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Understanding Indigenous Peoples' Administrative Mechanisms in Tripura, Northeast India: A Constitutional and Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The Indian federal constitution plays a crucial role in bringing the northeast region under the framework of social, cultural and political autonomy to protect the indigenous people. The present study will be an attempt to analyse the functioning, operation and effectiveness of the Autonomous district council which is framed under the fifth (5th) and the sixth (6th) Scheduled of the Indian Constitution and will provide a study of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous district council (TTAADC). The Sixth schedule framework is vital in the protection of the indigenous people by providing them with self-autonomy power to govern the executive, legislative and judicial power. The paper will attempt to argue comparative analysis of the ADCs in northeast India that is Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. The study investigates how these autonomous governance mechanisms have influenced their political self-determination, customary laws and addressed their challenges. The analysis finds that while ADCs have successfully preserved cultural identity and provided a political platform for marginalised indigenous people their effectiveness is often hindered by financial dependence on state governments, jurisdictional conflicts and the delay of implementing the 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill. The study concludes that true indigenous autonomy requires strengthening financial autonomy and enhancing the administrative capacity of the ADCs to fully realise the constitutional mandate.

Keywords: *Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution, Autonomous Council, Indigenous Governance, TTAADC, Fifth Schedule, Northeast India.*

Introduction:

North East India is a meeting place of diverse people with linguistic groups, ethnicities, cultures and a traditional government, along with autonomous areas and a home to over 220 diverse groups of indigenous communities (Riamei, 2022). The region comprises 8 states- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura (Sarma & Chakravarty, 2017). Since the Northeast's

integration into the Indian Union, it has faced many problems related to regional autonomy, land rights and the population explosion following India's partition (Das, 2017). As a result, the constitution of India have to set up a provision under the fifth and the sixth schedule which is design to protect the indigenous people from being exploited and assimilated and they can established their own autonomous body and govern their day to day life those land under the schedule area (Saxena & Chitkara, 2023).

The Constitution of India also provided special provisions to Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland in the form of Articles 371A and 371H respectively (Chiezon & Lokhande, 2025), which are designed to further protect the indigenous people. Article 371A is designed to prohibit parliamentary legislation on Naga religious beliefs, customary laws, land, and civil or criminal justice, unless directed by the state legislative assembly (Chiezon & Lokhande, 2025). On the other hand, Article 371H grants the Governor special powers to exercise in matters of law and order for the state of Arunachal Pradesh (Choten & Saha, 2025). Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura have a different constitutional autonomy arrangement which is designed and grant power to those states to form their own government and exercise their authority in the matter of protecting their identity, traditional customs, land and their cultural practices through their legislative and executive power structure (Chatterjee, 2020).

Tripura provide interesting study in matter of how the autonomous came into existence in 1982, under the TTAADC Act of 1979 (Tripura Gazette, 1985; TTAADC Official Data, 2023). Historically, before the partition and colonial rule, the Tripura was princely state ruled by Manikya dynasty for centuries which is said to begin with the reign of Ratna Manikya I and ended with Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur dating from 14th Century to 15 October 1949 until its merger with the Indian Union (Sandys, 1997). Before Tripura became a full state it was earlier put in the category of Part C state which was later evolve to union territory and later part got statehood on 21st January (Ambagudia & Xaxa, 2021). However, during the transition, the state faced significant challenges when, after the liberation of Bangladesh (Formerly East

Pakistan), large-scale illegal migration began to flow into Tripura, resulting in a demographic shift and creating fear among the indigenous population (Tewari, 2018). Today, the loss of majority status and becoming a minority in one's own homeland has raised concern among the indigenous population, who had raised the rich Tripura dynasty since ancient times, and are now in a crisis of loss of identity. This growing demand for self-governance has given birth to the establishment of the TTAADC, through various sacrifices and political reconstruction.

2. Constitutional framework for autonomous Governance

India's autonomous tribal administration is enshrined in two distinct constitutional instruments: Fifth (5th) and Sixth (6th) Schedule of the Constitution (Saxena & Chitkara, 2023). Though both aim to promote self-governance and protect tribal interests they are different from each other the way they function.

2.1. The Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and Its Provisions

The Fifth Schedule of the constitution is designed particularly for the state of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland and they differ from that of the sixth schedule (Wankhede, 2021). The main purpose of the schedule is to provide protective discrimination, so that the indigenous people may not remain unnoticed and prevent the exploitation of tribal communities of the region (Jena, 2021). The Dhebar Commission (1960-1961) formulated the following criteria for designating a area which can be termed as Scheduled Area under the Fifth Schedule are as follows (Wahi & Bhatia, 2018) :-

At least 50% tribal population dominance.

Compact and reasonably sized area.

Underdeveloped nature of the region.

Significant economic disparities relative to neighbouring areas.

Additionally, the suitability of an administrative unit such as a district block or taluk has been added as another key factor and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs notes that while these standards are not specifically stated as a requirement in the constitution they have become well established guidelines (Prasad et al., 2023).

The key provisions include:

Governor's Responsibilities: The Governor holds special responsibilities for managing Scheduled Areas, such as preparing and submitting annual reports to the President.

Tribes Advisory Council: Each state that has their own autonomous body also has to set up a separate tribal advisory body which will be a representative from among the tribal groups who will advise the governor in matter of their issues and challenges that are hampering their tribal.

Regulatory Authority: The Governor can exercise the power to regulate in the matter of transferring of land from tribal to non-tribal persons, allocation of land and money lending activities within these areas, while also enabling the modification or non-application of existing parliamentary or state legislative enactments to Scheduled Areas (Government of India, 1950).

The Fifth Schedule does not provide for an autonomous administrative framework to govern themselves by setting up autonomous bodies having legislative powers but it provides a protective shield which are administered through the State Executive and advisory bodies.

2.2. The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution

On the other hand, the Sixth Schedule framework applies to four state of the north east region-Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura (Mahanta, 2024). This framework helps to establish an autonomous governance system of political and administrative autonomy by creating a separate autonomous government within the same state that will function and administered their own matter (Arshi, 2011).

The Bardoloi Committee's rationale for the schedule was to reconcile the desire for self-determination with the need for national integration (Tewari, 2018). The sixth schedule is design to create extra autonomous within the same state by creating state within the same state having significant autonomous power through its governance. Key features of this Schedule include:

Constitution: The Autonomous Districts are to be managed by councils constituting 30 members and the Governor can also nominate four of them while the rest are elected by all adults franchise in the district (Saxena & Chitkara, 2023). Exception to the rule the Bodoland Territorial Council has 46 seats out of which 40 are directly elected by adult franchise and 6 are nominated and in Tripura the council has 30 members, where 28 members are directly elected and 2 are nominated by the Governor.

Legislative Authority: These councils are empowered to enact legislation on 14 designated subjects, including (Saxena & Chitkara, 2023) :.

Allocating, occupying, and using land.

Managing forests.

Rules for inheriting property, marriage, and tribal social customs.

Setting up village or town committees.

Judicial Authority: Councils can also establish village councils or courts to adjudicate in matter of issues related to Scheduled Tribe members under customary law.

Fiscal Powers: the council also have the power of exercise their own financial autonomy decision by collecting of taxes in matter of trades, vehicles passing and land taxes within their own jurisdiction.

Devolution of Control: Administrative oversight of primary schools, markets, dispensaries, fisheries, and roads is transferred from the state government to the councils.

This provides a much more robust and functional system of indigenous self-rule compared to the Fifth Schedule, allowing the communities to govern themselves according to their traditions while remaining within the constitutional framework (Saxena & Chitkara, 2023).

3. Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in Northeast India: A Comparative Overview

The Sixth Schedule framework implemented across the four northeastern states (Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura) show some variation in their working and how well the autonomous of governance are exercise and helpful to the indigenous people.

3.1. Autonomous District Council in Assam

Assam has 3 three Autonomous District Council (ADCs) within same state that act as a tool to protect the indigenous people having differences among each other:

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC)

The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) is an autonomous body that is created under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution to protect the tribal communities who are residing under the Karbi Anglong district and West Karbi Anglong district (Ramirez, 2014).

Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (DHAC)

The Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (DHAC) was earlier known as the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council established under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India to govern and administered Dima Hasao district and protect the tribal communities residing under this scheduled areas of Dima Hasao (Tuolor, 2013). The headquarters is located in Haflong, Dima Hasao district.

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) / Region (BTR)

The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) / Region (BTR) were established under the Sixth Schedule which was a result of the peace accord (Bodo Accord, 2003) and following other constitutional amendments from time to time. The BTC governs a significantly larger area and also the financial autonomy as a result it is considered much developed autonomous body of the Autonomous District Council (ADC) model and covers a non-contiguous territory.

The challenges in Assam are always due to boundary disputes and the demand by various non-Bodo tribal groups for inclusion or exclusion from the BTC, which remain and create the complexities of multiethnic administration within a single autonomous structure (Chowdhury, 2021).

3.2. ADCs in Meghalaya

Meghalaya was earlier part of Assam but carved out due to larger statehood demand it has three Autonomous District Council (ADCs) covering the traditional territories of the three major tribes Khasi, Garo and Jaintia (Singha & Nayak, 2015).

Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC)

The Garo Hills Autonomous District (GHADC) is an autonomous administrative body that is designed for protecting the Garo community residing in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya (Ramirez, 2014). The body has the power to exercise and control over their traditional customary law and order (O'Brien, 2021). The GHADC is important because this council helps to reach the voices of the Garo community to the state government by addressing their grievances and issues related to tribal welfare (Soreide, 2020). The council also holds the unique authority to decide whether specific state laws apply within its jurisdiction by ensuring that the customary practices and resources of the A.chik people remain under local administrative control or not (O'Brien, 2021). This grant of self-autonomy is important for managing “the regions socio-cultural development while safeguarding the community land rights” (Ramirez, 2014).

Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC)

The Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) is designed for the Jaintia people of Meghalaya (Ramirez, 2014; Tuolor, 2013). The main function of the JHADC is a mixture of administrative structures with traditional institutions practices particularly the office of the Doloï- a traditional institution (Warjri, 2025). The Doloïas chief of an Elaka falls under the council jurisdiction for election, appointment and administrative rights (Warjri, 2025). Being Empowered and administered with the framework Sixth Schedule of the constitution the JHADC has the power to legislate on local development, land use and traditional customary law and order by providing the Jaintia communities with an autonomous governance framework to preserve their distinct cultural practices (Tuolor, 2013). By having dual framework of indigenous autonomy with constitutional provisions the JHADC promotes socioeconomic progress while upholding “Pnar” identity and traditional social framework (Ramirez, 2014; Tuolor, 2013).

Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC)

The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) has also have the power to administer the Khasi peoplea community that follows a matrilineal family structurein which property is transferred through the mother lineage” (Roy, 2018). The council constitutes a traditional governance structure such as the Hima Myllem and local Dorbars (Roy, 2018; Warjri, 2025). Its legislative mandate includes the power to make laws on marriage, divorce and social customs if they align with the broader Indian Constitution (O’Brien, 2021). Presently, the KHADC is central to addressing social transitions including disputes over property rights and the formalisation of traditional governance instruments (Roy, 2018). The sixth schedule grants judicial and legislative autonomy to regulate their land and customary affairs, ensuring that Khasi cultural heritage remains protected despite challenges posed by the modern legal framework and changing demographic dynamics (Ramirez, 2013, 2014; Roy, 2018).

3.3. ADCs in Mizoram

Mizoram which evolved from an Autonomous District to a Union Territory and finally a state have three autonomous district councils under the sixth schedule (Soreide, 2020).

1. Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC)

The Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) constituted under the framework of Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution has the power to administer the affairs of the Chakma community in Mizoram (O'Brien, 2021; Tuolor, 2013). As an elected autonomous body it exercises legislative and judicial authority over local administration and traditional social customs (O'Brien, 2021). This includes the authority to make their own laws relating to land use, water resources, village management, and marriage practices (O'Brien, 2021). By providing a representative platform the council aims to safeguard the community way of life and promote faster economic development through local participation (Ngaihte, 2022; Tuolor, 2013). It also promotes federal structure acting as a bridge of governance ensuring the Chakmas cultural identity is preserved while integrating its functions with state level administrative requirements (Soreide, 2020).

2. Lai Autonomous District Council(LADC)

The Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) is an autonomous district council in Mizoram which is established to safeguard the cultural and economic interests of the Lai community within the state (Shyamkishore & Lalrempuia, 2024; Tuolor. 2013). The Sixth Schedule serves as a representative body that grants the tribe autonomy over its traditional customary laws and land affairs (Ngaihte, 2022; Shyamkishore & Lalrempuia, 2024). The council is further empowered to legislate on specific fields such as property inheritance, marriage and management of non-reserved forests (Shyamkishore & Lalrempuia, 2024). By maintaining a simplified administrative setup the LADC provides the hill people with training in local self-government (Ngaihte, 2022; Tuolor, 2013). This autonomy ensures that the community unique

customs are protected from external legislative pressures while fostering regional and economic development (Tuolor, 2013).

3. Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC)

The Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) was established under the framework Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution which has the power to administer the affairs of the Mara community in Mizoram (Shyamkishore & Lalrempuia, 2024; Tuolor, 2013). It has the power to established their own autonomous council which can later exercise their power in their own tribal matters through their autonomous legislative and judicial power (Roluahpuia, 2021 ; Shyamkishore & Lalrempuia, 2024). It has the mandate to manage ancestral lands and regulate local customs including divorce and social traditions (O'Brien, 2021; Shyamkishor & Lalrempuia, 2024). The council is significant as it address the issues related to the mara community directly with the state government and making sure that the identity of the mara community are not being sideline in matter of development in the state (Soreide, 2020). Through elected representation the MADC enables economic growth while safeguarding the historical specificities of the Mara community (Ngaihte, 2022).

These councils was established to accommodate the distinct ethnolinguistic groups residing in the southern part of the state ensuring that even within a primarily tribal state (Mizoram) the unique identities of smaller groups are protected through the schedule (Ray, 2017). The Mizoram model is often praised for its political stability but faces challenges regarding the minority Chakma community rights within the CADC which frequently lead to political tensions over identity and citizenship.

4. Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council

The birth of autonomous council in Tripura is a product of continuous political and ethnic movements by the indigenous people of the state to regain political control over their ancestral lands following rapid demographic shifts driven by illegal migration from Bangladesh (Debbarma, 2024).

4.1. Formation and Historical Trajectory

Tripura autonomous administrative journey saw a crucial legislative step in 1979 following the Tripura Legislative Assembly passed the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) Act (Debbarma, 2018). This Act was initially under the Seventh Schedule of the constitution and later the council became more powerful under the Sixth Schedule framework which came in 1985 following the 49th Amendment to the Constitution (Tripura Gazette, 1985). This constitutional upgrade gave the TTAADC undisputable legal standing and greater administrative authority.

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council presently administers and exercise its power on 68 per cent of Tripura geographical area spread across all eight districts of the state and accommodating approximately one-third of the state total population (TTAADC Official Data, 2023). Its headquarters is located in Khumulwng.

4.2. Powers and Functions of TTAADC

TTAADC exercises powers across four key domains:

4.2.1. Legislative Powers

The Council legislative power extends to land, customary laws, village administration and social practices. The TTAADC has passed numerous Acts and Regulations governing the use and transfer of land which are important to prevent the loss of tribal land to non-tribals migrants. However, all laws passed by the Autonomous Council also require a mandate acceptance from the Governor who may withhold it or refer the matter to the President (Article 244). These administrative blockage hindrances the true power of autonomous and self government (Sinha, 2022).

4.2.2. Executive Powers

The executive functions are directed by the Chief Executive Member of the TTAADC assisted by an Executive Committee that functions in a manner close to a state cabinet (Saxena & Chitkara, 2023). The Executive Committee supervises the management of devolved subjects allocated to the Council, encompassing:

Management of schools up to the primary level.

Construction and maintenance of local roads and waterways.

Establishment and management of primary health sub-centres and local markets.

4.2.3. Judicial Powers

The Council is authorised to establish Village Council Courts and District Council Courts (Government of India, 1950). These courts primarily decide disputes between members of Scheduled Tribes and decide civil and specific minor criminal cases based on tribal customary laws (Government of India, 1950). This system ensures that traditional dispute resolution mechanisms are preserved and respected serving as an important framework for cultural protection. Appeals from the District Council Court usually rest with the High Court providing a link to the mainstream judicial system.

4.2.4. Financial Powers

The TTAADC is empowered to levy taxes on certain subjects including vehicles, professions, trades and tolls on bridges. It also receives a share of royalties from minerals extracted within its territorial jurisdiction. However, the majority of its budget comes from grants and allocations from the State Government making the TTAADC highly dependent on the state grants. This financial reliance over the state allocation of funds is perhaps the biggest hurdle for achieving true autonomy often turning the Council into a development agency rather than a truly self-governing political unit (Chakma, 2020).

4.3. Contemporary Challenges and the Demand for Change

The core challenge for the TTAADC is the discontent between its constitutional powers and its practical effectiveness. The fragmentation of the ADC area, political interference, and inadequate flow of funds severely restrict its capacity to execute large-scale development projects (Hmar, 2023).

The long-pending 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill 2019 represents one of the important proposed reforms to address these issues. If this is enacted the Bill would drastically strengthen the Autonomous District Council (ADCs) by:

Providing direct funding from the central government specifically the Union Finance Commission.

Increasing the number of subjects transferred to the Councils.

Renaming the TTAADC to the Tripura Territorial Council and granting Village Councils more formal powers thereby deepening grassroots democracy.

The continued push for 'Greater Tipraland' or enhanced autonomy by tribal political groups is framed as a response to perceived governance gaps within the current Sixth Schedule framework (Soreide, 2020). Though the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) was established in 1985 (Debbarma, 2024) to protect indigenous land rights and cultural identity it is seen that due to massive and successive demographic transition post merger with Indian union and later the Bangladesh liberation had received illegal migration resulting the indigenous population to minority from majority totalling to 30 per cent of the total population of Tripura has led to identity crisis (Debbarma, 2024; Islam, 2022; O'Brien, 2021). This demographic transition has led to the belief that the current council structure is a defensive mechanism that requires greater empowerment to be effective (Islam, 2022).

The aspiration for enhanced autonomy stems from a perceived lack of sufficient legislative and financial power to bridge regional socio-economic disparities (Debbarma, 2018; Mohapatra, 2017). Although the TTAADC governs 68 per cent of Tripura's territory its administrative capacity is often constrained by its reliance on state level grants and limited control over key developmental departments (Debbarma, 2018; O'Brien, 2021). As a result the push for 'Greater Tipraland' can be viewed as an attempt to address these structural deficiencies by seeking a more robust

form of ‘territorialization of ethnic space’ (Ramchiary, 2020). This reflects a broader regional trend in which tribal groups seek to evolve the original Sixth Schedule foundation into a more comprehensive governance model capable of ensuring long-term cultural and economic survival (Islam, 2022; Rabha, 2023).

5. Critical Analysis of the ADC Model in Northeast India

The Autonomous District Council framework is a globally recognised example of differentiated citizenship and self-governance within a democratic federation (Sinha, 2022). However its operation in Northeast India reveals both successes and limitations.

5.1. Successes in Political Voice and Cultural Preservation

The primary success of the ADC model lies in providing a legitimate constitutional political platform for indigenous communities. By institutionalising indigenous leadership the ADCs have channelled political aspirations away from secessionist tendencies towards democratic participation (Das, 2017). They have been indispensable in:

Cultural Protection: ADCs have preserved and promoted unique tribal languages (e.g., Tripura / Kokborok in Tripura), festivals and social practices by legislating on customary law.

Land Security: The authority to legislate on land transfer despite implementation difficulties provides the main legal safeguard against historical exploitation and alienation of ancestral land.

Political Identity: The councils allow indigenous groups to maintain a separate, recognised political identity within the larger state structure, fostering a sense of belonging and representation.

5.2. Structural and Functional Gaps

Despite these successes the ADC model suffers from three critical structural deficiencies:

Financial Dependence (The Grant-in-Aid Trap): As discussed, the vast majority of ADC revenue comes from the respective state government's apparatus. This over-dependency makes the councils vulnerable to political leverage where fund releases are often delayed or curtailed based on political alignment, undermining the spirit of autonomy (Chakraborty, 2021).

Dual Administration and Jurisdiction Conflicts: The coexistence of the state government administration and the ADC's jurisdiction often leads to confusion and bureaucratic conflict, particularly in key developmental sectors like infrastructure and education. The state retains control over high-value subjects like mining, major irrigation, and policing, leaving the ADCs with less lucrative and less impactful powers.

Varying Implementation Quality: The enthusiasm and administrative efficiency of ADCs vary significantly. Councils like the BTC in Assam have achieved greater financial and administrative muscle due to strong political backing and resource mobilisation, whereas councils like the TTAADC and some in Meghalaya often struggle with limited trained personnel and poor execution capacity (Hmar, 2023).

The failure to pass and implement the 125th Amendment Bill perpetuates this cycle of dependency by failing to address the root cause of financial vulnerability.

6. A comparative analysis between BTC and TTAADC

The federal constitutional frameworks governing the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in Assam and on the other hand the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) in Tripura provide a contrast. Two case studies of the implementation of the 6th Schedule frame under Article 244 and Article 275 of the Indian Constitution design to provide self-governance to tribal communities who are living within the administered territory (Rabha, 2023). Though both autonomous institutions were established as unique administrative mechanisms to preserve and protect ethnic identities, their land, budget and manpower, they differ from each other greatly due to their distinct historical trajectories and the varying demographic pressures within

their respective states (Islam, 2022; Rabha, 2023). At the beginning the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was formally constituted under the Bodo peace Accord of 2003” (Bhattacharyya, 2023; Bora, 2020) that governs the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts for the Bodo people constituting four district- Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang (Bora, 2020). This territorial jurisdiction covers a large geographic area in the northern part of Assam and has recently been further extended into the Bodoland Territorial Region following the 2020 Peace Accord (Bora, 2020). On the other hand, the TTAADC which was formed through a political movement in 1985 led by Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS) (Debbarma, 2024). The council covers a 68 per cent of Tripura total geographical area (Islam, 2022; O’Brien, 2021). Although the TTAADC encompasses a larger percentage of its state landmass compare to the BTC does for Assam it serves a much smaller proportion of the total population amounting to only 30 per cent of the total population in Tripura (O’Brien, 2021). This geographic disparity highlights comparative difference while the BTC manages a consolidated ethnic homeland for a large population but the TTAADC governs a vast area for a population that has historically been marginalised and reduced to a minority due to significant migration from neighbouring regions in 1965 and 1971.

The budget size and financial autonomy of these two autonomous councils are fundamentally shaped by the scale of the populations they serve and the legislative powers they exercise. The BTC operates on a significantly larger scale serving a population of approximately 32 lakhs as of the 2011 census report of India with its headquarters in Kokrajhar (Swargiary, 2020). The BTC has extensive and enormous powers that functions to address the economic educational and linguistic aspirations of the Bodo people thereby enabling it to administer approximately 40 departments encompassing land revenue education agriculture and allied sectors (Gogoi, 2019; Rabha, 2023). Its budget is characterised by dual framework from both the state of Assam and the central government often supplemented by special development packages aimed at addressing historical socio-cultural and economic backwardness (Bora, 2020; Gogoi, 2019). Although the TTAADC is a challenging institution it operates within a distinct financial framework that requires continual reassessment of

its authority and resources to advance the comprehensive development of indigenous tribal communities (Debbarma, 2018). Its funding is heavily reliant on state level grants and its own internal revenue mechanisms such as taxes on professions and land revenue, but its financial scale remains smaller than BTC's because it serves only about 30% of Tripura's population (Mohapatra, 2017; O'Brien, 2021). Furthermore the broader funding is reflected in the Union Budget 2023-24, where total allocations for Scheduled Tribe welfare across all central ministries which saw a significant increase to Rs. 117,943.71 crore this show a clear gap of received scheme and the central scheme (Annual Report 2023/24, 2024).

In terms of staff strength and administrative structure the BTC has a more complex and extensive legislative body than the TTAADC which directly influences its total workforce. The legislative body of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) comprises 46 members 40 of whom are directly elected and the remaining 6 are nominated by the Governor (Gogoi, 2019). This structural framework allows the BTC government to administer its transferred departments with a high degree of specialisation (Ramchiary, 2020). The TTAADC legislative body is smaller and its seats are determined by population reflecting its role as a representative body for a community that has historically faced an identity crisis (Islam, 2022; O'Brien, 2021). The staff strength of both councils is a point of concern for governance, as 'loopholes and shortcomings' have been identified in the BTC's mechanism that affect its proper functioning despite its large administrative capacity (Rabha, 2023). Similarly the TTAADC faces deficiencies in its functioning leading to calls for a comprehensive re-evaluation of its administration to better serve the state's tribal development goals in the state (Debbarma, 2018; Mohapatra, 2017). Although the BTC have a larger workforce of more departments, both councils function as essential bridges between contemporary state administration and traditional tribal governance structures, thereby preserving local jurisdiction over customary laws on marriage, divorce and land (O'Brien, 2021; Rabha, 2023).

An analysis of these two councils reveals a significant contrast in their institutional success and ethnic relations. The BTC is often viewed as a sub-State level federal asymmetry that has granted the Bodo people a high degree of autonomy but has also faced criticism for creating insecurities among minority and non-tribal communities (Bhattacharyya, 2023; Gogoi, 2019). For example in a council where policy decisions are decided by majority vote the Bodos are often seen as more advantaged, which can lead to friction with the 16 nominated and non-reserved seats (Gogoi, 2019). On the other hand, the TTAADC serves as a vital protective institution for Tripura indigenous population which has shifted from a majority to a minority status and now depends on the council to safeguard the 2,060 sq. km of reserved land by Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur (Islam, 2022). The TTAADC struggle is associated with the preservation of land and identity of the tribal people from the illegal migration while the BTC's struggle is expanding its territorial and administrative reach, a process termed the 'territorialization of ethnic space' (Ramchiary, 2020). The ongoing demand for a separate state within India by some Bodo organisations, despite the extensive powers of the BTC, suggests that even large budgets and territorial autonomy may not fully address the community's deep-seated aspirations (Bora, 2020). Both councils remain indispensable to the North-East geopolitical landscape, acting as a buffer against total assimilation and ensuring that the "historic Act of 2003" and the "1985 TTAADC formation" continue to provide a framework for tribal self-determination within the Indian constitutional order (Islam, 2022; Rabha, 2023).

The comparative analysis from the present study shows that while the BTC is larger in terms of budget, absolute population served 32 lakh and legislative seats the TTAADC is more territorially dominant within its state boundaries (68 per cent of Tripura) (Gogoi, 2019; O'Brien, 2021; Swargiary, 2020). The BTC is an example of an 'extended' Sixth Schedule model that has been updated and evolve through peace accords while the TTAADC remains a more traditional model under the original 1985 provisions that require urgent administrative and financial modernisation to be effective (Bora, 2020; Debbarma, 2018). Bodoland highlight that territorial and financial autonomy are only the first steps the administrative staff and the council leadership must also manage

the complex interethnic dynamics that define these scheduled areas (Bhattacharyya, 2023; Gogoi, 2019; Islam, 2022). Through these institutional arrangements the Indian state sustains the intricate equilibrium between advancing national integration and safeguarding the distinctive cultural legacies of the Bodo and Tripuras communities (Rabha, 2023; Ramchiary, 2020).

7. Findings of the study

Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) as a critical sub-state governance model under the Sixth Schedule. Key findings include:

Demographic Shift and Identity Crisis: Historical influxes from neighbouring regions particularly in the aftermath of 1971 have demographically transformed the indigenous Tripuri population from a historical majority to a minority within their ancestral homeland. Although the TTAADC administers 68 per cent of Tripura territory it serves only approximately 30 per cent of the state population thereby functioning as a significant institutional safeguard for cultural and identity preservation amid universal demographic pressures.

The Grant-in-Aid Trap: Although the Sixth Schedule empowers the TTAADC to levy taxes on professions, trades and land revenue its funding remains heavily reliant on state level grants and limited internal revenues far smaller in scale than larger that of BTC which is seen much more autonomous. This financial dependence limits the Council to just a development agency role rather than a truly autonomous political entity.

Legislative and Judicial Constraints: The TTAADC exercises legislative powers over land, forests, social customs (marriage and divorce) and operates Village and District Council Courts based on customary law. However the mandatory requirement for the Governor assent on all legislation creates a significant autonomous hindrance to true autonomy alongside identified loopholes and shortcomings in administration that hinder effective functioning and demand comprehensive re-evaluation.

Comparative Scale: Unlike the Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam which administers 40 specialised departments for 32 lakh people across a 46-member legislative body (40 elected 6 nominated by the Governor) as a more extended Sixth Schedule model the TTAADC operates on a smaller administrative scale with fewer staff and legislative seats despite its territorial dominance (68 per cent) under scoring the need for modernisation to match BTC's iterative updates via peace accords.

8. Conclusion

The sixth schedule framework enshrined to the Constitution of India is an important set up for the establishment of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in Northeast India which constitutes a important mechanism for managing the complexrelationship between the Indian federal polity and its diverse indigenous communities in the region (Soreide, 2020). The TTAADC, in particular, stands as a testament to the constitutional recognition of the indigenous people of Tripura, governing 68 per cent of Tripura territory despite serving only about 30 per cent of its population following the successive waves of illegal migration post-merger with the Indian Union which had led to a demographic shift and an identity crisis. It has successfully established an institutional mechanism for cultural preservation and political representation including legislative powers over land, forests and social customs alongside Village and District Council Courts based on customary law mitigating the potential for large-scale conflict that has historically plagued the region.

However the current model requires significant recalibration to move beyond symbolic autonomy towards genuine self-rule. The key findings from this study indicate that the efficacy of ADCs is consistently bottlenecked by the Grant-in-Aid Trap financial subservience to state governments, legislative constraints requiring Governor assent and jurisdictional ambiguities as evidenced by identified loopholes and shortcomings in administrative functioning.

Recommendations: To strengthen indigenous administrative mechanisms in Tripura and across Northeast India drawing lessons from the comparative study with the

larger Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) which manages 40 departments yet still grapples with ethnic insecurities and territorial demands the following recommendations:

Implementation of the 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill: This is the most crucial step ensuring direct and mandatory financial devolution from the Union Finance Commission to the ADCs and breaking the political control of state governments over tribal financial autonomy thereby addressing the heavy reliance on state grants that limits the TTAADC to a mere development agency.

Enhanced Administrative Capacity: The central and state governments must fund and establish specialised training institutes for ADC administrative staff to improve governance, financial management, and project execution, countering the deficiencies that plague both the TTAADC and BTC despite their administrative scope.

Clarity on Jurisdiction: A clear separation of powers between State Legislatures and ADC Councils, especially regarding profitable natural resources such as the 2,060 sq. km of reserved land, must be established to prevent policy paralysis, conflicts, and further ‘territorialization of ethnic space’ pressures.

Strengthening Grassroots Democracy: Formalising and adequately funding Village Councils under the TTAADC to empower local communities and make governance more decentralised and responsive at the micro-level, enhancing their role beyond the current constraints.

By addressing these structural shortcomings, the ADCs in Northeast India can evolve from being merely protective agencies to becoming fully functional, self-sustaining units of democratic governance, much like the iteratively updated BTC model, thereby realising the full potential of the constitutional promise of indigenous autonomy.

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