Understanding Tripura

In course of an early writing by me, I have described the North-East as a bewildering, fascinating mosaic. It is no doubt bewildering and it is also fascinating! Broadly speaking, there are 7 different patterns (States) with each pattern having its own mosaic of various sub-patterns. *It has patterns within patterns!* That makes it really interesting and also bewildering! The state of Tripura is one important pattern of the North East. This special issue is an attempt to understand and project Tripura, to share the assets and shortcomings of the state and to share with the wide world as much accurate information and understanding about Tripura as possible.

As the contents show, we have tried to publish articles dealing with different aspects of life of the people. These are socio-economic, art & culture, works of voluntary service organizations, eminent personalities etc. In addition to that a compendium of information is placed as the concluding part of the Tripura section.

A person knowledgeable about the North East will readily accept that Tripura stands out to be different. Out of all the North Eastern states it is closest to the cultural mainstream of India other than Assam. It is a landlocked state surrounded by Bangladesh on three sides and having only a narrow link with the rest of the country through Silchar in Assam. There is no good railway link, and the citizens have to resort to expensive air travel to reach other parts of the country. Tripura is also one of the two erstwhile princely states in the region. Yet another aspect of Tripura which needs attention of all concerned is that out of all N.E. States it has the largest number of persons below poverty line. Their number is 66.81%, according to Economic review-2001, Dept. of Economics & Statistics, Govt. of India. Their number was 73.58% in 1999, according to the Centre for Social Research, Agartala. More such features can be pointed out. We have mentioned only a few of them in this write-up. Different articles in this issue deal with all the above-mentioned and other aspects of Tripura. Historically speaking also Tripura is unique. It is said that the jurisdiction of Tripura was large and it even extended at some points up to the banks of Brahmaputra. Scholars say that references to Tripura are found in the Mahabharata also. The royal family of Tripura is considered to be one of the oldest royal families of India.

Looking at Tripura today the most prominent feature is that it is a disturbed state on account of a militant secessionist agitation conducted by a section of tribal population of Tripura. These kinds of agitations are prevailing in other states of the region also. Tripura is the youngest recruit to this kind of militancy. The state government and the government at the Centre are taking necessary steps to deal with it.

Another noteworthy feature peculiar to Tripura is the heavy pressure of population on account of influx of refugees after partition of the country. In fact, Tripura is a state which has the second highest population in the region, with the area which is the smallest of all the seven states. The density of population per square kilometer is also the second highest in the region. The density of population of Assam is 340 per square kilometer against the total area of 78438 sq k.m. whereas the density of population in Tripura is 304. against the total area of 10486 sq k.m. This has put
heavy strain on the available resources. This special issue contains two articles dealing with the desirability of ensuring food security, one by noted economist and former Vice chancellor of Tripura University, Professor J.B. Ganguly and other by an agriculture scientist, Dr D.R. Bhattacharya. We also invite the attention of our readers to the carefully prepared statistical profile of Tripura.

The indigenous population of Tripura consists of tribal communities. The influx of refugees disturbed the tribal way of life and the resources that were at their disposal. The state and the Centre follow a policy of paying all the attention for the well-being and the progress of tribal communities. But it appears that a lot more needs to be done.

There is no doubt that there is an urgent need to promote amity between the tribals and the non-tribals. All sections of both the communities ought to strive hard to bring this about. The Gandhian remedy in such a situation is for volunteers with right understanding and dedication to come forward and engage themselves in the task of rendering different kinds of welfare and development services to the tribals. There will also be the need to undertake similar social service activity amongst economically weak and downtrodden sections of non-tribal population. There are some good voluntary service organizations already rendering yeoman’s service. These are Tripura Adivasi Mahila Samity, Tripura branch of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Tripura Adimjati Sevak Sangha and Centre for Social Work and Research. We have included the account of their working in this issue. The hands of all these and other similar organizations need to be strengthened. They should receive support not only from the state but also from the society and the concerned citizens. In addition to this, more and more young persons should come forward to take to the career of rendering dedicated voluntary social service, join the existing voluntary organisations and create many more small and big new voluntary organisations. All voluntary bodies should see that they maintain distance from politics of power.

This special issue of Ishani on Tripura is an humble attempt to disseminate information and to present the viewpoints and suggestions of the concerned and knowledgeable individuals and experts. We have tried our best to mobilize as much information as possible, but we also found that we could have mobilized more and shared more. We shall continue our efforts in this direction. In the meanwhile we present this special issue on Tripura to all those in the North East and outside the North East. The objective is to create understanding about Tripura as stated above. Right understanding will enable the concerned to explore right ways and means to deal with the felt needs of the people of Tripura.

I must acknowledge here our sincere thanks to an esteemed fellow social worker from Tripura, Smt. Fulan Bhattacharji. But for her help we would not have been able to bring out this issue with valuable inputs. It is she who rendered much help in mobilizing material at Agartala, the capital of Tripura, which is located at a long distance from Guwahati.

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One of the important objectives of Ishani is to promote understanding about the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Some matter on Mahatma Gandhi’s life and teachings we intend to include in every issue of Ishani. In pursuance of this objective we have included a section in this issue entitled Gandhiana. It consists of a highly interesting account of the Dandi March led by Mahatma Gandhi in the year 1930 to launch the Salt Satyagraha. The country also witnessed the re-enactment of this march which generated much interest and better awareness. An item of constructive programme, which was prepared by Gandhiji for reconstruction of India, was the promotion of cleanliness and sanitation. As mentioned above, a re-enactment of Dandi March took place in the month of March 2005. Nearly 400 Indian and overseas participants joined this march. While planning the march the organizers were worried about the arrangements for toilets and sanitation en route. The task was entrusted to a non-profit voluntary organization, namely NASA Foundation of Gujarat. We have included a brief report of sanitary arrangements that were made by the Foundation. In addition we have also included a small article describing the working of NASA Foundation written by its founder, Shri Sooryakant Parikh. We express our sincere thanks to Shri Parikh for this valuable input.