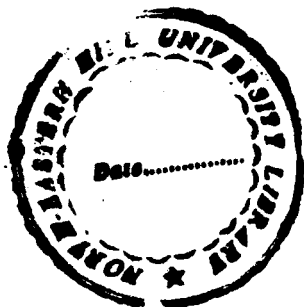


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**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

**SIXTH SESSION
AGARTALA : 1985**

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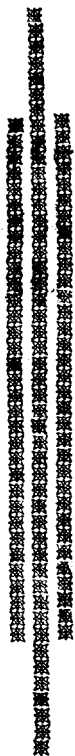
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Preface

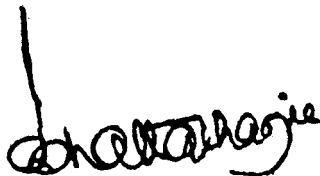
The Sixth Annual Session of the North East India History Association held at the Calcutta University Post-Graduate Centre, Agartala on October 3-5, 1985 was one of our most colourful academic meets in the region, attended by the largest number of delegates. Professor H. L. Gupta, formerly Head of the 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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Communist Activities in Tripura : 1939-42

Mahadev Chakravarti

The history of the Communist Movement in Tripura is not yet written. Due to the paucity of source materials, it is difficult to give a full picture. The recollections and reminiscences of the old leaders and the Intelligence Branch reports are the main sources of our information. There was practically no regular newspaper in Tripura in between 1939 and 1942.

In India the Communist Party was put under a legal ban in 1934 which lasted till mid-42. But its work did not stop. The Congress Socialist Party, set up in 1934-35, came also to include many Communists. Infact, before its legalisation in July 1942, the Communist Party workers worked under different organisations throughout the country. In Tripura the Communists worked at that time under the Janamangal Samity although that organisation raised the slogan of 'Responsible Government under the aegis of the Maharaja'.

The year 1939, i. e. the year of the beginning of the Second World War, started in Tripura with a 'clean sheet' so far as political agitation was concerned. "The only disturbing element", in the words of the Commissioner of Police, "was a batch of the ex-detenus, numbering 22, who were sitting idle in the State. Each one of them considered himself a martyr to the cause of the country and thought that it was up to him to redress the grievances of the dumb millions of the land. Many of them were in great want having no sensible means of subsistence." Troubles started in some of the Native States of India with the beginning of the World War II and these had their repercussions in Tripura as well. The ex-detenus helped the Automobile Association of Agartala to start an agitation in 1939. The motor vehicular traffic between Agartala and Akhaura was carried on so long by the Automobile Association. But in 1939 the monopoly of the motor service between Agartala and Akhaura was given by Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya to the Chartered Motor Transport Company. The Automobile Association approached the Congress, the Moslem

League and some other influential persons of the Thakur family of Agartala at first ; but as none came forward to stand by them, the Automobile Association had no other alternative but to take the help of some ex-detenus, particularly from some known communists like Biren Dutta. As their existences were at stake, the members of the Automobile Association, with the help of the Communists, offered resistance and started Satyagraha by lying on Agartala-Akhaura Road. But the beginning of the World War II in 1939 stood in the way of any such movement.

Janamangal Samity

The Janamangal Samity came into existence on 13.5.45 T.E. ; i. e. in 1938 A. D. Some members of the Automobile Association also joined the Samity later on. In addition to its ten-point political and sixteen point socio-economic demands, the Samity raised the slogan of 'Responsible Government under the aegis of the Maharaja'.² It is evident from different police reports that some of the State officials, particularly two publicity officers of the Maharaja, silently joined the Janamangal. The State officials probably thought that if they could guide the political consciousness of the people under the Janamangal in a constitutional channel with moderate demands, it could then save Tripura from many troubles as some of the Native States of India were then confronted with. But the hopes of the State officials were belied. The Samity became very popular among the masses through numerous public meetings and pamphlets. The Janamangal opened 8 branches in the mofussil areas and its members came upto 187 even in the first year of its birth. It was not possible for the State officials to control the deliberations of the Janamangal and its so many branches. When the Janamangal thus practically got out of the hands of the State officials and indulged in free-thinking, the police force under the Maharaja carried on intensive propaganda to the people in general to ventilate their grievences, if any, through the authorised spokesmen, i.e. the 'Mandalis' and not through the Janamangal. In order to suppress the Janamangal movement, Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya arrested Bansi Thakur (Amarendra Debbarma), Prabhat Roy, Biren Dutta, Namai Debbarma and other top ranking leaders of the Samity under D. I. Rules and detained them in jail.³ In spite of that the Janamangal under the Presidentship of Gangaprasad Sharma organised 'mammoth gatherings' in between 1939 and 1942 both in the plains and the hills of Tripura and could carry forward the movement.

On the night of 3 August, 1940, printed Bengali leaflets entitled 'Asanna Biplab' (Impending Revolution) appeared in Agartala. Nemaï Debbarma brought these leaflets with him from Comilla on the same night and the students of the local H. E. School, e.g. Hirendra Sen, Sukhabindu Sen (alias Kanu), Jyoti Chakravarti and Khagendra Chaudhuri took active part in pasting the leaflets on the light posts and buildings of the town on the same night.⁴ Nemaï Debbarma's house was duly searched by the local police, but nothing incriminating was found in his possession. Over and above 'Asanna Biplab', the distribution of other printed Bengali leaflets, e.g. 'Lal Nisan', 'Ingrazer Yuddhey na ek bhai, na ek pai' (which appealed to the people not to participate in the World War II) in 1940 by the members of the Samity created commotion at Agartala.

It was not Janamangal Samity alone, but some members of Bhatri-Sangha headed by Sachindra Lal Singha carried on organisational work. The houses of political suspects of both Janamangal and Sachindra Lal Singha's group were ruthlessly searched time and again by the local police for the above pamphlets. Infact, the Communists (though small in number) were successful in persuading the leaderships of other groups in Tripura to adopt, at least in 1940, a more sympathetic stance towards the cause of the neglected people - both tribal and non-tribal and to give open support to the slogan 'not a pie, not a man'. That slogan was already raised in Bengal and Punjab by Socialists and Communists in 1939 and in Tripura it had a deep impact particularly among the tribals of the hill and the question on recruitment of tribal youths for the World War II played a big role behind the Riag Unrest of 1942-43.

Gana Parishad

Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad came to notice on 18.9.48 T. E. when Sachindra Lal Singha himself declared the formation of such an association in Tripura as a branch of the All India State Peoples' Conference under the leadership of Pattavi Sitaramyya. The aim and object of the Gana Parishad was the same as that of the parent association, viz., to demand full responsible government under the aegis of the Maharaja (which was also one of the demands of the Janamangal Samity). As in the case of the Janamangal, here also the state police carried on propaganda explaining to the people that they required no other organisation to lay their grievances before the Maharaja for redress, that they would be within their rights in doing it through their accredited agent 'the

Mandalis' only. However, barring the movement against eviction of Muslim tenants of Ramnagar, (at Agartala) the Gana Parishad could not create any mark in the political life of Tripura in between 1939 and 1942. This would be evident from the fact that although Sachindra Lal Singha undertook to send fifty delegates to the State People's Conference at Ludhiana in 1939 from Tripura, he succeeded in sending only his cousin Umes Lal Singha whom he had made the President of the Gana Parishad. The Gana Parishad (which ultimately merged with Tripura State Congress) had close connections with the Yugantar Group of Bengal. On the otherhand, the Janamangal, which mainly worked on the lines of the Communists, had intimate relations with Ananta De's Anusilan Group of Bengal. Rajendra Chandra De's attempts to unite the Janamangal and the Gana Parishad ultimately failed for different reasons.

How the Intelligence Department of the Maharaja kept a close watch on the works of the Janamangal group was evident from a simple report of the O/C, C. I. D. on 23.12.40 : "One Subash Chandra Das Gupta (alias Bhulu Das) reported to be an Anusilan worker of Comilla came to Agartala on 9.12.40 and left the place on 17.12.40. He was found associating with the Janamangal group of this town during his stay here and was trying to recruit members for the Anusilan Party. Samsuddin Khadem, a member of the Krishak Congress Communist Group of Tippera and Rajendra De of Akhaura, an Anusilan worker visited Agartala and associated with the Janamangal Group with a view to exchange their views." Again, on 10.1.41 the O/C, C. I. D. reported : "The Janamangal Group (Anusilan) held a secret meeting on the evening of the 6th January last inside the house of one Abinash Karmakar of this town under the presidentship of E. D. (Ex-Detenus) Premangshu-bikash Chaudhuri. 7 Students of the local school (all of Janamangal Group) attended the meeting. One Saradindu Roy also took part in the meeting. They resolved to start a Library for their Group in this town and they have rented a house of Abinash Karmakar with that object in view".⁶

As the Communist Party was banned, and there was no Party Office in Tripura (between 1939-42), the Tea Stall 'Dutta Brothers and Co.' of Agartala under the proprietorship of Dharendra Chandra Dutta (S/O Jogneswer Dutta) served the purpose of the Party Office. The above Tea Stall was 'purely a political institution in disguise being financed by the Anusilan Group'.⁷ Both Dharendra Chandra Dutta and his brother Jitendra Chandra Dutta (Jitu Dutta)

were then important Anusilan workers of Agartala. Infact, all the sons of Jogneswer Dutta played a big role behind the formation of the Communist Party in Tripura.

Although a large number of leaders of both Janamangal and Gana Parishad groups were either interned or externed ; still, from the organisational point the position of the two organisations were different, e.g., the Janamangal was in a growing stage, and the Gana Parishad in a moribund stage. It is better to quote the Fortnightly Reports of the C. I. D. in this regard : "Janamangal (Anusilan) is strengthening their organisation by secret propaganda amongst the young men of the town under the lead of the Ex-detenus with a view to carry on their organisational work with renewed vigour. Ganaparisad (Jugantar) is in a moribund condition. The important members of their group are externed from the State and since then their activities have ceased to some extent."

Participation of the Students

The Students' Federation, whose declared object was to establish unity and fraternity among students, was in its formative stage at Agartala in this period and a branch was also opened at Belonia. In 1939, the Students' Federation presented an address of welcome to M. N. Roy who passed through Akhaura (in British India) on his way to Sylhet. Being attracted by the programmes of the Janamangal Samity, some students of Agartala resolved in a secret meeting to start a library. In this formative period of the Communist Party, the Police took note of that simple development. In August 1940 the Chief Minister of Tripura asked the Commissioner of Police whether it was a fact that the school students of Tripura were fast becoming Communists and that no action had yet been taken against them.⁹ The Police Commissioner denied such things. It is interesting to read the Fortnightly Report of the Intelligence Department dated 25 January 1941 in this connection : "Janamangal Group (Anusilan) brought out a Bengali manuscript magazine entitled 'NOVEMBER ISSUE' 1940 which came to notice recently. This is a communistic literature. The magazine contained no name of the Editor nor even the names of the writers. Secret information revealed that one Manindra Chandra Deb Burma (a student of the local High School) is the so-called Editor of the magazine noted above and Hitendra Mohan Sengupta (student of Class X of the local High School) is the Sub-Editor. The articles published in the issue

were seditious but as the magazine contained no name of the writers and Editor so no steps could be taken to bring them to book."¹⁰ Still, the houses of the members of the Students' Federation were ruthlessly searched time and again by the Police. On 25 May 1941 the houses of Rajandra Chandra De and other members of the Students' Federation and also of Anusilan Group were severely searched by the Police on the strength of a requisition from the Comilla D. I. B. as they were suspected to possess leaflet entitled 'May Day' and 'Communist Partyr Abedan'; but the Police failed to find in their possession any such thing.¹¹

In between 1939 and 1941 there was a considerable agitation in Chakla Roshanabad (i. e. in the Zamindary of the Maharaja of Tripura in British India) against some tortuous taxes imposed by the Maharaja on his Chakla tenants. The impact of that agitation on the Communist activities in Tripura was not negligible. The success achieved by the tenants of Chakla Roshanabad by adopting 'no rent campaign' was held out as an object-lesson to the subjects of Tripura. How the Police authority under the Maharaja of Tripura took serious exceptions against those campaigns and movements would be evident from the following remarks of the Police Commissioner : "The time is inopportune for taking any drastic measure against the mischief-makers and taking advantage of the Police inactivity they are doing their worst. The time, I am afraid, is fast approaching when the police will be compelled to justify their existence and I hope and trust they will be found equal to the task thus thrust upon them."¹²

But the opportune moment of the Police came very soon. Taking advantage of the D. I. R. Rules and also of the situation arising out of the World War II Internment and Externment Orders were issued against a number of the leaders of the Janamangal. Although the number of the known Communist and their activities were very few in between 1939 and 1942, still, the repression of the Police was severe. Bansi Thakur, Prabhat Roy, Biren Dutta, Sukumar Bhowmik and other leaders bravely faced torture and harassment at the hands of the authority and naturally these had an effect on the activities of the Communists. The Communist leaders of Comilla (in British India), like Subodh Mukherjee, Kanti Sen, Prabodh Chakravarti and others took an active part to organise the Party secretly both among the tribals and non-tribals in the hills and plains of Tripura.

The year 1942 is important in Indian history due to a number of reasons. Legalization in July 1942 brought obvious organiza-

ional advantages of the Communist Party throughout the country. The slogan of the anti-fascist 'People's War', though incomprehensible to the masses at first, did have a real appeal among the students and other sections of the intellectuals. The economic impact of the World War II in Tripura was very serious. An acute discontent among the hill people was noticeable as the prices of essential goods like kerosene oil, salt etc. had gone up very high in Tripura. Captain Usha Debbarma was sent in the hill to make the people conscious about the cause of the 'People's War'. A number of militant cadres like Hirendra Sen, Jyoti Bhattacharjee, Rabindra Dutta, Khagendra Chaudhuri, Madhusudan Choudhuri and others worked under the direction of Probodh Chakravarti who took the guideline from the leaders of Comilla like Subodh Mukherjee and Kanti Sen. Biren Dutta, after his release from jail in the second half of 1942, was again placed in his previous position as the leader of the Party in Tripura. It is better to quote the letter of the Commissioner of Police to the Chief Minister of Tripura in this regard : "He (Biren Dutta) visited Comilla, Chandpur, and other places to establish contact and met the Secretary of the District Committee and important C. P. I. members to discuss with them about the organisation. In view of German attack on Russia, Ex-detenu Birendra Dutta with other members was sent to Calcutta to get direction from the Bengal Committee about the course of action by the Party. He is the Secretary of the Agartala local Committee".¹²

On 8 March, 1942 the 'China Day' was celebrated. There was a mass meeting at Agartala where among others the Maharaja and the Chief Minister were present in that ceremony and a total collection of Rs. 5,000/- was made from that meeting.

Thus during the first three years of the World War II, the economic situation of Tripura was becoming more acute as days passed on and was proving very exacting to the people in general. Over and above some special taxes imposed on the people for the creation of War Fund by the Maharaja, and the soaring prices for essential goods, there was dearth of smaller changes also in the sphere of currency. The agony and suffering of the people both in the hills and plains knew no bound. But as the Communist Party was then not well-organised in Tripura, rather it was in its formative stage as the number of members of the Party was rather negligible; as there was also some confusion among the people in between 1939 and 1942 about the slogans of the Party, there was practically no important movement in these years other than the Riang Unrest

which occurred a year later. Still these three years prepared the ground for the future development and the sacrifices and sufferings of the Communists during these years and their underground activities served as an incentive to the students and youths both tribal and non-tribal who later on joined the Communist Party under the banner of the Red Flag in numbers which ultimately helped creating the important movements in the later days.

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* TSAR—Tripura Secretariat Archival Record.