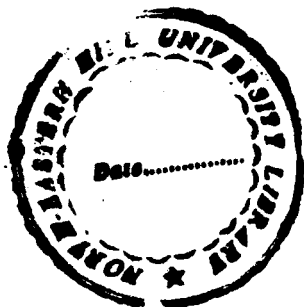


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**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

**SIXTH SESSION
AGARTALA : 1985**

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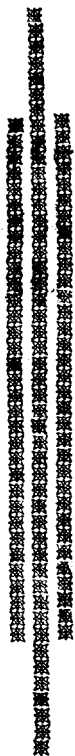
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Preface

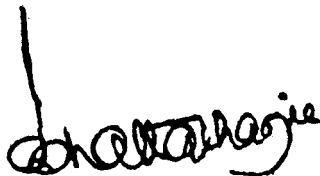
The Sixth Annual Session of the North East India History Association held at the Calcutta University Post-Graduate Centre, Agartala on October 3-5, 1985 was one of our most colourful academic meets in the region, attended by the largest number of delegates. Professor H. L. Gupta, formerly Head of the Department of History, Saugar University presided over the Session, which was inaugurated by Sri Nripen Chakravarty, Chief Minister of Tripura and graced by Dr. B. D. Sharma, Vice-Chancellor, North-Eastern Hill University as the Guest of Honour. Shri Dasarath Deb, Deputy Chief Minister of Tripura also addressed the delegates. Our colleagues, Professor J. B. Ganguly, Director, CUPG Centre, and Dr. Mahadev Chakravarti, Reader & Head, Department of Modern History at the Centre did us great honour as Chairman of the Reception Committee and the Local Secretary of the Session respectively.

We are grateful to the Calcutta University Post-Graduate Centre, Agartala for hosting the Session and warm hospitality offered to the delegates. The administration, members of the teaching faculties and the students' community in the Centre were all involved in the Session. The Centre received generous support from the Government of Tripura. The Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and their cabinet colleagues generously spared time from their schedules to be with the delegates and participate in academic discussions. They entertained the delegates and offered as gifts some publications on Tripura and excellent pieces of indigenous handicrafts as token of love and affection of the people of the State. The Directorate of Information and Culture, Government of Tripura, organised colourful programmes depicting the rich cultural heritage of Tripura. Study tours were organised to the places of historical importance. On the whole, the delegates shall cherish the fond memory of the Session for a long time.

The academic standard of the Session was also very high. We have maintained our tradition of steady growth in membership pattern and the number of papers presented and discussed. Tripura is one of such areas in our region where we do not have enough historical studies. In Agartala Session, we indeed achieved a major breakthrough. Majority of the papers presented there were on Tripura. These shall certainly generate further research. The volume is a collection of sixty two papers, empirical as well as

analytical and interpretative. Some of the papers, particularly by the colleagues in other disciplines, have added to the merit of the volume by fitting well in our scheme of recording the living history.

I am personally thankful to my colleagues Dr. J. P. Singh, Dr. M. S. Sangma, Dr. O. P. Kejariwal and Dr. Gautam Sengupta for the ready help in editing and publishing the volume.



Shillong
The 22 August 1986

(J. B. Bhattacharjee)
General Secretary
North East India History Association

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Students' Movements in Tripura (1950-70)

Himansu Pal

Tripura came across a number of students' movements during the period 1950-70. The issues involved were not always educational. There were broad economic and political issues as well. The aim of this paper is to present a brief analysis of the student movements, their spirit, objectives, achievements and weaknesses.

Jana Siksha Andolon

The prospect of education in Tripura during the rule of the Maharajas was very disappointing. The state administration did not pay necessary attention for improvement of education.¹ It was at the end of the 40's that a mass movement on education, Janasiksha Andolan, was launched by the Janasiksha Samiti, non-government voluntary organisation.² It is heartening to note that many of the elderly political leaders of the state today, namely, Sri Dasarath Deb, Sri Biren Dutta, Sri Sudhanya Debbarma etc. were in the leadership of the Janasiksha Samiti.³

The spirit of the student movements in the State it to be traced back in the philosophy of the Janasiksha Samiti. The basic philosophy of Janasiksha Samiti was to mobilize the common man especially the poor tribal people of the State. Within a few years of its inception Janasiksha Samiti could start 448 Primary Schools in the remote hill corners of the State.⁴ People belonging to both tribal and non-tribal communities were in fact mobilised in large numbers in the Janasiksha movement. A good number of teachers belonging to the Bengali community volunteered to run schools. Unfortunately, neither the exact number nor their names can be known today. The involvement of the tribal people in the Janasiksha Andolan was particularly noticeable. Nowhere in India and even in the world, tribal people are found to express their urge for education as they have done in Tripura.⁵

Factors Influencing the Students' Movements

The partition of India and the massive influx of refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh) not only changed

the demographic composition but also the socio-economic structure of the state. During the period 1951 to 1971 the percentage of tribal population to total population of the state fell from 36.85 to 28.70%.⁶ The increasing pressure of population on land on the one hand, and limited availability of land on the other, imposition of restrictions on Jhuming etc. led to the growth of indigenous money lending in the State. Land belonging to the poor cultivators in general and those belonging to the tribes in particular, passed on to the hands of a handful of middlemen, traders and usurers. Overall economic condition of the State reached a deplorable state. The food problem in the State reached its climax in 1958. Death due to starvation became regular incident during those days.⁷

Economic crisis of the State was followed by a number of crises in other fields including education. So far as education is concerned, no practical plan was taken by the state government. Mismanagement of the schools, inadequate provision of funds and teaching hands for running the schools was the order of the day. The government's attitude towards spreading of education was not at all favourable. All these factors had definitely influenced the student movements in the State.⁸

Formation of Student Organisations

Although no documentary evidence could be found regarding the existence of formal student organisations in the 50's, discussion with the veteran political leaders in the state and some stray references in the contemporary newspapers reveal that the progressive section of the student community led various movements in the State during the decade 1950-60. As a matter of fact, a number of movements took place in the State during the 50's under the banner of the left parties. Starting from the Janasiksha movement to the movement for rehabilitation of the refugees and the movement against Centre's neglect towards the State, the left parties were in the fore front. The progressive student community of the State did not remain silent spectator, rather it took part in all such movements.⁹

A student organisation, named Tripura State Students' Federation came up in the early 60s. This organisation was renamed as Students Federation of India, Tripura State Unit when the conference of progressive students organisations from all over India was held in Trivandram in 1970 and S. F. I. as a national level students' organisation was formed.¹⁰ Besides this, a student

Organisation called "Chatra Block" was reportedly set up in 1964 in Tripura.¹¹

Students' Demands

The basic demands and issues on which the student movements of Tripura took place during the period 1950-1970 may be broadly classified into three categories viz. Political, Economic and Educational.

Political Demands

The major political demands include elected representation in the government, formation of T. T. C., Implementation of 5th schedule of the constitution for the welfare of the tribal people of the state, holding of election to the students' Council in all educational institutions etc. These demands clearly indicate how the student community in the state championed the cause of the masses. The students force in the state actually worked as a supplementary force to the contemporary left and democratic forces in the 50's and 60's in the state. Needless to repeat, the student movements were not confined to the boundaries of educational institution; on the contrary, the Student Organisation fought in alliance with the left forces for upholding and establishing the democratic rights of the people.¹² Not even that, the student community was also found to be aware of the international situations. Discussions and Demonstrations organised by them in support of the Liberation movements in Vietnam, Congo, Korea and Muzabique were frequently observed.¹³

Economic Demands

The major economic issues on which the student organisations organised various struggles and movements during the period 1950-1970 include proper rehabilitation of the refugees, distribution of 'Khas land' among the small and marginal farmers and landless labourers, restoration of "Benami land", of the people residing in reserved forest area, stopping tortures by forest officials and police on landless jhumias and day labourers, extension of rail links from Dharmanagar to Sabroom, provision of jobs or unemployment allowances to the unemployed youths etc.

The role of the student organisations at the time of severe food crisis in 1968 needs special mention. Tripura being a deficit state in terms of rice production was naturally very much dependent on central supplies. But as we all know, agricultural production in India as a whole during the period 1966 to 1968 fell un-

precedentedly due to widespread drought, and as a result the public distribution system itself was almost on the verge of collapse. Tripura was not an exception to it. From the records it is revealed that on food issue there had been joint movement of the left parties, mass organisations and the student organisations. The indifferent attitude of the government in solving the food problem was the pivotal point of the movements. The records also reveal that the movements were not devoid of bloodshed. A number of incidents may be referred to in this context. On August 29, 1966 police fired on a procession in front of Umakanta Academy killing on the spot three students Dilip, Tarun and Arabinda.¹⁴ The movement took a militant shape in Kamalpur sub-division. On April 17, 1968 police fired several rounds on a peaceful demonstration led by T. S. S. F. in front of the office of the S. D. O. killing on the spot Sri Soumendra Sutradhar, a student leader and injuring many others.¹⁵

The role of the student organisations in the struggle of the youths for jobs is of no less importance. On 20 August, 1970 in Melaghar, Kajal Barman, a student of class seven was shot to death because he subscribed to the view that unemployed should be provided either with job or with allowance and that was why he took part in the rally of students and youths organised on that day.¹⁶

As a matter of fact since 1950 the people of Tripura witnessed the students rallying behind the peasants, employees, teachers, and workers for establishing and upholding their respective legitimate demands and rights. In Kailashahar and Dharmanagar sub-division the students provided an active support to the striking tea garden workers by campaigning, rallying and raising subscription.¹⁷

Credit should be accorded to the student organisation for its continuous struggle in maintaining, upholding and strengthening communal peace and amity not only in Tripura but also throughout India. It was the student organisations of Tripura that opposed vehemently the communal hatred and torture that occurred in Assam in 1960. A large number of people were rendered homeless in that disturbance and were forced to leave Assam and come to settle in Dharmanagar sub-division of North Tripura District. A batch of 42 students including the student leader Muiz Khan, was suspended from a school in Dharmanagar sub-division on the alleged ground that they were involved in the movement. This movement continued for a long time and spread throughout the state.¹⁸

Educational Demands

In the educational front the student organisations have been fighting for a long time on various issues. On January 28 and 29, 1961 the T. S. S. F. in its second state conference declared its 10 point demands and appealed to the student community to unite and fight for attaining the same. The Charter of demands included setting up of Medical college, Engineering College, Agricultural College, opening more schools, raising roll strength in the schools, introducing tribal language as the medium of instruction at the primary level, setting up of Hostels for the tribal students, allotment of stipend to the students of all levels etc.¹⁹ On these issues the student community in the state was mobilised by the T. S. S. F. at different points of time. On 6 August, 1961 on the call of T.S.S.F "student demands day" was observed all over the state.²⁰ The remarkable student movement took place in Kaylanpur under Khowai sub-division. Besides the above demands, there were some local issues in Kalyanpur movement. Kalyanpur movement in fact was more a mass movement than a mere student movement. The involvement of the teachers, peasants, employees and the students in the movement against the undemocratic authoritarian anti-people actions of the then Sachindra Lal Singha Govt., was total and the Government instead of yielding to the situation called civilian and paramilitary force to crush it. As a result, the situation became more volcanic giving birth to a broad based political platform of the masses - the 6th February Committee. Since then 6th February Committee has been fighting for upholding democratic rights and demands of the common people of the State.²¹

In 1969 the Students Council of Ramkrishna Mahavidyalaya under the leadership of T. S. S. F. launched a continuous movement in the form of demonstration, showing black flag to the visiting Governor, strike etc. against the malpractice and corruption of the College authority in the maintenance of the College building, illegal suspension of two teachers of the College etc. As a result, the College life came to an almost deadlock and it was only after the intervention of the Calcutta University authority that the situation became normal with the teachers being reinstated.²² Taking over the College by the State Government was also one of the demands of Students' Council in this movement which actually materialised after the Left Front Government came to power in 1978. Not only Ramkrishna Mahavidyalaya but also Belonia and Ramthakur colleges have been taken over by the Left Front

Government.

The demands on which the progressive students' organisations fought during the period 1950-1970 clearly revealed that students' demands were not only educational rather, they fought simultaneously for attaining the political and economic demands of the people of the State. Consequently the student organisations were not alienated from the mass. There was mass support in every movement of the students. Likewise in every struggle of the mass the student organisations were found as the allied forces. The student movements and, therefore, the student organisations contributed to a great extent to the growth and development of the left and democratic forces in the state.

A question may arise whether there were other student organisations in the said period which can claim such glorious role. The answer is no. Never did the people of the state witness any rally, demonstration, strike etc. on political, economic and educational issues called by student organisations other than T. S. S. F. and Chatra Block. Indeed there were some student organisations other than the said ones but the activities of such organisations were often found as going against the interest of the people of the state.²³

The attitude of the Government towards the student movements during the period 1950 to 70 was completely hostile. The brutal murders of Dilip, Tarun, Aravinda, Kajal and Soumendra in police firing give concrete examples of the antagonistic attitude of the contemporary Government.²⁴

The Leaders

An interesting feature of the leadership of the student movements was that almost all the leaders hailed from lower middle class family and their dedication to the cause of the students as well as of the people in general of the state was almost unquestionable. Their life style was simple and commitment to the cause of the people was so genuine that it could successfully mobilize a large section of the student population of the state. Unfortunately membership/enrolment figures of the organisations could not be known, such figures are available only for 1970 onwards.²⁵

Weaknesses

The discussion would remain incomplete if the weaknesses of the movements are not highlighted. The organisations themselves were not in fact equally powerful and strong always and everywhere. There were some definite flexibility in them. The

repressive and antagonistic attitude of the Government might be a factor that had hindered the smooth uninterrupted growth of the student organisations. But ironically, at the same time this had also strengthened the solidarity and militancy of the members of the organisations.²⁶

Conclusion

It is the great heritage of the progressive students movements of the past since the 40's of the present century that has given birth to the present Left Front Government. Many of the leaders of the present Left Front Government are the products of the progressive student movements in the state.²⁷

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