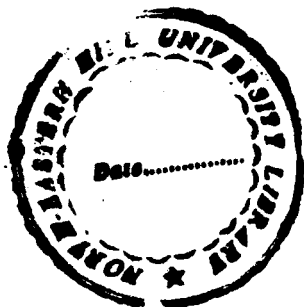


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**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

**SIXTH SESSION
AGARTALA : 1985**

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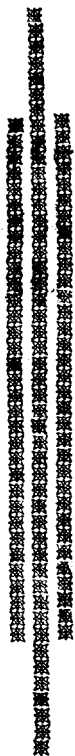
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Preface

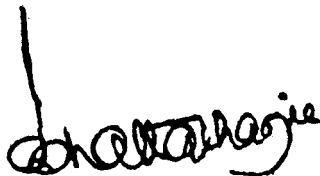
The Sixth Annual Session of the North East India History Association held at the Calcutta University Post-Graduate Centre, Agartala on October 3-5, 1985 was one of our most colourful academic meets in the region, attended by the largest number of delegates. Professor H. L. Gupta, formerly Head of the 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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The Struggle for Responsible Government in Tripura (1947-1956)

Benimadhab Majumdar

Though the movement for civic rights and responsible Government started in Tripura from the beginning of the present century, the movement got momentum during the reign of Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya (c. 1923-1947), the last king of Tripura. Two popular organisations named Tripura Rajya Janamangal Samity and Tripura Rajya Ganaparisad were active at that time organising movements in support of their demands. The Janamangal Samity was formed in 1937 by some Communist and progressive minded youths of Tripura and it raised the slogan of 'Responsible Government under the aegis of the Maharaja' along with its ten-point political and sixteen-point social and economic demand.¹ A few months later, Tripura Rajya Ganaparisad was formed by some Congress minded youths and it also raised the demand for responsible government side by side with its twenty point charter of demands.² At the sight of the growing intensity of the movement, the King sought to appease the agitators by passing the Prajamandal Act in 1938, but both Janamagal and Ganaparisad opposed the act as it made provision for election on communal basis. The King in anger arrested and externed the prominent leaders of both the organisations, and imposed bans on all meetings and processions. These measures further aggravated the situation, and the king announced a constitution for Tripura in order to pacify the growing discontent. He also formed some nominated councils, but the agitators were not satisfied with those piece-meal measures.³ So, the movement continued.

The leaders of both the Janamangal Society and the Ganaparisad were released from Jail in 1946. Sometime later, the Janamangal Samity was dissolved and an organisation named Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal was formed by the Ex-members of Janamangal Samity and some communist and progressive-minded people. One of the major demands of the organisation was formation of full responsible administration to be controlled by

the elected representatives of the people with allegiance to the Maharaja.⁴ The King did not recognise Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal. In order to delude the people's demand, he made arrangement for a big conference of Tribes at Agartala and he declared in the conference that he would soon form a responsible Ministry for Tripura. But the leaders of the Praja Mandal publicly opposed the proposal as the members of the proposed Ministry were to be nominated by the king according to his own choice. This was too much for the king to tolerate and he caused the arrest of some prominent leaders of the Praja Mandal and detained them in jail, but he had to release them soon in the face of a strong protest movement.⁵

The Tripura State Congress Committee was formed with the members of the Tripura Rajya Ganaparishad at Agartala in January, 1946 as a District Institution under Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. During the reign of Bir Bikram, the relation between the party and the Government of Tripura was very bitter and hence the party could not accept the Government of Tripura as its own Government.⁶ By this time, the struggle for independence in British India reached a decisive phase and by the end of the year, the birth of Free India was almost in sight. Under growing pressure of the people of the native states, most of the princes were compelled to promise that they would join the proposed Indian Union. The king of Tripura also surrendered to the pressure of his people to accede to the proposed Indian Union before his death in May, 1946.⁷ After the death of the king, the regent Maharani Signed the Instrument of Accession on August 13, 1947,⁸ and that marked the formal accession of Tripura to the Indian Union.

The movement for responsible Government was resumed after the regent took over the charge of Tripura Administration. On the occasion of 15th August, 1947, the regent declared that some popular reforms would be introduced in Tripura very soon.⁹ She announced in December again that Tripura would have a fully democratic constitution and it would be framed by a body to be constituted on a properly democratic basis.¹⁰ These declarations satisfied the Tripura State Congress, but Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal could not remain content with mere declarations. In March, 1948, the post of the Prime Minister was abolished, and in lieu of it, the post of the 'Dewan' was created. But there was no sign of any reflection of popular aspirations in the administrative change. No step was taken to fulfil the promises for setting up responsible Government. The Praja Mandal was thus left with

no option but to launch a vigorous movement for realisation of its demand for responsible Government. From hundreds of meetings and processions as organised by the Praja Mandal, slogans were raised demanding abolition of the Dawani administration, Ministers by people's vote and immediate formation of responsible Government.¹¹ The Government of Tripura retaliated by declaring the organisation banned and issuing warrants of arrest against many of its leaders and followers. The leaders of the organisation like Bansi Thakur, Biren Dutta and Pravat Roy were arrested and many of its leaders and members went underground.

From the last part of the year 1948, the Praja Mandal had to engage its attention to the safety and security of the lives and property of the common people in Tripura, especially those in hills, side by side with its struggle for responsible Government. At the time of the Partition and immediately after that, a big influx of refugees took place and the process of immigration continued. The Government started giving settlements to the refugees even on the grazing grounds of the tribals. Besides, a large area of Jote lands of the tribals was forcefully occupied by some non-tribal money lenders.¹² The hill people stood against all these injustice under the leadership of the Praja Mandal and thus a strong resistance movement started. The Government began to post military camps in different interior areas of the State in order to crush the movement. The innocent people in hills were subjected to torture and repression by the military personnel as they extended support to the Praja Mandal. At one stage, it became impossible for the organisation to give protection to the people in the face of ever increasing repression and hence it declared its own dissolution. But the repression continued unabated. In order to cope with the situation, the leaders in hills formed an organisation named 'Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad' with Dasarath Debbarma and Aghore Debbarma as its President and Secretary respectively. Among the demands of the Parishad, the important ones were withdrawal of D. I. R., and grant of freedom of expression and of forming associations. Instead of conceding the demands, the Government sent more police and military personnel to the villages in hills who killed many innocent villagers and burnt down many houses. The Parishad was then left with no alternative but to resist violence with violence side by side with its slogan for 'Democratic right for the people of Tripura'.¹³

The support of an All India Party behind the movement was badly felt at this stage, and hence the leaders of the Mukti Pari-

shed and Krishak Samity (formed in December, 1948 at the initiative of Aghore Debbarma) assembled together and formed a branch of the Communist Party in Tripura in 1949. The repression let loose by the Administration went on increasing. Ten tribal villages under Jirania Police Station were burnt. Many houses situated at the Mouzas of Jampuijald, Ghanimara and Sidhai were looted. In Khowai Sub-Division the villages within the area of Champa Haor, Kalyanpur and Dakshin Ramchandraghat were burnt and looted. The most brutal of all was the firing at Padmabil, Khowai, killing three hill women who rushed to save their tender-aged sons from torture by the military personnel.¹⁴ The C. P. I. members composed songs on the slaughter which were sung in numerous public meeting all over Tripura and it helped to create public opinion against the military repression.

A strong volunteer corps named 'Santi Sena Bahini' was formed with a view to resist such atrocities in future. The volunteers of the organisation, in collaboration with people in hills, began to counter the military forces with their ancestral guns. The situation thus took a serious turn. It was probably the gravity of the situation that led the Government of India to think in terms of taking over the administration of the state without further delay. According to Sardar Patel, the reason lay in the inability of the state, at that stage of development, to solve a host of problems brought before it by Partition.¹⁵ The merger agreement was, accordingly, signed by the Regent on behalf of the minor prince on 9th September, 1949 and the State was taken over as a Chief Commissioner's province on 15th October, 1949.¹⁶ Thus formal integration of Tripura with India was completed, but no step was taken for democratisation of the Administration.

The new administration also followed the policy of crushing the resistance movement in stead of finding a real solution for the problem. In the name of refugee rehabilitation lands of thousands of farmers of Muslim, Hindu, Tribal and Hindustani communities were requisitioned.¹⁷ The farmers under the leadership of the Mukti Parishad and the Communist Party stood against this 'reactionary' land requisition policy of the Government. At the same time, they raised the demands for grant of loan to the immigrants and proper rehabilitation to them. The Government paid no heed to these demands and it geared up its repressive machinery in order to quell the movement. Thus, the situation further aggravated with the introduction of Chief Commissioner's rule. In self defence, the people in hills stood united. Within a short

time, the struggle spread all over Tripura and Government lost control over the entire area outside the sub-divisional Head Quarters of the state and the Communist Party started a parallel administration in the area.¹⁸

With the introduction of the new constitution of India, Tripura was declared a 'Part C' State along with nine other Chief Commissioner's provinces. This arrangement also failed to satisfy the movement for responsible Government as, under the present arrangement also, the administration continued to be carried on by the Chief Commissioner as before. Hence the struggle for responsible Government continued and the Government caused the arrest of a large number of members of the C. P. I. in an attempt to suppress the movement. The Independence Day of the year 1951 was observed by the Tripura Ganatantrik Sangha (formed in 1950), the Communist Party, the State Congress, the Forward Block (formed in Tripura in 1948) and fourteen other political and non-political organisations as "Demand Day". An unanimous resolution was adopted in a large public meeting held that afternoon sharply criticising the 'undemocratic' and 'anti-constitutional' attitude of the Central Government to continue Chief Commissioner's rule and demanding immediate setting up of a responsible Government. The Government at the Centre, however, turned a deaf ear to the demand as usual.¹⁹

By this time, the first General Election of 1952 came near and the Communist Party of Tripura decided to contest the Election in pursuance of the decision taken by its All-India body in this regard. The party made a front with the Tripura Ganatantrik Sangha and some other progressive groups and individuals. Among the demands raised by the front, the important ones were immediate formation of a 'Bidhan Sabha', grant of responsible Government, abolition of the Chief Commissioner's rule, grant of all civic and democratic rights to the citizens, rehabilitation of the refugees and the Jhumias, etc.²⁰ In the Election, the alliance occupied 18 out of 30 seats. Congress got 10 seats and unattached independents got 2 seats. Both the Lok Sabha seats were won by C. P. I. candidates Dasarath Deb and Biren Dutta.²¹ By the end of 1952, all political leaders and workers were released and all warrants of arrest against communist leaders and workers were withdrawn and with that the political situation of Tripura began to ease down.

The struggle for responsible Government by the joint Front at the leadership of the communist party was resumed shortly after

the General Election. The Front demanded that as the Electoral College had no function other than sending one of its representatives to the Rājya Sabha, the Government of India should convert it into Legislative Assembly forthwith, and that would fulfil popular aspiration for responsible Government to some extent. But no heed was paid to the demand. Shortly thereafter, an agitation propaganda movement spearheading the demand for responsible Government was started by the front all over Tripura. In order to suppress the movement, the Government of Tripura declared 144 Cr. P.C. in some Sub-Divisions and thus all meetings, processions and demonstrations were banned.²² The ban lasted till the end of January, 1953. Almost simultaneously, the Government of India announced its decision that, as Tripura was a frontier state, it would continue to remain under the direct control of the Chief Commissioner and an advisory council would be constituted to advise the Chief Commissioner on administrative matters. Large public meetings were organised by the left parties all over Tripura, protesting against the proposed advisory council and demanding immediate formation of a legislature. The Government of India paid no heed to the demand of the people of Tripura and appointed Sri S. L. Singh, Sri Jitendra Mohan Debbarma and Sri Sukhamoy Sengupta as advisors in the State of Tripura in April, 1953.²³

A Bidhan Sabha Committee was formed in Tripura towards the end of 1953. On 26th January, 1954, at the call of the committee, demand for legislature was raised vigorously in many places of Tripura. In a public meeting at Agartala held that afternoon, resolutions demanding immediate setting up of a legislature and remission of arrear rents of poor peasants were adopted.²⁴ After the formation of the States Reorganisation Committee by the Government of India, the political parties of Tripura placed their proposals to the Committee through their respective memoranda. The Tripura State Congress placed the proposal that Tripura should be kept under the existing system of administration for another ten years. The party opposed the idea of merger of Tripura with any other province. The Communist party vehemently opposed the idea of merger of Tripura with any province and it upheld its demand for separate Tripura and introduction of responsible Government. PSP (formed in Tripura in 1955) placed its proposal for either separate Tripura or greater Tripura or Purbachal Pradesh or merger with West Bengal, but never with Assam.²⁵ During the visit of the members of the States Reor-

ganisation Committee to Tripura in March, 1955, the representatives of all political parties and some organisations, in one voice, expressed their view in favour of separate Tripura and strongly opposed the proposal for merger of Tripura with Assam.

In April, 1956, the news came to Tripura that according to the States Reorganisation Bill that was ready for being placed before the Parliament, Tripura and seven other centrally administered states would be ruled by the Chief Commissioner who would enjoy more powers than the Chief Commissioners in existing 'part C' states. Further, they would be empowered to enact laws and frame rules taking the permission of the President, and by passing the Parliament. The Swatantra Tripura Committee (formed in October, 1955), in its meeting dated 3.4.56, demanded that arrangement must be made both in the S. R. Bill and the proposed constitutional amendment for introduction of democratic system of administration in all the Centrally administered territories including Tripura. The Select Committee (formed in connection with the reorganisation of states) placed its report in July, 1955 and it recommended for keeping Tripura and Manipur separate. The committee further recommended that Tripura, Manipur, Bombay, Himachal and Delhi should be made 'part C' States, the posts of Chief Commissioners should be abolished and the posts of Administrators should be created in lieu thereof.²⁶ In November, 1956, the States Reorganisation Bill was placed before the Parliament. The proposed reorganisation required amendment of the constitution and the Amendment and the Reorganisation Bill were passed granting some autonomy, in local matters, to Tripura and Manipur. Territorial Councils were created therein with powers over education, public health, road, transport, revenue works, animal husbandry, relief works, etc. The councils also got powers to levy taxes, subject to Central approval, on professions, trades, callings and employment, tolls of bridges and school fees.²⁷ Substantial powers were thus given to the council, but provision was also kept for Central Interference at every step. Hence, the new arrangement could not fulfil popular aspiration for Responsible Government. However, the C. P. I. and other Left Parties accepted this as a temporary experimental arrangement.

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