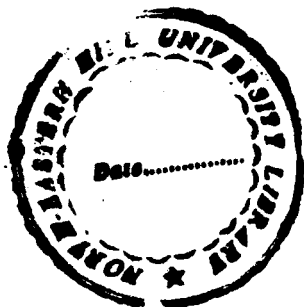


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NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

**SIXTH SESSION
AGARTALA : 1985**

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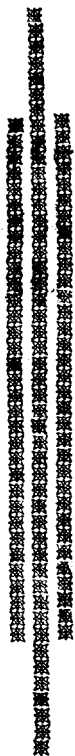
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Preface

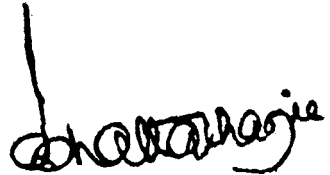
The Sixth Annual Session of the North East India History Association held at the Calcutta University Post-Graduate Centre, Agartala on October 3-5, 1985 was one of our most colourful academic meets in the region, attended by the largest number of delegates. Professor H. L. Gupta, formerly Head of the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

Suchintya Bhattacharya

For a long time past, the tribal communities of Tripura are being consistently deprived of their lands and forests and other resources of subsistence and as such, there has been persisting discontents and anger amongst them even when Tripura was under the rule of the *Maharajas*. The *Maharajas* encouraged the settlement of the advanced peoples in various parts of the State, and the administrative machinery was manned and managed by them. They were employed in the royal services and enjoyed privileges and patronage from the Court. The *Maharajas* of Tripura, however were guided by the fundamental objective of furthering improvement or advancement of State's economy and culture.

Discontents amongst the tribal people and their grievances against the non-tribals, became very acute in the third decade of the present century when the *Maharaja Bir Bikram* (1923-1947) could realise that if the tribal land alienation continued unabated, the tribal communities in the State would be deprived of their subsistence economy and their very existence would be jeopardised. Accordingly, the *Maharaja* by an order in 1340 T. E. (1930-31 A.D.) reserved a wide area of 11,000 drones (i.e. 28,490 hectares) in the *Khowai* Sub-division for five tribes viz., *Tripras*, *Jamatias*, *Reangs*, *Noatias* and *Halams*.¹ Subsequently, the total scheduled reserved tribal areas was raised to 5,05,053 hectares in 1941.² This reservation was, however, made only for five tribes and others were excluded. Not only that, this reservation was restricted only to one Sub-division and in the subsequent periods the said order was more violated than observed.

Realising the prevailing discontents amongst the tribal peoples, some social workers and enlightened persons engaged in working out welfare activities amongst the tribal communities, founded an organisation named *Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad*.³ This organisation consisted of both the tribals and non-tribals as its

members, and its primary concern was to bring about all sorts of improvement and advancement of the State of Tripura. Accordingly the Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad submitted a charter of 20 Points demands to the King of Tripura. These demands included the abolition of *taitung* i.e., the practice by which the tribals were compelled to carry the belongings of the royal officials on official tour, abolition of taxes like *Ghar-Chukti* (family tax) *Ghasurtax* (on cutting grass), removal of all restrictions on political activities, granting lands to the tribal *jhumias* and landless agriculturists etc. * The movements launched by the T. R. G. P. with this charter of demands became very wide-spread all over Tripura, and this movement to a limited extent was accompanied by violent expressions as well. The intensity of the movement was so pressing that the Maharaja had to pass the Praja Mondal Act in 1938. This Act included provisions for the election of the members of the Praja-Mandal on communal basis, i.e., Bengali Hindus, Muslims and the tribals. It may be noted that the *Maharaja* might have included this provision of election on communal basis after Government of India Act of 1935. Even this did not satisfy the members of the Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad, and the expressions of their dissatisfaction continued. But things changed to a worse with the out break of the World War II in 1939. The *Maharaja* had to ban the Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad. Accordingly, all Public activities of the Parishad ceased for the time being, and the State resources were directed to carrying out war efforts as advised and directed by the Government of India.

During the war period, the people of Tripura became more and more politically conscious, and all efforts of the various organisations, tribal and non-tribals were directed towards abolishing monarchy in the State of Tripura. Politically conscious peoples of the State became sharply divided into two camps. The leftist group formed an organisation named Praja Mandal in 1946 under the banner of previous association, i.e., Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal. The other group, however, mostly joined the All India Congress and formed the Tripura State Congress. The Praja Mandal launched a vigorous movement with some specific demands like the formation of State for its subjects only, formation of a Government responsible to the subjects etc. This movement received a great impetus, more particularly from the tribal communities.

Maharaja Bir Bikram realised the intensity of the movement launched by the Praja Mandal. He also felt the necessity of increasing efficiency in administration and in ensuring progress amongst

the tribal communities. Accordingly, the Maharaja constituted the Gram-Mandali or the Village Council in 1938, the membership of which was restricted to the villagers only.

With the attainment of independence in 1947, followed by heavy influx of refugees from the erst-while East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) a new era started in the political life of Tripura. It may be noted in this context that in a National Conference held by the then Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru in 1952 for discussing the problems of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, Shri Dasrath Deb, the then Lok Sabha Member from Tripura had observed: "Some area or areas of Tripura shall have to be set aside for the tribals alone and no other persons belonging to non-tribal communities should be allowed to settle there. And this conference should take note that this is not a new idea at all."⁵ Subsequently the Tripura Rajya Gana Mukti Parishad in their Memorandum to Pandit Nehru stated, "In the present scramble for land, it is not possible for the tribals, particularly for the tribal jhumias, to secure land on personal initiative. Therefore, in the area inhabited by tribal people, all Khash land should be reserved exclusively for rehabilitation of tribals."⁶ Later on, this realisation was given concrete shape in the organisation of such parties as *Langkrak*, *Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti* etc. These organisations were absolutely manned by the tribal peoples. Their primary object being to protect the rights and privileges of the tribal communities of Tripura.

Along with the formation of these political organisations amongst the tribal peoples a reference may be made to the significant changes brought about in the tribal economy. The traditional tribal economy became shattered due to the changes brought about by the introduction of advanced techniques of cultivation. They were not fully conversant with it as to produce sufficient crops needed for their subsistence. Again, frequent changes of village sites in search of new jhum-fields entailed heavy loss of crops. The tribals had no other alternative but to borrow money from the money-lenders who are invariably the non-tribals. The money-lenders also charged heavy interests. Unable to repay the debt, they had to sell out their lands and other possessions. Not only that, the recording of the ownership of the land all over Tripura has been very defective and unsatisfactory. The tribal cultivators have not been recorded as actual owners of the land in the official register. This has been clearly stated by the National Committee constituted in 1981 on the development of tribal areas. Again, with merger of the State with the Union of India, the system of

administration in the State was modelled after the all India fashion. The administration became primarily manned by the non-tribals who had little experience of the interior and isolated tribal villages and as such, the administration failed to realise the tribal grievances. All these certainly have produced great discontent and anger amongst the tribals against the Government and non-tribal communities.

This long continued and persistent discontent, hatred and anger against the non-tribals of Tripura took violent turns a few years ago and the result was the Great Mandai Massacre on June 6, 1980. It was such a massacre that the Home Minister of the Govt. of India had to confess that India had never before experienced such well planned acts of mass-killing as witnessed in Tripura. As a matter of fact, the flame of the tribal upsurge engulfed the whole State. The uprisings have been no doubt quelled down; but the discontentment, ill-feelings and hatred should be removed by safeguarding the genuine interests of the tribal communities.

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