

Tripura Rajya Prajamandal - Origin and Achievement

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The emergent middle class in Tripura attained strength in association with others including some tribal youths to plunge into various movements in Tripura State from late 1930s from different ideological platforms. As a result of this collaboration, wider mass-based movements were being organized through the *Janamangal Samiti*, the *Tripura Rajya Ganaparishad*, the *Tripura Sangha*, the *Janasiksha Samiti*, the *Prajamandal*, the *Mukti Parishad* etc. But the fight soon assumed three distinct ideological colour. While the *Tripura Rajya Ganaparishad* and later the State Congress Committee tried to follow the all Indian nationalist approach, the *Janamangal*, the *Janasiksha Samiti* - the *Tripura Rajya Prajamandal* and later communist Party of Tripura adopted progressive-Leftist approach but the *Tripura -Sangha - Anjuman Islamia - Hindu Mahasabha* etc. stood for ethnic solidarity. The emergence of the first two outlook had their origin in the socio-economic-political struggles started from the beginning of the 20th century by the rickety middle class along with the collaboration of the revolutionaries of the adjoining British districts. The outlook was borrowed somehow from the national scene.

The working of the Act of 1935 which was passed in the meantime and all India freedom struggle created fresh hope for agitations in Tripura which were found expression in the formation of the *Janamangal Samiti* in 1938-39. The emergence of the *Tripura Rajya Prajamandal* was the culmination of all such ventures to meet the extra-ordinary demands of the State people. So the progressive section of society came forward to form a new political association.¹ The present paper aims at analysing the formation and achievement of the *Tripura Rajya Prajamandal* (henceforth *TRPM*). To write it, original and secondary sources-archival records, leaflets, newspapers, works of contemporary activists and others are exploited.

The formation of the *TRPM* took place on 8 May 1946 at Kunjakuthir (house of Kunja Debburma), Agartala, on the birth day

of Rabindranath Tagore. Jogesh Chandra Debburma and Birchandra Debburma were elected as first President and Secretary respectively.²

A Common Platform

Regarding the composition of this *TRPM* or State subjects Association, the analysis of Bir Chandra Debburma the Secretary, seems plausible. To him Tripura State subjects movements were not an amalgamation of various unrelated events. Long-standing accumulated grievances of the people against the administration found its manifestation at various time through various means. All the past movements directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously were for self-rule, though sometimes the demands appeared hazy : but the *TRPM* clearly and emphatically expressed that old demand in a new situation.³

Since it was somewhat a broad based political platform, the banner of this association was a tri-colour one composed of yellow, white and red. In the executive committee, the members of the erstwhile *Janamangal Samiti*, *Janasiksha Samiti* and some important members with progressive ideas found place.⁴

Suffering of the mass

The *TRPM* depicted the subjects of Tripura as a living symbol of suffering, poverty and tolerance. After being defeated in the struggle for existence, they were advancing gradually towards destruction. The illiterate poor peasants and *jhoomias* possessed no rice or paddy, no cloth even, and were in debt from head to foot to the *mahajans*. The price of necessary goods were 5 to 7 times higher as a result of the war-effect and lingering famine in the southern part of the State. Again, as a result of gross mismanagement of the supply Department of the State, the misery of the dumb millions in the plains and the hills - knew no bounds.⁵

The outlook and demand :

When such was the condition of the people in the State and the authority was apathetic to mass demand and requirement and also when the ray of hope was on the wane, the *TRPM* came forward to intervene in the socio-political life of the people. In an appeal through a leaflet they began to demand : (a) Tripura for Tripura State subjects only and (b) a responsible Government only with the votes

of the state subjects.⁶ Although in the first demand one may find the germ of a narrow type of Monroe doctrine. The point should be clarified. According to the leaders of the *TRPM* Tripura was not for the Hindus alone, not even for the Muslims, not for the Manipuris, not also for the tribals, but it was for the subjects of the State. The destiny of Tripura would be guided by those who accepted Tripura as their motherland, took pride in its growth and prosperity and also pained at her adversity and misery. In a word, Tripura wanted compassionate subjects irrespective of their caste, community, religion etc. The *TRPM* - a platform of all such people with broad outlook - indirectly challenged the communal politics and gave a clarion call to establish contact with other parts of India.⁷ The aim was at drawing the attention of national leaders about the Tripura scenario, whereas in some parts of North East India, separatist tribal movements became explosive issue as a result of the emergence of a tribal educated middle class elite.⁸ Tripura remained absolutely free for many years from such influence of tribal identity in this surcharged position. There was no objection from the left-progressive section to adapt with the activities of an association initiated by tribal elites. The main reason for this was the pan-Indian outlook and to judge the situation of Tripura in Indian context.

The clear identification of the tribal and poor peasants issues made the work of the *TRPM* much more easier as these gave free access to the masses. To pursue them, a demand charter was placed before the authority for their quick redressal. The demands include : besides a responsible Government by the votes of the subjects, implementation of Pay Commission, nationalization of oil-fields and tea-gardens, land for the landless peasants, settlement of *jhoomias* permanently, setting up of industries and electric supply centres, purchase of goods of peasants at just price through cooperative societies, committees to be formed with the elected representatives in each *mouja* for equitable distribution of controlled goods, supply of drinking water in interior areas, opening of charitable dispensaries in villages and hills.⁹ Thus demands included the cause of poor *jhoomias* and an overall development and modernisation of the state for all sections of the people.

Some of these demands were economic and political in nature. Keeping in view of these demands, the members made extensive four-

programme in the distant places of the State to strengthen their organisational base. In their propaganda work the slogans like the establishment of responsible Government by the votes of the subjects, accession of Tripura with Indian Union, democratic rights of the people, removal of oppression and exploitation of the bureaucracy and official machinery and *talikads* etc. etc. found place as very important subjects requiring quick implementation.¹⁰ Though the demands of the *TRPM* were conceded by the authority in principle, the implementation did not take place immediately. But the people were not ready to accept delay dell for an indefinite period.

Propaganda - work

To expose the character of the authority for its apathetic attitude towards mass cause, the organisers decided to go to the people. Some even showed their keenness towards the Communist and other movements occurring outside the State. The tour-programme was also undertaken before and after the Calcutta session of the Communist Party of India in February 1948. In a place called Bamutia, Pravat Chandra Roy, Debaprasad Sen and others took up the propaganda work of the *TRPM*. Badsha Miah of Udaipur, Nirnanjan Sen of Sonamura, pleader Kirti Singh and his son Amar Singha and Bimal Deb of Kailashahar helped the *TRPM* in various ways by arranging group meeting etc. The response from the Manipuris and Bengali Hindus and Muslims was appreciable. Dharma Ray of Kamalpur, Baidyanath Majumdar and Rasbehari Pal of Kailashahar, Rajkumar Singha of Dharmanagar served the interests of it. Debaprasad Sen, Birchandra Debburma and other central leaders visited Kamalpur, Kailashahar, Fatikroy, Kanchanpur, Mayanama, Dharmanagar, Khowai and had popularised the demands through a large number of meetings.¹¹ Mass mobilization and participation programme was not directed only towards non-tribal but also towards tribal people residing in villages and hill sides as well. To mitigate the sufferings of the famished Reangs of Fatikroy - a business centre of present north Tripura - where the Reangs settled in large numbers after their abortive uprising in 1943, *TRPM* organisers in 1948 made representation before the administration at Agartala. As a result, some sort of relieving measures were undertaken for them. It also through its activities, could attract the attention of a large number of Nath community, Manipuris and Muslims of Dharmanagar. Pravat Chandra

Roy, Bansi Thakur and others with their missionary zeal started work at various places of *sadar*.¹²

Link with national politics

The *TRPM* drew the attention of the All India States Peoples Conference. At the invitation from it *TRPM* members attended Gwalior Session in later part of 1946 when it was presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru.¹³ In the midst of charges that it was a Communist association and counter charges that it was an association of the displaced persons from East Bengal (Now Bangladesh) settled in Tripura, the *TRPM* ultimately failed to accord affiliation from the Gwalior session of the ALL India States Peoples Conference. The representatives of the *TRPM* were, however, accepted as fraternal delegates at the conferences.¹⁴

Communist link

The members of the *TRPM* also attracted the wrath of the authorities because of the writings in their mouth-piece, the *Tripura Rajyer Katha*. A few lines in the editorial column of this newspaper, 20 April 1948 were clipped to show the anti authority attitude of the *TRPM*. To quote the newspaper.¹⁵

... the expenditure on police-military is increased. No rule is framed to prevent the evil designs of the *ijardars*. There is no indication to introduce Cooperative *Samiti* Law. No arrangement is made to abolish *mahajani* system. *Landless jhoomias are dying. No plan is prepared to give them lands. There is no reservation policy for protecting share-croppers. No effort is made to abolish the talukdari system.* (Emphasis added)

The Purge

The *TRPM* members with Communist leanings who were working under the guidance of B.T. Ranadive after the Second Calcutta Session of CPI in 1948, had to face repression. The non-Communist members were determined to purge out the Communists from it. So the former utilized the letter of the All India States Peoples Conference of 13 May 1948, for this purpose to merge the *TRPM* with the State Congress, Tripura branch. In response to that letter an emergency meeting of the Working Committee was held on 7 June 1948 in which it was decided by the majority members to work in com-

plete unity with the Tripura State Congress Committee maintaining the aim and ambitions of the *TRPM*.¹⁶

But when conversation with the Congress leaders was going to take a definite shape, the *TRPM* was banned and the Government issued a warrant of arrest of the leaders, Communist and non-Communist. Bansi Thakur and Pravat Chandra Ray were arrested by the police but many other top-ranking leaders went underground.¹⁷ The *Tripura Rajyer Katha* was banned by an order and its editor, Biren Datta, a Communist was arrested.¹⁸

Thus the swan-song of the *TRPM* signalizes the failure of an experiment of united struggles of the Communist, non-Communist combine. This experiment having failed ultimately, bi-polar politics (sometimes Congress rule and sometimes left rule after 1952 election) came to dominate the scene. Congress organisation in the meantime, on the other hand, established good relation with the regent administration (18 May 1947 - 15 October 1949) in the wake of the death of the king on 17 May 1947. That administration was nothing but an indirect rule of the Congress Government at the centre. Benimadhab Majumdar observes, "with this, thus ended the role of the Congress as an opposition party in Tripura".¹⁹ Even after the ceasing of existence of the *TRPM*, the issues it had raised lasted in the mind of the people which helped the growth of political movements in the periphery as well as centre in Tripura.

Notes and References

1. Tripura Chandra Sen, *Tripura in Transition*, 1970, Agartala, p. 68.
2. Biren Datta, 'Prajari Dabi' (in Bengali), in *Dainik Sambad*, 13 December 1977, Agartala.
3. Bir Chandra Debburma, 'A Statement', in *Dainik Sambad*, 15 December 1977, Agartala, Debaprasad Sen, *Tripurar Gana Andolan O Communist Partir Itikatha* (in Bengali), Agartala, 1991, p. 51.
4. Jiban Chakraborty, *Tripura Trish Theka Ashi* (in Bengali), Agartala, 1983, p. 27.
5. *Tripura State Subjects Association*, a leaflet (in Bengali), 13 June 1946, Agartala.

6. Fortnightly Police Report ending in 3 April 1948, B-1/S-1, Tripura Secretariat Archival Records (hereafter TSAR).
7. Bir Chandra Debburma, in *Dainik Sambad*.
8. Sumit Sarkar, *Popular Movements & Middle Class Leadership in Late Colonial India*, Calcutta, 1980, p.53.
9. Biren Datta, in *Dainik Sambad*.
10. Debaprasad Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-39.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44, They were engaged in propagand and organisational work. They wanted their representatives in administration. (Weekly Statement, 14 July 1947, Poll. Deptt., TSAR).
13. Tripura Chandra Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 69; Biren Datta, *Amar Smritite Tripurar Communist O Ganatantrik Andolaner Pathabhumika*, (in Bengali) Calcutta, 1982, p. 40; Comrade P.C. Joshi was then guiding the members being present at the meeting. He proposed to Nehru that the TRPM had its mass-based character. (*Ibid*, p. 41).
15. Confidential Police Report ending in 20 July 1948, Sd/- S.K. Ghosh, CID Office, Poll. Deptt. B-1/S-1, TSAR.
16. Tripura Rajya Prajamandal, (Pad), *Seha* No. 47/48, 8 July 1948, Agartala, TSAR.
17. Tripura Chandra Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
18. Biren Datta, *Amar Smritite Tripurar Communist O Ganatantrik Andolaner Pathabhumika*, p. 48.
19. Benimadhab Majumdar, *The Legislative Opposition in Tripura (1963-76)*, and unpublished Ph.D. thesis of Calcutta University 1986.