC. In recent years, the Government of Tripura has shown interest in forest governance initiatives such as the Digital FRA Atlas, the Forestry Integrated Geospatial Solution (FIGS) and forestry capacity-building programmes, which have helped to increase transparency, accountability and the implementation of forest rights. However, challenges such as delays in the recognition of claims and limited awareness of rights among forest-resource communities continue to cast a shadow over implementation to some extent. There is therefore an urgent need to strengthen institutions, secure greater engagement of Gram Sabhas and raise awareness among beneficiaries to ensure the realisation of forest rights. Although the Government of Tripura has taken initiatives to protect the rights of the ST communities, further efforts are required to maintain a balance between forest conservation and the welfare of the STs and to achieve inclusive and sustainable development.
