Ethnic Minority and Differential Fertility Behaviours in Rural Tripura, India

By

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Extended Abstract

The ratio of tribal to non-tribal population in Tripura had been changed from 13 : 7 in 1874-75 ti 3 : 7 in 1991. The Bengalees and Tribal people constitute the two major ethnic graps in Tripura. The Bengalee people migrated from neighbouring areas and districts (especially after independence of India and creation of Pakistan) constitute the most predominant community. The Tibetý - Burmese speaking tribes were the earliest inhabitants of Tripura. Eighteen tribal communities lived in Tripura. Only six tribal communities are alocthons tribes constitute less than three percent of the tribal population and the rests are claimed to be autochthons.

The falling percentage of the tribal population is alarming to the politicians especially among tribal groups. As a result, political tensions directed towards insurgencies to drive out non-tribal population from the state. Migiration is insignificant since 1961 and the infant mortality rate is little higher among tribes than non-tribes but not statistically significant (as observed from two National Family Health Survey 1992-93 & 1998-99). Therefor, future population size and composition depend mainly on fertility.

The objective of this paper is, therefore, to study the differential in fertility behaviour as well as fertility performance between tribes and non-tribes in Tripura through characteristic hypotheses (-i.e., the socio-economic characteristic could varry by ethnic factor causing differentials in

fertility behaviour and fertility), and particularised theology hypothesis (-i.e., percepts and injunctions associated with an ethnic group may influence fertility desires and contraceptive use). The minority status hypothesis (-i.e., being a numerical monority may have a bearing on fertility behaviour) is difficult to examine since minority status effect gets confounded with the particularised theology effect.

The intermediate objectives of the study are :

to assess the age at initiation of child bearing (-i.e., age at first marriage, and age at first birth) among two major ethnic groups (-i.e., tribals and non-tribals) in Tripura.

to compare family size desires and ideal family size among tribals and non-tribals in Tripura.

to estimate prevalence of use of contraception and abortions among tribes and non-tribes inn Tripura.

to examine cumulative marital fertility in tribals and non-tribals group in Tripura.

The primary data for this study are from a survey conducted during October 1996 to March 1997 that provides information on fertility behaviour and fertility performance of the study population. The entire Tripura state is administrratively stratified into three districts, eleven sub-divisions and seventeen development blocks (Census 1991). A good number of villages are existing under each development block. While formulating the sampling design of the present study, these administrative break up of the state has been utilised and the sample villages are randomly selected by undertaking multisatge stratified random sampling technique. Applying the above sampling technique, at the final stage twelve villages were selected. From each selected village, 100 house holds were chosen at random and all currently married women within ages (15-49) years in the house hold were considered. There are 1350 eligible sample women for this study.

Multiple classification analysis (MCA) and Logit Regression analysis were employed in the analysis apart from other conventional statistical techniques. MCA combines the features of analysis of variance and multiple regression and is useful to assess the effects of a number of categorised explanatory variables on a numeric dependent variable. The explanatory variables could be inter related or associated and one could obtain the net effects.

Logistic regression also called logit regression, is used when the response or dependent variable is dichotomons (i.e., binary, or 0, 1). The predictor variable may be connotative, categorical or a mixture of two.

The conceptional frame work calls for examining the tribal and non-tribal - i.e., ethnic factor effect after controlling for other socio-economic factors such as education, income, land owned and occupation. Marriage marks entry into sexual union and age at first birth marks the initiation of child bearing.

At first gross differential in age at first marriage and age at first birth are presented and then to estimate net differences, the MCA has been adopted.

Desire for addition children is a dichotomons variable. Therefore, logistic regression has been employed to examine whether ethnicity influence desire after controlling for socio-economic and demographic factors. Contraceptive use or nonuse is also a dichotomons variable and so logistic regression has also been employed after controlling socio-economic and demographic factors.

An analysis of cumulative marital fertility - i.e., children ever born (CEB) has been carried out by considering it as dependent variable. The net effect of ethnicity is measured by using multiple classification analysis.

The mean age at first marriage and mean age at first birth are significantly higher among tribes than non-tribes after controlling the effects of other socio-economic variables. This is due to prevalence of some strict norms regarding marriage and child bearing among tribes in Tripura.

The logistic regression analysis does not show any significant difference to desire additional children between tribes and non-tribes even after controlling for other socio-economic demographic variables for women having 1, 2, 3 or 4 children. However, non-tribal women tends to have lower number of ideal family size than tribal women after controlling above variables.

Logistic regression clearly indicates that there is no significant difference for the use of contraceptions among tribals and non-tribals after controlling all socio-economic and demographic variables. However, only at four living children, tribal women show low propensity to use contraception than non-tribal women.

The multiple classification analysis also confirms that there is no differential in marital fertility by ethnic group even after controlling for other socio-economic and demographic variables.

Thus characteristics hypothesis does not gain much support in this study. Instead, specific factors associated with ethnic group appear to be crucial in existing fertility differentials. Particularised theology hypothesis explains the ethnic differentials only in case of initiation of child bearing (i.e., age at first marriage and age at first birth)and ideal family size. Non-tribal women have higher age at first marriage and age at first birth and low ideal family size than non-triabal women after controlling socio-economic, demographic factors.Ethnic minority factor fails to explain differentials in fertility behaviour and fertility performance.