

Book Review

Radical Politics in Tripura

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Radical Politics and Governance in India's North East: The Case of Tripura, by Harihar Bhattacharyya, London, Routledge, 2018, xiv+252 pp., Price not mentioned, ISBN978-1-138-66872-0.

The politics of post-independent North East India is filled with conflicts over ethnicity and identity. While the 'fear of being small number' and losing the cultural and traditional heritage at the hands of 'immigrants' have reckoned the politics, the self-determination of tribal life has also played a major role in its politics. The princely state of Tripura which came under the rule of the Government of India in the post-partition independent India was largely a tribal dominated state till 1941 with 50.09 percent of tribal population of the total population, but in 1951 tribal population decreased to 34 percent. Unlike all other North East Indian states, Tripura is the only state where the left politics was a success. Discussing on such vital issues, the book- *Radical Politics and Governance in India's North East: The Case of Tripura* by Harihar Bhattacharyya revolves around the Marxist framework of the rise of radical (left) politics in Tripura. It is divided into twelve chapters and also includes an Introduction and Conclusion.

The book begins with a discussion on the theoretical aspects of Marxism as well as its relation with the national and ethnic questions in India. The first chapter foregrounds the theoretical backdrop against which the book has been conceived. The author has drawn a comparison of left politics in all other North East Indian states to show how Tripura has witnessed a successful left politics. In the second chapter, the author analyses the result of ethnic politics in North East India and how this has resulted in creation of new state or grant of autonomy in many tribal areas. It provides a brief outline of civil disturbances in several parts of north eastern India with the rise of ethnic politics due to the diversities in terms of languages, religions and territorial differences. In the third chapter, the author has attempted to show how several rebel groups emerged out of the ethnic politics and later joined the democratic process through peace accords and negotiations (p. 56).

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Founded in the fifteenth century, Tripura Kingdom came under direct British control under a political agent in 1871, since then remained as a princely state till its accession to Indian on 19th October 1949. Being a neighbouring area of Bengal, Tripura received the large-scale migration of Bengali population which sometimes received king's patronage in return for higher rent on land, and the Bengali language was even accepted as the court language. Tracing the history of the growth of the Bengali population in the state, the author dealt with the changing agrarian structure of Tripura resulting out of migration and changed agrarian practices brought about by the migrants. (Chapter 4)

In most cases in the agrarian society, the revolt or popular discontent is the result of high taxation which is also seen in case of Tripura when the Reang and Noatia tribes revolted against the king as they were subjected to higher taxation, sometimes six times higher than the ruling Tripuri tribe. The revolt awakened the ruling princely power leading further radical politics in the region (Chapter 5). In the meantime, along with the rise of the communist movement in other parts of India, it also started in Tripura in 1938. The sixth chapter discusses at length the process of the inroads of communists in Tripura with the help of the Bengalis and adapted itself with the radical ethnic politics that had already emerged in Tripura. Reformatory organisations emerged as a precursor of a left politics in Tripura which demanded responsible government under the Monarch.

In chapter seven, the author provides a vivid analysis and shows how in a small state like Tripura, an agrarian radicalism emerged after the Independence as had been witnessed in many other parts of India. Already in Tripura like Assam, a state in North East India, a form of agrarian radicalism emerged and continued till 1951-1952.² In the meantime, with the rise of left radical politics, there emerged the politics of ethno nationalism based mainly on the language which, however, had its own limitations (Chapter 8). The author devotes the two chapters of his book (Chapter 9 and 10) to discuss the rise and challenges to the communist in electoral politics. While chapter nine shows how the tribal ethno-nationalism was appropriated by the communists and their success in the elections, chapter ten gives an accounts of the rise of a radical ethnic challenge to the left by a tribal party.

Towards the 1970s secessionist forces had emerged in entire North East India and Tripura was no exception. The state went through a period of great turmoil and uncertainty however, came out of the secessionist movement with the signing of a peace accord with these forces followed by a mechanism of the autonomous rule provided under the constitution of India (Chapter 11). This chapter also reflects the dominating influence and appeal of left front in the autonomous areas and this could be seen reflected in the election results. The last chapter of the book sums up the nuances of various issues in governance that led to the success of left front government in Tripura for a long period of time.

² Saikia, Arupjyoti. (2014). *A Century of Protests: Peasant Politics in Assam Since*. New Delhi: Routledge.

The book essentially covers the period of the political history of Tripura from 1947-2018 in terms of the growth of left radical politics in a historical context. Though placed coherently, the pleasure of reading the book is reduced because of several typos and repetitions, perhaps because of lack of revisions and editing (e.g. pp. 54, 88, 94, 145, 189). Nevertheless, the book based on primary sources and empirical evidences is an important contribution for the study of the post-independence political history of Tripura.

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