India is a big country with different languages, religious beliefs and faith, social customs and usages from region to region. India is a country with mixed culture. There are social and lingual differences no doubt but there are differences in respect of food habits, dresses and traditions also. But the Indians are proud to call themselves Indians. From historical and political viewpoints, the Indians think they are one nation. From time immemorial there exists in India the spirit of brotherhood. India became independent and is now a secular state. There is peaceful co-existence based on tolerance giving priority to moral values. Although we have enjoyed new way of life based on science and technology, but the old moral values remain unchanged.

Tripura is a small state in the North-eastern region of India. It was a princely state and it was ruled by the Maharajas of Tripura. The rulers of this princely state have done many welfare works. After Independence, Tripura was merged with India on 15th October, 1949. Thereafter Tripura was administered by the Chief Commissioner appointed by the Government of India. The Tripura Territorial Council (T.T.C.) was constituted in 1956 with total members of 32 out of which 2 were nominated members. The Government of India declared Tripura, a full fledged state on 21st January, 1972 and this is the victory of democracy and the victory of the people of Tripura.

At present the total population of Tripura is about 30 lakhs* and one third of the population is tribal people. The Tripuri, Jamatia, Reang, Uchui, Garo, Chakma, Magh, Lusai, Kuki, Halam etc. belong to the tribal community of Tripura. They are the original inhabitants of Tripura. They are accustomed to the cultivation of jhum and also accustomed to forest life since prehistoric age. Tripura is rich in forest wealth. This hilly state is largely covered with sal, segun, peepul and banyan and other kinds of trees. All these forest wealth provide the tribal people with enough wood for furniture and other building materials. Indeed almost sixty per cent of the areas of Tripura is covered with forest. In Tripura there are abundant bamboos and canes. The handicrafts are in great demand not only in Tripura but also outside of Tripura. In short, the forest wealth of Tripura provides livelihood to thousands of tribal people. Tripura is also rich in rubber plantation. The climatic condition is favourable for rubber plantation.

The peaceful life of the tribal people has been changed due to the migration of a large number of refugees from East Pakistan. The partition of India is a curse. Due to the creation of Pakistan, thousands of Hindu refugees are compelled to migrate to India specially in this nearest hill state of Tripura. The tribal life based on the cultivation of jhum and forest resources has been largely affected.

At the time of Independence there was perfect peace in Tripura between the tribal and non-tribal people. After 1980, peace and harmony got disturbed. The selfish politicians and antisocial elements have been disturbing the long existing communal harmony of Tripura. They are provoking one community against the other for their own selfish interests. As a result, communal and ethnic riots occur. The crying need of the hour is to maintain communal harmony and national integration at all costs. Disruptive forces should be discouraged by all concerned.

* Since the paper was presented at a seminar in 1999, the author has quoted the 1991 population figure (about 30 lakhs) as per 1991 Census. According to the 2001 Census, the population is 31,91,168.

India became independent in 1947 and Tripura was annexed to India in 1949. Thereafter the Government of India took up several measures to improve the worst condition of the tribal people of Tripura. Reservation of seats in the Parliament as well as in the State Legislative Assembly was
provided and the interests of the tribals were protected. Reservation in government jobs was also given. Loan has been sanctioned to the tribals in easy manner and with low interest rates. The Government of Tripura has undertaken various welfare measures to improve the lot of the tribals. The government has taken steps to safeguard the interests of tribals by creating Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (T.T.A.D.C.) comprising the areas where the tribals are in majority. The system of free education with stipend has been introduced and the government service with quota system has been taken up. The tribal land was protected from the non-tribal people by making new laws.

Although there are acute economic and political problems in the state of Tripura, the tribal people greatly enjoy their religious festivals. There are some festivals like the Kharchi Puja, Ker Puja and Garia Puja, which surpass all other festivals in festive mood. The Kharchi puja is held in the month of July (Bengali Ashara) where fourteen Vedic and pre-Vedic idols are worshipped with much enthusiasm. It is known as Chaturdash Devata. King Trilochan was the founder of this festival. The religious fair is held on the occasion of this festival. The tribal and non-tribal are united in the fair and share the joy of festival together. Tripura is a paradise of the tourists. Large number of people from all over India come here to see the old temple of Tripurasundari at Matabari, Udaipur and Kasba Kalibari and some other important places like Rudrasagar and Ujjayanta Prasad, Laxmi Narayan Temple etc. With the promotion of tourism, the tribal people of this state will find their bright days in future. The state is the fairest one because the hills are the main sources of its topographic beauty. The rivers and hills are seen side by side of this hilly state. The natural beauties attract all.

The tribal communities are the original inhabitants of this state. The state government has taken various schemes for the economic progress of the tribal people. A number of rehabilitation programmes were taken up by the government. Lands have been handed over to the tribals. Tribal farmers were given and are given bank loan through “The Tripura Tribal Cooperation Development Bank”. The government has created educational facilities by way of awarding stipends, school dress and others.

But unfortunately, some fissiparous tendencies have crept in the state of Tripura in recent years and the activities of the extreme conservative groups have been destroying the peace and prosperity of the state to a large extent. This should be curbed. The extremists should be brought in the national mainstream and they should be allowed to take part in the programmes of economic development. Their distinct culture must be maintained at all costs. The crying need of the hour is our national integration. We should remember that united we stand the divided we fall. The tribal people must realise that they will no longer be neglected. They should also understand that our government is people’s government and only the people’s government can protect their culture, rights and progress by all means.