

# THE LEGISLATIVE OPPOSITION IN TRIPURA



**BENIMADHAB MAJUMDER**



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**Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research  
Institute & Museum  
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## FOREWORD

The importance of Opposition Party in Parliamentary Democracy increases in modern form of democratic government. Though it is nothing to oppose the government machinery which is run by a majority of the party. Even then, it is the sacred duty of the opposition party to focus the drawbacks and wrong policy of the ruling government before the general public so that they may earn confidence of the voters for coming in power in future. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the Opposition Party to act as a watch over the activities of the government so that it might not be a dictator and follow the norms of democracy. Dr. Benimadhab Majumder in his doctoral thesis has aptly described the role of the Opposition Party in the Legislative Assembly of Tripura from 1963-1976. He has brought the Assembly proceedings of Tripura and the activities of the opposition party in Assembly in his thesis paper wherein he has elaborately analysed and described, consulted and narrated in such a manner that may be a very valuable reference to the scholars who are much interested to know the Tripura Legislative Assembly.

We are grateful to Dr. Majumder for his kind consent to publish this book from Tribal Research Institute. We do hope that this book will be a much help to the researchers, students and scholars who are interested to know this small state Tripura of North East India.

Dated, 6-10-1997

(M. L. Reang)  
Director  
Tribal Research Institute.

## **Preface**

The role of opposition inside and outside the Assembly plays a great job in moulding public opinion in its favour as well as in making the people aware of their need and demands in the process of Assembly affairs.

In this study, attempt has been made to analyse the proceedings of Tripura Legislative Assembly from 1963 to 1976 with an intention to find out the role of opposition in the general constitutional frame-work of India.

This study has been for preparing dissertation for the degree of Ph. D in the University of Calcutta under the guidance of Dr. Amal Kumar Mukhopadhaya, Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science, Presidency College, Calcutta. In This regard I owe my deep sense of gratitude to my guide-Prof. Amal Kumar Mukhopadhaya for his constant inspiration, encouragement and cooperation.

I take this opportunity to express thanks and gratitude to Manindra Lal Bhowmik, Ex-Speaker of the Tripura Legislative Assembly (1967-77), Dasarath Deb the present chief Minister of Tripura and Late Biren Datta, Nripen Chakraborty, Sudhanwa Deb Barma, Anil Sarkar, Ajoy Biswas, Amarendra Sharma, Samar Choudhury, Dinesh Deb Barma, Aghore Deb Barma and Late Abhiram Deb Barma, the Opposition stalwarts of the period under review, for giving me some of their valuable time for interview on the functioning of the Opposition. I am also thankful to Tapan Chakraborty and Bimal Sinha, the present Minister of the state (both of whom were my ex-students) for the favour they showed me by borrowing volumes of Assembly Proceedings, books and journals

from the Assembly Library for my use at regular intervals all these years.

I also record my thanks and gratitude to my colleagues of RamKrishna Mahavidyalaya and Subrata Sengupta and Amalendu Chakraborty in particular, for the personal interest they had taken at every stage of my work. My thanks are also due to Manik Dasgupta, Ex-Librarian, Tripura Assembly Library, Shankar Debnath, Reporter, Tripura Assembly, Ratan Acharjee, Library Assistant, and the other employees of the Assembly who extended me their hearty co-operation.

My beloved mother and Manju, my sister-in-law, left us and this mundane world of ours in the midst of my work. What pricks my emotion every now and then is that they did not survive to see the completion of my work. I dedicate this humble work of mine to the loving memory of these two great-hearted ladies.

I also convey my thanks and gratitude to Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute and Museum, Government of Tripura, Agartala and Tripura Printers and Publisher Pvt. Ltd., Agartala for the initiative they have taken for early publication of my work.

Last but not the least is my thank and gratitude to Smt. Jhuma Majumder, my wife, who almost singularly shouldered all the duties and responsibilities of our family and who inspired me every now and then all these years to go ahead with my work. No less is my loving gratitude to Enakshi (my daughter), Pallab (my son) and Shyamali (my niece), who took at ease all my inability to personally attend to their academic and other needs all these years.

**Benimadhab Majumder**

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Opposition in Parliamentary Democracy :**

The liberal democratic notion that an organised group should exist within the political system to oppose, criticise, and, if possible, oust the leading officials of Government was until modern times quite unfamiliar and unacceptable. Both Rome and Venice made provisions for sufficient checks and balances in their constitutional arrangements in order to prevent arbitrary decisions by their officials and to ensure a large measure of consensus for the laws; thus organised opposition was seen as unnecessary and a danger to the stability of the republics. In and outside the popular assemblies of Athens, however, factions, coalitions and alliances of one kind or another existed, and in the late Roman Republic political alliances sought votes both for candidates and for laws in the various popular assemblies. But these groups were never well organised, had no permanent frame-work, and even lacked definite names. Moreover, factions typically settled the differences among themselves through negotiations. <sup>1</sup>The system of managing the major political conflicts of a society by allowing one or more opposition parties to compete with the Governing Parties for votes in elections and in legislature, is, therefore, a modern discovery. No one had definitely foreseen it even two centuries ago. But today the existence of an Opposition Party is regarded by a liberal thinker as one of the most important distinctive features of democracy itself, and the absence of an Opposition Party is regarded by him as an evidence of the absence of democracy.

Since Great Britain is the mother and model of



parliamentary democracy, any discussion on the nature and role of Parliamentary Opposition should start with the Opposition in the British Parliament. The Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition in the Parliament of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is paid a salary, which ultimately comes out of the taxpayer's pocket.<sup>2</sup> This fact implies that the Leader heads an institution, the Opposition, which is dignified by the title "Her Majesty's" in the same manner as is the Government and that this institution is regarded as of so much importance to the smooth functioning of Government that Parliament has considered it necessary to provide its Leader with a salary out of public revenue. Most people in Great Britain today take the institution for granted, yet it is of comparatively recent origin even in Britain.

The fact that in Britain the Leader of the Opposition is a public functionary, whose duty is to criticise the measures of Government, and whose success or failure is a matter of public concern comes as a great surprise to the inhabitants of many a country still struggling to establish representative institutions. Canada, Australia and the Union of South Africa had also accorded statutory recognition to the Leader of Opposition in 1905, 1920 and 1946 respectively. Several other countries have also adopted the parliamentary form of government with the Opposition as a part and parcel of the legislature. In public view, the leader of the Opposition is the alternative Prime Minister if there is a change of government. He runs a 'Parallel' government with his 'Shadow' Cabinet. All major attacks on the government policies are planned by him. His colleagues in the shadow cabinet look after and watch critically the working of the departments assigned to

them. It has, therefore, been stated that the Opposition is the party for the time being in the minority organised as a unit and officially recognised, which has had experience of office and is prepared to form a government when the existing Ministry has lost the confidence of the country.<sup>3</sup> It must, therefore, have a positive policy of its own and is expected not merely to oppose for opposition's sake.

The duty of the Opposition is to oppose, vociferously and insistently, the daily programme and methods of the Government, and to quote Sir Toby's oft quoted words: "So soon as ever thou seest him, draw, and as thou drawest, swear horrible".<sup>4</sup> The Opposition, of course, cannot stop the Government from doing what the latter plans to do. All legislative measures can be got through by majority support which the Government enjoys. There is hardly any possibility of the party in power being defeated on a confidence vote. But the Opposition by opposing certain measures and policies of the Government can focus attention of the public and information media. As governments generally lose at the polls by adverse vote, the attacks and criticisms of the Opposition can play an important role in changing the complexion of the public opinion thereby gaining the support of what Jennings called the 'floating vote'. The Opposition guards not only the interests of the nation, but also the interests of various groups, both small and large, within a country. It enlightens them about the impact of various government policies on their day to day life. The cumulative impact of these activities is mobilisation of public opinion and the formation of a popular judgement on the quality of administration provided by the government, and this proves to be a crucial factor at the election time.

It is the presence of the Opposition inside the legislature which makes parliamentary democracy meaningful. If the majority party is too strong and there is no significant opposition, there would be nothing to stop the party in power to behave in a dictatorial manner. An effective Opposition checks the enormous power of the Government. Lowell has, therefore, rightly observed that the constant presence of a recognised Opposition is an obstacle to despotism. "The existence of a Party in Opposition, with a programme fairly within the limits of a possible public opinion, is a bulwark against the tyranny not only of a despot but also of a fanatical majority",<sup>5</sup> he added. Jennings views that the Opposition is a focus for the discontent of the people, and that its functions are almost as important as that of the government.<sup>6</sup>

An important function of the Opposition is that of controlling the Executive and it maintains its control in two ways. The first is the constant demand in the House for information about the actions of Government, the second is the criticism that is constantly aimed at the Government in the House. The most effective instrument by which the Opposition seeks information from the Government is the oral or written question. The device of asking questions has important results. It brings the work of different departments of Government under public scrutiny. This fact makes all concerned with the working of the governmental machinery realise that their efficiency and honesty are being regularly tested. It is the most effective check on the day to day administration also. The most important function of the Opposition is to criticise matters of administration and policy making, and, thereby make the Government defend its intentions and practices.

At the beginning of each session of British Parliament, the Government's legislative programme is announced in the Speech from the Throne, and amendments are moved on the Speech by the Opposition regretting that the Speech contains no reference to some matters, or is, in some other way, unsatisfactory. Then discussion of public finance offers a very real opportunity for discussion and criticism. If the Opposition disapproves the Government's foreign policy, it uses the debate on appropriation for the foreign office as an occasion for criticism.

The normal occasion for criticism of the Executive is, of course, a debate on a motion for adjournment. The Opposition moves motions for adjournment of the House for discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance. "Such motions are accepted roughly only twice a year. Yet the possibility of instantaneous arrangement keeps the Government alive to opinion in the House of Commons and efficient and lawful relationships with the millions who are under its democratic power",<sup>7</sup> observes Finer. What has been called the "Half-Hour" adjournment debate takes place at the end of each day's regular business. This enables a grievance to be ventilated without a formal motion and without a vote. Immediately before Parliament adjourns for recess there are a series of general debates similar in character to the regular "Half-hour adjournment debates". In addition to these, the most extreme form of Opposition attack on Government policy is the vote of censure which is tantamount to expressing lack of confidence in the Ministry. So long as a Government can command a comfortable majority,<sup>8</sup> it is not possible for such a motion to get through, but still it creates embarrassments in the ranks of the Ministry and shakes its prestige. The

Opposition, thus, possesses adequate and effective opportunities for controlling the Government. And such a control is more urgent today than before, for the functions of the Government are so extensive now that they touch the very bones of individual lives.

The Opposition, however, does not oppose for the sake of opposition only. More often than not, its contribution is constructive. It does not try to obstruct the working of the Government. For these obvious reasons, the Government takes into account the viewpoint presented by the Opposition and makes necessary amends wherever called for. The Opposition is thus able to influence decision making at the governmental level. Both the ruling party and the Opposition act on the basis of a subtle arrangement. The minority agrees that the majority must govern, and the majority agrees that the minority should criticise. <sup>8</sup> This principle of mutual forbearance leads the Government to meet the convenience of the Opposition and the Opposition to meet the convenience of the Government. "The respective whips, in consultation with the respective leaders, settle the subjects to be debated, the time to be allowed and, sometimes, the information to be provided and line of attack". <sup>9</sup>

No party has to stay as the Opposition for good. The roles may be reversed after every 5 to 10 years. This fact keeps the Opposition within the limits of responsibility. It knows that what it can do to the majority party now could be reciprocated by the other party later. The Opposition mainly aims at building an image of responsible alternative government and once it succeeds and the electorate accepts its policies and programmes, the chances of its gaining

majority in the election improve. As Opposition thus plays a very important and effective role in parliamentary democracy it may be worthwhile to make a detailed and intensive study of the function and role of the legislative Opposition in Tripura which obviously has been working within the framework of Indian Parliamentary democracy. A study of legislative opposition in Tripura is also important in as far as it has its own specificities mainly controlled by the peculiarities of Tripura's historical conditions and so we begin with a brief historical account.

## II

### **Tripura : The land and its People :**

Tripura, formerly a native State under British India and now a State under the Indian Union, lies between 22.56' and 24.32' North latitude and between 91.0' and 92.20' East longitude. <sup>10</sup> It is surrounded on the three sides - north, west and south by the districts of Sylhet, Comilla, Noakhali, Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) and its link with Indian mainland is maintained in the north-east by the Cachar district of Assam. Five principal ranges stretching from north to south make her connection with the rest of India extremely difficult. Its present area is 10,661 square kilometres, <sup>11</sup> its population according to 1971 census figures is 15,56,342, <sup>12</sup> and according to 1981 census figures is 20,53,058. <sup>13</sup> Previously Tripura was termed a 'tribal state' as most of its inhabitants were tribals. According to the Census of 1941, the total population of this hill state was 5,13,010 majority of whom were tribals belonging to 19 tribes. <sup>14</sup> The influx of refugees to Tripura in 1942 following the communal riot in Raipur P.S of

Dacca district and again in 1946 in the district of Noakhali and Chanpur Sub-Division of the district of Tripura (of British India) in response to the 'Direct Action Day' call of the Muslim League totally upset the character of the population of the State and the tribals were reduced to minority. The immigration that ensued then and continued in a faster pace subsequently brought in its wake manifold problems for the tribesmen of Tripura. Grant of permanent land rights to the refugees even deep into the interior and ever-expanding reserve forests <sup>15</sup> led to the shrinkage of jhum-land that, in its turn, added to the plight of the tribals, more than half of whom subsisted on jhuming (i.e. shifting cultivators). The other portion of the tribals, were in possession of land and were adapted to plough cultivation, who were also losing grip on their land due to the tricky moves of the nontribal moneylenders.

In order to induce the jhumias (shifting cultivators) "to give up jhuming and adopt plough cultivation" as also to stop any further transfer of tribal land to the non-tribals, Bir Bikramkishoremanikya (c.1923-47), the last king of Tripura, created a "Tribal Reserve" in the year 1931 with an area measuring 28,490 hectares, and as this area was considered inadequate, the total area reserved was raised to 5,05,053 hectares in 1941. <sup>16</sup> The reserve comprised areas where the five classes of tribes (Tripuri, Jamatia, Noatia, Reang and Halam), who were believed to be the original inhabitants of the land and who constitute about 80 percent of the total tribal population, had a clear numerical majority. Another appreciable step of the king was the relief and rehabilitation measures he undertook for the migrants from the then East Bengal following the communal disturbances in 1942 and 1946.

### **Seeds of Political Opposition in Tripura.**

The popular movement for civil rights and responsible government that started in Tripura from the beginning of the present century gained momentum during the reign of Bir Bikram. Three popular organisations named Tripura Rajya Janamangal Samity, Jana Siksha Samity<sup>17</sup> and Tripura Rajya Ganaparishad were active at that time organising movements in support of their demands. The Janamangal Samity was formed by some Communist and progressive minded youths of Tripura in 1937 and it raised the slogan of 'Responsible Government under the aegis of the Maharaja' together with its ten point political and sixteen point social and economic demands.<sup>18</sup> The Samity spearheaded these demands through numerous meeting and pamphlets and within a short time it became popular among the masses. Tripura Rajya Ganaparishad was formed a few months later by some Congress-minded youths and its ideas and objects were those of the Indian National Congress. Side by side with its demand for responsible government, the Parishad placed a twenty-point charter of demands before the king for immediate solution. In addition to this, it raised the slogan of 'land for the tillers' and the demand for rehabilitation of the tribal jhumias and landless agriculturists.<sup>19</sup> The Parishad tried its utmost to win the support of the common people of Tripura, but with little result, as it failed to win the support of the tribals who, till then, formed the majority of the population.

At the sight of the growing popularity and intensity of the movement, the king became perturbed and in order to



appease the agitators, he passed the Praja Mandal Act in 1938 in which provision for election on communal basis was made. Both Janamangal and Ganaparishad boycotted the election in protest against this reactionary provision of the Act. This was too much for the autocratic king to tolerate. He sought to quell the movement by arresting and externing the leaders and followers of both the organisations. Accordingly, Bansi Thakur, Biren Datta, Prabhat Roy and Nemai Debbarma, the top-ranking leaders of the Janamangal were arrested in 1938 and detained in jail for four years.<sup>20</sup> Sachindra Lal Singha, Sukhamoy Sengupta and some other leaders of the Ganaparishad were externed from Tripura for six months to one year for their anti-Government activities.<sup>21</sup> These leaders then continued propaganda campaign against the royal excesses in the bordering areas of the State, and they were arrested by British Police and were handed over to the Tripura State Police who kept them in Agartala Central Jail without any trial for four years. Bans were imposed on all meetings and processions. These repressive measures further aggravated the situation and popular discontent was on the increase. In order to pacify the growing discontent of the masses, the king announced a constitution for Tripura and subsequently gave partial effect to it. He formed some Councils and Committees most of which were nominated bodies. He also set up 'Gram Mandalis' or Village Councils with some administrative and judicial powers.<sup>22</sup> But the agitators were demanding full responsible Government and so they were not satisfied with these piece-meal measures. Hence the movement continued. Another storm of repression was let loose over the territory during the August Movement in 1942. Many leaders and supporters of both the

Janamangal and the Ganaparishad were arrested and detained in Jail upto 1945. The situation further aggravated as a result of the repressive measures.

The leaders of both the Janamangal Samity and the Gana Parishad were released from Jail in early part of 1946. A few months later, the Janamangal Samity was dissolved and an organisation named 'Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal' was set up by the ex-members of Janamangal Samity, Jana Siksha Samity and some Communist and progressive minded people. Ever since its formation, the organisation took up the cause of the common people of Tripura in general and of the tribals in particular and started a vigorous movement against the Government. Amongst the demands raised by the Organisation, the important ones were : " (i) Tripura State is meant for the subjects of the State, (ii) formation of full responsible administration to be controlled by the elected representatives of the people with allegiance to the Maharaja, (iii) supply of drinking water in the villages, (iv) opening of free charitable dispensary in villages, and (v) revival of cottage industries, etc." <sup>23</sup> The king did not recognise Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal. In order to delude the people's demand, he formed one organisation called 'Tripur Sangha' and an arrangement was made for a big conference of tribes at Agartala. In this conference the king declared that he would soon form a responsible ministry for Tripura. But as the members of the proposed Ministry were to be nominated by the Maharaja according to his own choice, the leaders of the Praja Mandal opposed it publicly. This incurred the displeasure of the king and he caused the arrest of some prominent leaders of the Praja Mandal and detained them in the Central Jail,

Agartala. Thousands of people burst into agitation protesting against the arrest of their beloved leaders and demanding their immediate release. At one stage, the infuriated people were about to attack the royal palace. The king in fear released the leaders forthwith.<sup>24</sup>

The Tripura State Congress Committee was formed with the members of the Tripura Rajya Ganaparishad at Agartala Town on 26.1.46 as a district institution under Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. The Organisation began to sing 'Pravat Feri', observe days such as 9th August Day, Kashmir Day and Jalianwallabagh Day ever since its formation. Further, in pursuance of the principles of its all-India body, it began to preach for the abolition of untouchability, spinning 'Charka', weaving Khaddar, stopping the use of wine and seizure of power. During the reign of Bir Bikram, the relation of the party and its predecessor Gana Parishad with the Government of Tripura was very bitter and hence the members of the party could not think the Government of Tripura as their own government.<sup>25</sup>

By this time, the struggle for independence in British India reached a decisive phase. The Cabinet Mission was sent to India in March, 1946 in order to promote, in conjunction with the leaders of Indian opinion, the early realisation of full responsible government in India.<sup>26</sup> The national leaders of India agreed to accept the Plan of the Mission. Under growing pressure of the people of the native States, most of the Princes were compelled to join the Constituent Assembly. The king of Tripura also surrendered to the pressure of his people and expressed his decision to accede to the proposed Indian Union before

his death on 17th May, 1947. <sup>27</sup> After the demise of the Maharaja, the regent Maharani signed the Instrument of Accession on August 13, 1947 and with this was solemnised the accession of Tripura to the Indian Union. <sup>28</sup>

#### IV

### **Development and growth of Political Opposition in Tripura from Independence till the formation of the Territorial Assembly.**

In her address on the occasion of 15th August, 1947, the Regent announced her resolve that she would soon introduce some popular reforms in Tripura. <sup>29</sup> In the month of December again, she made a declaration that Tripura would have a fully democratic constitution and it would be framed by a body to be constituted on a properly democratic basis. <sup>30</sup> The Tripura State Congress remained content at these declarations. This was because of the fact that the relation between the Government of Tripura and Congress leaders began to improve following the death of king Bir Bikram and the party became an ally of the Government of Tripura within a short time. This was only natural because the Regent administration that was initiated in Tripura in the wake of the demise of Bir Bikram was nothing but an indirect rule by the Congress Government at Centre. With this thus ended the role of the Congress as an opposition party in Tripura.

Tripura Rajya Prajamandal could not remain satisfied with mere declaration of the Regent. On March 21, 1948, the post of the Prime Minister was abolished and, in its stead, the post of the 'Dewan' was created. There was no reflection of the aspirations of the masses in administrative

change. Promises for setting up responsible government were not getting any concrete shape. Hence, the Prajamandal launched a vigorous movement for realisation of its demands. A remarkable feature of this phase of the movement was that, side by side with the tribal supporters of the organisation, thousands of non-tribals of the plains also flocked together under the banner of the Prajamandal and hills and plains of Tripura were trembled by the slogans of more than a lakh of people demanding abolition of the Dewani administration, installation of ministers by people's vote and immediate formation of responsible government.<sup>31</sup>

At this time, the Government of Tripura was contemplating to ban the Prajamandal because of its close association with the Communist organisation in Tripura District of East Pakistan. The non-Communist leaders and members of the Prajamandal also were influenced by the allegation of the Government and they took the decision to drive out Communist members from the organisation. But before any step could be taken by them, the organisation was declared banned and the Government of Tripura issued warrants of arrest against many of its leaders and followers. This indiscriminate issue of warrants against Communist and non-Communist members of the organisation turned many of its members into Communists.<sup>32</sup> Among the leaders, Bansi Thakur, Biren Datta and Pravat Roy were arrested and many of its leaders and members went underground. In 1948, on the occasion of the Independence Day, the Prajamandal took out a large procession consisting of many tribal people on the roads of Agartala carrying the banner of the organisation and shouting slogans befitting to the occasion and also

spearheading the demands of the organisation. <sup>33</sup>

From the latter part of the year 1948, the leaders of the Prajamandal had to engage their attention towards the safety and security of the lives and property of the Common people, especially the tribals in hills, alongside their struggle for responsible government. Immediately after partition, another big influx of displaced persons took place and the process of immigration continued. The Administration started giving settlements to the immigrants even on the grazing grounds of the tribals. Further, considerable portion of jote-lands of the tribals were forcefully occupied by some non-tribal money-lenders. Again, numerous false cases began to be instituted against the tribals in police stations in order to harass them, but seldom there was any conviction. <sup>34</sup> Under the leadership of the Prajamandal, the hill people stood firmly against all these injustices and built up a strong resistance movement. The Government also took all measures to crush this movement. The innocent people in hills had to face bullets as a price for the sympathy and support they extended to the Prajamandal. One such heinous incident was the barbarous police firing at Bishalgarh in October, 1948 in which nine tribals were killed and twenty others were injured. <sup>35</sup> News of this shocking incident reached the people all over Tripura through public meeting and pamphlets of the Prajamandal. The organisation began to organise the people in hills with an eye to resist such atrocities in future.

The Government was aware of the activities in hills and it began to post military camps in various parts of the State and the military personnel continued repression upon the innocent villagers. It was beyond the capacity of

the Prajamandal to cope with the ever increasing repression any longer and hence it declared its own dissolution. In order to resist the repression, the leaders in hills assembled together and formed an organisation named "Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad" with Dasarath Deb Barma and Aghore Deb Barma as its President and Secretary respectively. The main demands of the Parishad were : withdrawal of D.I.R and grant of freedom of expression and of forming associations.<sup>35</sup> But instead of conceding the demands, the Government sent more police and military personnel to the villages in hills who killed many innocent villagers, burnt down many houses and thus sought to drown in blood the struggle for individual liberty and democratic rights. The Parishad was then left with no option but to resist violence with violence along with its slogan for "Democratic Right for the People of Tripura". Furthermore, the organisation began to lead the peasants, both tribal and non-tribal, in their liberation struggle against feudal exploitation and oppression.<sup>36</sup> Strangely enough, some leaders of other political parties including Congress allegedly branded this struggle for self defence as 'Bogal Kheda' and began to help the police and the military personnel to oppress the masses.<sup>37</sup>

The support of an All-India party behind the movement was badly felt at this stage, and the leaders of the Mukti Parishad and the 'Krishak Samity'\* assembled in a hilly area in the Sadar Division and formed a branch of the Communist Party in Tripura in the last part of 1949. Initially Puran Tripuris and muslims were the followers of the C.P.I. The other sections of tribes and the previously settled Hindu farmers were the passive supporters of the party. The suppression let loose by the Administration

went on unabated. Ten tribal villages under Jirania Police Station were burnt. The village of Ramdurgabari under Jirania Police Station was looted and burnt to ashes. Many houses situated at the moujas of Jampuijala, Ghaniamara and Sidhai were looted. In Khowai Sub-Division, the villages within the area of Champa Haor, Kalyanpur and Dakshin Ramchandraghat were burnt and looted. The most brutal of all was the firing at Padmabil, Khowai, killing three tribal women named Madhuti, Kumari and Rupashree whose only fault was that they rushed to save their teen-aged sons from torture by the military personnel.<sup>38</sup> The CPI members composed songs on the slaughter which were sung in numerous public meetings of the party all over Tripura.

In order to resist such atrocities in future, a strong volunteer corps named 'Santi Sena Bahini' was formed. The volunteers of the organisation in collaboration with people in hills began to counter the military forces with their ancestral guns. In March, 1949, the Government declared military administration over the entire Khowai Sub-Division. The situation thus took a serious turn. It was perhaps the gravity of the situation that led the Government of India to think in terms of taking over the administration of the state without any further delay. The additional task of looking after the large number of refugees from the then East Pakistan was also considered as one of the causes of the take-over. According to Sadar Patel, the reasons lay in the inability of the State, at that stage of development, to solve a host of problems brought before it by Partition.<sup>39</sup> The merger agreement was, accordingly signed by the Regent on behalf of the minor prince on 9th September, 1949, and the State was taken over as a Chief



Commissioner's Province on 15th October, 1949. <sup>40</sup> Thus formal integration of Tripura with India was completed but no step was taken for democratisation of the administration.

The new Administration also followed the policy of crushing the resistance movement instead of finding a real solution for the problem. In the name of refugee rehabilitation, lands of thousands of farmers of Muslim, Hindu, tribal and Hindustani communities were requisitioned. <sup>41</sup> The farmers under the leadership of the Mukti Parishad and the Communist Party resisted this 'reactionary' land requisition policy of the Government. At the same time, they raised the demands for grant of loan to the refugees and proper rehabilitation to them. The Government paid no heed to these demands and geared up its repressive machinery in order to quell the movement. Thus, the situation further aggravated with the introduction of Chief Commissioner's rule. In self-defence, the people in hills stood united. In this struggle, about two thousand retrenched soldiers of the Government who were experts in guerrilla warfare sided with the Communist Party and the Mukti Parishad. The struggle spread all over Tripura and within a short time, the Government lost control over the entire area outside the Sub-divisional headquarters of the State and the Communist Party started a parallel administration in the area. <sup>42</sup>

In the year 1950, the All-India CPI changed its policy. According to the new policy, the Party declared that it would abandon violence as a means to achieve political ends, and, instead, would adopt constitutional methods for capturing political power. The policy of the party in Tripura had also been changed as in other places of India.

Many of the CPI Party members from Cachar and West Bengal came into Tripura Hills to assist and participate in the movement for self defence and responsible government. Dr. Bijoy Kumar Basu and Mohan Choudhury were sent by the West Bengal Committee of the CPI to help the movement and to organise the volunteer corps. During this period, Nripen Chakrabarty, the Ex-Secretary of the Bengal Committee of the CPI and the leader of the Kakdwip Peasant movement was sent to Tripura for strengthening the party organisation. Hemanta Das, Rakhal Rajkumar and Makhan Dutta of Cachar also rendered valuable services to the party at that stage. By the end of 1950, the party organisation was spread over all the sub-divisions of Tripura. In the middle of 1950, Biren Dutta was released from Tezpur jail and under his editorship 'Tripura Rajyer Katha', the mouth-piece of the Communist Party of Tripura began to be published from then. <sup>43</sup>

With the introduction of the new Constitution of India, Tripura was declared a 'Part C' State along with nine other Chief Commissioner's Provinces, This arrangement also failed to satisfy the movement for responsible government as, under the present status also, the administration continued to be carried on by the Chief Commissioner as before. Hence the struggle for responsible government continued and the Government caused the arrest of a large number of members of the CPI in an attempt to suppress the movement. The Independence Day of the year 1951 was observed by the Tripura Ganatantrik Sangha (formed in 1950), the Communist Party, the State Congress, the Forward Block (formed in Tripura in 1948) and fourteen other political and non-political organisations as 'Demand Day'. A unanimous

resolution was adopted in a large public meeting held that afternoon sharply criticising the 'undemocratic' and 'anti-constitutional' attitude of the Central Government to continue Chief Commissioner's rule and demanding immediate setting up of a responsible government. The Government at the Centre, however, turned a deaf ear to the demand as usual.

By this time, the first General Election of 1952 came near and the Communist Party of Tripura decided to contest the Election in pursuance of the decision taken by its All-India body in this regard. The party made a front with the Tripura Ganatantrik Sangha and some other progressive groups and individuals. The front raised demands for a 'Bidhan Sabha', grant of responsible government, abolition of Chief Commissioner's rule, land for the landless peasants, rehabilitation of the refugees and the jhumias, grant of all civic and democratic rights to the citizens, release of political prisoners and withdrawal of warrants of arrest against others. The alliance further pledged that, if voted to power, it would punish the blank-marketeers, expand national industry (Tea industry), and provide the unemployed workers with jobs and reasonable pay.<sup>44</sup> As a good number of members of CPI were still under arrest and some others had warrants of arrest against them, the party had to carry on its election campaign with utmost care and anxiety. In the month of September, 1951, large gathering assembled in an election meeting at the Children's Park, Agartala at the call of the front. Thenceforth the police were trying to create impediments in the attempt of the CPI members to carry on election campaigns, and they created terror by arresting Biren Dutta, the candidate of the CPI for the West Tripura

Parliamentary Constituency. Subsequently, leaders like Prabhat Roy and Bansi Thakur of the Ganatantrik Sangha, Promode Dasgupta and Atiquil Islam of the CPI and some important workers of the front were arrested.<sup>45</sup> For all that, the election work of the front could not be stopped. Despite all opposition and arrests, the alliance occupied 18 out of 30 seats of the Tripura Electoral College. Congress got 10 seats and unattached independents got 2 seats. Of the total votes polled, the alliance got 61 percent and the Congress got 26 per cent votes.<sup>46</sup> Both the Lok Sabha seats were won by CPI candidates Dasarath Deb and Biren Dutta. By the end of 1952, all political leaders and workers were released and all warrants of arrest against Communist leaders and workers were withdrawn and with that the political situation of Tripura began to ease down.

The struggle for responsible government by the Joint Front at the leadership of the Communist Party was resumed shortly after the General Election. The Front demanded that as the Electoral College had no function other than sending one of its representatives to the Rajya Sabha, the Government of India should convert it into legislative Assembly forthwith, and that would fulfil popular aspiration for responsible government to some extent. But no heed was paid to the demand. Shortly thereafter, an agitation propaganda movement spearheading the demand for a responsible government was started by the Front all over Tripura. In order to suppress the movement, the Government of Tripura declared 144 Cr. P.C. in some subdivisions and thus meetings, processions and demonstrations were banned<sup>47</sup>

The ban lasted till the end of January, 1953. Almost

simultaneously, the Government of India announced its decision that as Tripura was a frontier State, it would continue to remain under the direct control of the Chief Commissioner and an advisory council would be constituted to advise the Chief Commissioner on administrative matters. Large public meetings were organised by the left parties all over Tripura, protesting against the proposed advisory council and demanding immediate setting up of a legislature. The Government of India paid no heed to the demand of the people of Tripura and on 14th day of April, 1953, V. Nanjappa, the chief Commissioner of Tripura declared that "..... The President has been pleased to appoint Sri Sachindra Lal Sinha, Shri Jitendra Mohan Deb Barma and Sri Sukhamay Sengupta as Advisors in the State of Tripura with effect from the forenoon of 14th April, 1953".<sup>48</sup>

A 'Bidhan Sabha Committee' was formed in Tripura towards the end of 1953. On 26 January, 1954, at the call of the Committee, demand for legislature was raised vigorously in many places of Tripura. In a public meeting at Agartala held that afternoon resolutions demanding immediate setting up of a legislature, remission of arrear rents of poor peasants, and withdrawal from the British Commonwealth were adopted<sup>49</sup>. After the formation of the States Reorganisation Commission by the Government of India, the opposition parties of Tripura placed their proposals to the Commission through their respective memorandum. The CPI vehemently opposed the idea of merger of Tripura with any other Province. The PSP (formed in Tripura in 1955) placed its proposal for either separate Tripura or Greater Tripura or Purbachal Pradesh or merger with West Bengal, but never with Assam<sup>50</sup>.

During the visit of the members of the States Reorganisation Commission to Tripura in March, 1955, the representatives of all political parties and some organisations, in one voice, expressed their view in favour of separate Tripura and strongly opposed the proposal for merger of Tripura with Assam.

In April, 1956, the news came to Tripura that according to the States Reorganisation Bill that was ready for being placed before the Parliament, Tripura and seven other Centrally administered states would be ruled by Chief Commissioners who would enjoy more powers than the Chief Commissioners in existing 'Part C' states. Further, they would be empowered to enact laws and frame rules taking the permission of the President, and by-passing the Parliament. The "Swatantra Tripura Committee" (formed in October, 1955) in its meeting dated 3.4.56, demanded that arrangement must be made both in the S.R. Bill and the proposed Constitutional amendment for introduction of democratic system of administration in all the Centrally administered territories including Tripura. The Select Committee (formed in connection with the reorganisation of states) placed its report in July, 1955 and it recommended for keeping Tripura and Manipur separate. The Committee further recommended that Tripura, Manipur, Bombay, Himachal and Delhi should be made 'Part C' states, the posts of Chief Commissioners should be abolished, and the posts of Administrators should be created in lieu thereof<sup>51</sup>. In November, 1956, the States Reorganisation Bill was placed before the Parliament. The proposed reorganisation required amendment of the Constitution and the amendment and the Reorganisation Bill were passed granting some autonomy, in local matters, to Tripura and

Manipur. Territorial Councils were created therein with powers over education, public health, road, transport, revenue-works, animal husbandry, relief works, etc. The Councils also had powers to levy taxes, subject to Central approval, on professions, trades, callings and employment, tolls of bridges and school fees<sup>52</sup>. Substantial powers were thus given to the Councils, but provision was also kept for central interference at every step. Hence, the new arrangement could not fulfil popular aspiration for responsible government. However, the CPI and other Left Parties accepted this as a temporary experimental arrangement.

During the period 1952-56, movements for food, flood relief and proper rehabilitation of the tribals and the refugees also took place side by side with the movement for separate Tripura with legislative assembly at the initiative and leadership of the Communist Party, and the other opposition parties like the P.S.P., R.S.P. (formed in Tripura in 1948) and Forward Bloc extended support to the movements. During this period, the Communist Party and its tribal organisation, Upajati Ganamukti Parisad<sup>\*2</sup> fought for the solution of the deepening land problem of the tribes caused by the continuous inflow of refugees and their settlement even in deep interior areas. The problem was highlighted in the speech of Dasarath Deb in the conference of representatives of the scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes held in the Central Hall of Parliament in 1952. In his address, he placed the demand that "some area or areas of Tripura should be set aside for the tribals alone and no other persons belonging to non-tribal communities should be allowed to settle there. In fact such area does prevail in Tripura since Maharaja's Regime"<sup>53</sup>.

He further demanded that immediate steps should be taken for giving settlement to the tribal jhumias on cultivable low lands by setting up settlement colonies. Only the last demand was acceptable to the Government. A Pilot project Programme for the settlement of the jhumias was undertaken in 1953 and by the end of 1955, the Government decided to extend the scheme to other parts of Tripura<sup>54</sup>. But the programme failed to yield satisfactory results. From the beginning of 1955, the influx of refugees started again and the Government began to set up refugee colonies even inside the tribal reserve as constituted by Bir Bikram in 1943. At this, the leaders of the CPI and Ganamukti Parishad became anxious and they launched a vigorous movement with the demand of 'No more of refugee rehabilitation in Tripura'. The demand was raised by Dasarath Deb, M.P. in the Lok Sabha also. The gravity of the situation led Home Minister Panth to declare in the Lok Sabha that " Tripura has reached its saturation point. It won't be wise to try to absorb additional number of population on this tiny State"<sup>55</sup>. For all that, settlement of the refugees continued and the tribals began to lose grip over their land in an unequal competition with the new -comers.

In September, 1955, a 25-point memorandum was placed before the Prime Minister by Dasarath Deb, the president of the Tripura Upajati Ganamukti Parishad in which he clearly stated, " In the present scramble for land it is not possible for tribals, particularly tribal jhumias to secure land on personal initiative ; therefore in the areas inhabited by tribal people all khas land should be reserved exclusively for the rehabilitation of Tribals"<sup>56</sup>. He suggested further that if enough cultivable khas land was not available for



giving settlement to all jhumias, portions of lands owned by the big jotedars and talukdars should be requisitioned on payment of proper compensation and the same should be allotted to the jhumias. In case the land so acquired was considered inadequate, cultivable land within the Reserved Forest should be de-reserved for giving settlement to the jhumias.<sup>57</sup> In February, 1956, a Tribal Conference was held in Teliamura and from it the demand was raised that, before the survey of all cultivable khas land, collection of correct information regarding the jhumias, refugees and landless labourers and settlement of all of them on land, no more refugee should be allowed entry into Tripura<sup>58</sup>, but no heed was paid to the demand. Thus, all the major problems of the tribals remained unsolved despite the movement. But the tribal support to the Communist Party remained as strong as before as the party always spearheaded their problems and fought for their solution.

Several refugee movements took place during this period at the leadership of the 'Nikhil Tripura Udbastu Samity (formed by some PSP leaders) and the 'Tripura Udbastu Samity (led by the Communists) for proper rehabilitation of the immigrants. The movement led the Nikhil Tripura Udbastu Samity, sometimes, took the form of hunger strikes. But as this movements were all 'unplanned' and 'uncontrolled' and led by 'week leadership', they miserably failed to bring any relief to the refugees and were often withdrawn unconditionally.<sup>59</sup>

At the beginning, the displaced persons looked upon the Communists with suspicion due to the propagation that the Communist Party was the enemy of the refugees. But they realised through experience that the allegation was baseless. True, the CPI and its tribal wing Upajati

Ganamuti Parishad opposed further infiltration of refugees in principle, but they had to do so in consideration of the fact that Tripura reached saturation point due to continuous refugee influx. At the same time, they demanded several times for proper rehabilitation of the displaced persons who already entered Tripura. In order to realise this demand, the party and its refugee organisation Tripura Udbastu Samity organised a number of public meetings, took out processions and met the authorities concerned on several deputations. Steps were taken for creating public opinion in favour of the demand for proper rehabilitation of the refugees and against widespread corruption and repression in the refugee colonies. Within a short time, branch committees of the Tripura Udbastu Samity were formed all over Tripura and several movements were launched by them spearheading the problem of the refugees and demanding their immediate solution. As a result of this, a sizeable portion of refugee support leaned towards the Communist Party.

The State Committee of the CPI brought out its election programme in the month of September, 1956, It declared its decision that it would contest in both the seats of the Lok Sabha and 22 seats of the Electoral College. It also expressed its eagerness to make a united front with other left and democratic parties, groups and progressive individuals in order to defeat the Congress Party ; and in order to obtain this objective, it was ready to contest in lesser number of seats also<sup>60</sup>. The P.S.P, R.S.P, and Nikhil Tripura Udbastu Samity responded to the call and, on 29. 12.56, representatives of the left parties assembled in a meeting in order to explore the possibilities of an electoral alliance. In the meeting, the CPI placed the demand for 2

Lok Sabha seats and 19 seats of the Territorial Council. The front led by the P.S.P. demanded 15 seats of the Territorial Council, but it was not acceptable to the CPI; and as a result, the attempt of forming a joint front ended in smoke. The CPI, however, made a front with the Tripura Ganatantrik Sangha and some progressive independents and the front contested in 2 Lok Sabha and all the 30 seats of Council. The P.S.P. posted 12 and the R.S.P. posted 2 candidates.

During their election campaigns, Congress leaders allegedly propagated among the refugees that the Communist Party candidates were all members of a 'Bongal Kheda' organisation, and that, should they cast their votes in favour of the Communist candidates, they would again be driven out from Tripura as they had previously been ousted from Pakistan <sup>61</sup>. They also reportedly threatened the Muslim and tribal voters of dire consequences, if they voted in favour of the Communist candidates <sup>62</sup>. These propagations and threatenings had their immediate effect on majority of the refugee voters who cast their votes in favour of the Congress candidates. In the election, the Congress captured 15 seats and the remaining 15 seats were shared by the CPI (12) and its allies (3). The front led by the PSP lost all the seats it contested. The Lok Sabha seats were won by Bansi Deb Barma of the Congress and Dasarath Deb of the CPI. <sup>63</sup>

The elected members of the CPI and its allies formed a bloc in the Territorial Council named the Communist bloc with Nripen Chakraborty as its leader, Bir Chandra Deb Barma (the Ganatantrik Sangha) as the deputy leader and Serajul Hoque (Independent) as the Treasurer. Immediately after its formation, the bloc raised the demand

that the then 'unpopular' advisory council should be abolished immediately and, in its stead, a new advisory council be formed with elected representatives from the two major parties of the Council<sup>64</sup>. The Government paid no heed to the demand and nominated two members from the Congress, and, in this way, it got majority in the Council. The sub-rules of the Tripura Territorial Council were published through a Gazette in May, 1957. Almost all powers and authority were concentrated in the hands of the administrator (the chief Commissioner) who, in his turn, delegated a part of this authority to the Executive Officer and the three principal officers, all of whom were appointed by him<sup>65</sup>. Thus the powers given to the Council were no more than what a local board or a union board enjoyed. The CPI strongly opposed the sub-rules, demanded their immediate modification and transfer of more powers to the Council, but in vain. On 31st July, 1957, the advisors tendered their resignation to the Chief Commissioner at his instruction, and that marked the end of four years of advisers' rule.

The experiment with the Territorial Council for four years from its inception proved it clearly that the Council was no substitute for a Legislative Assembly. During this period, several movements were launched at the leadership of the Communist Party demanding solution of the food problem and proper rehabilitation of the refugees and the jhumias. In August, 1960, the movement for a 'Bidhan Sabha' was launched. All these struggles were reflected in and carried into the Territorial Council by the Communist bloc. The bloc availed itself of every opportunity to utilise the sessions of the Council in spearheading the problems of the masses. The people of Tripura were then groaning

under a serious food crisis. The communist bloc tried time and again to move resolutions on the serious food situation, but every time their attempts were frustrated on the plea that no discussions on food was permissible in the Council. The same argument was put forward to block discussions on the problems of the refugees and the jhumas.

In protest, the bloc staged walk-outs and boycotted the remaining parts of the sessions concerned. During each budget session of the Council, the Councillors of the bloc took part in the Budget debates and moved a number of cut-motions drawing the attention of the House and sharply criticising the failure of the government in solving the problems of education, public health, roads, transport, relief works, etc.

During the session 1959-60, for instance, the Communist Councillors, in course of their speeches, exposed the deplorable condition of the departments of education, public health, transport, communications and irrigation and alleged that the inefficiency of the ruling party was responsible for that serious state of affairs. They alleged that a good number of schools were going with inadequate number of teachers and the number of students was falling sharply and that most of the students of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities were being deprived of boarding house stipends. They further complained that though a decision was taken for opening new dispensaries, none was started; no step was taken either for repairing tubewells and ring wells in the villages, and nothing done for supply of drinking water in the refugee and Jhumia settlement colonies <sup>66</sup>. During the debates on the Supplementary Demands for grants of 1960-61 in September, 1960, members of the Communist

bloc moved a good number of cut motions drawing the attention of the Council to the problems faced by the masses and strongly demanding remedial measures. Thus, demands were raised for the Fire Brigades in all Sub-divisional headquarters, pay revision of the employees, more sanction for relief works, more grants-in-aid to the non-government educational institutions, setting up of new schools, boarding facilities to all Scheduled Caste and Scheduled tribe students, and opening of some new dispensaries, and regular supply of medicines to the hospitals and dispensaries. All these cut motions were lost and discussion on 15 other cut motions were disallowed and the bloc members boycotted the rest of the session in protest.<sup>67</sup>

During the budget session of 1961-62, the bloc members alleged that even after completion of two five year plans, the problems of food and employment in Tripura remained unsolved; the Department of Refugee Rehabilitation was closed down although a good number of refugees were yet to be settled; and the rehabilitation of the jhumias and other landless peasants was still a far cry. The bloc further alleged that inefficiency of the party in power was responsible for the transfer of some vital powers of the Council to the administration in the fields of drinking water, construction of roads, irrigation, test relief, etc. As many as twenty two cut motions were moved on the budget by the opposition members, but all of them were voted down<sup>68</sup>. On July 21, 1961, the Leader of the Communist bloc moved a 'no confidence' motion against Chairman Sri S.L. Singh and brought many specific charges against him like distribution of many P.W.D. works among some contractors without estimates, tenders,

earnest money, etc., using the jeeps of the Council in the election campaign of his party, nepotism in respect of employment of some of his relatives and partymen to Government service, etc. Though the motion was lost, the charges were so specific and supported by so many documentary proofs that it appeared as a moral victory of the Opposition. Next day, the editor of 'Tripura', in the editorial of his daily, welcomed the motion and opined that the allegations brought against the Chairman and his party were all genuine <sup>69</sup> .

During the period 1957-61, movements like food movements, refugee movements and Bidhan Sabha movements were launched by the Communist Party, and other left parties like the PSF and the RSP extended support to the movements. In the month of March, 1960, Government of India announced its decision that the Department of Refugee Rehabilitation would be closed down in the month of July of that year. This announcement led to great anxiety among the refugees and a batch of refugees started hungerstrike at the leadership of the Nikhil Tripura Udbastu Samity from 18th April in Durgabari, Agartala in the demand of land, more loan, more scope for employment and continuance of the Refugees Rehabilitation Department so long as the economic rehabilitation of the refugees was not accomplished <sup>70</sup> . On 3rd May, a large meeting was organised by the CPI in the Children's Park, Agartala in support of the strikers and the 'adamant' and 'unsympathetic' attitude of the Government was severely criticised in the meeting. From 5th May, another batch of refugees started hungerstrike at the leadership of Nripen Chakraborty in support of 26-point charter of demands of the CPI for proper

rehabilitation of the refugees. On 14th May, a large public meeting was organised by the CPI at Agartala to express solidarity with the strikers. In the meeting, the attitude of the Government was sharply criticised and a resolution was adopted for observing 'hartal' on 15th May in support of the strikers. Despite strong opposition of the Government, the hartal was a complete success <sup>71</sup>.

In the midnight of 18th May, all the hungerstrikers were arrested and sent to Agartala Central Jail. On 19th May, a large public meeting attended by more than ten thousand people took place at Agartala at the call of the CPI. Bhupesh Gupta, the leader of the CPI in the Rajya Sabha, in course of his address, sharply criticised the 'inaction' and 'indifference' of the Congress Party and Government to solve the problems of the refugees. In the meeting, resolutions were adopted deciding withdrawal of the hungerstrike and launching of a civil disobedience movement <sup>72</sup>. In the night of 19th May, Biswambhar Namadas, a hungerstriker, who had been fasting since 5th May, lost his life. Next day, a procession was taken out with his dead body and in a meeting held thereafter, resolutions were adopted demanding judicial enquiry into the unnatural death of Shri Namadas and demanding economic rehabilitation of the refugees. On 23rd day of May, responding to the call of the civil disobedience movement of the two refugee organisations, thousands of people of Agartala took out processions violating 144 Cr. P.C. and organised public meetings in support of the refugee movement. On 30th May, a procession of more than five thousand people was taken out at Agartala in violation of the police law in response to the call of mass civil disobedience of the two Central refugee committees.



In the public meeting held thereafter, the leaders addressed giving call for strengthening the refugee movement started and continued at the leadership of the refugee committees, and demanding immediate release of the prisoners and judicial enquiry into the cause of the death of Shri Namadas<sup>73</sup>. At the call of the refugee committees, 'Sahid Dibas' was observed on 8th June and a large condolence meeting was held at Children's Park, Agartala in which great homage was expressed to the memory of Sri Namadas. The success of the refugee movement was that under the pressure of this movement, the Government of India was compelled to declare that the refugee department would continue and that some immediate steps would be taken for solving the acute problems faced by the refugees all over Tripura.

During the period, the tribal wing of the Communist Party fought for the cause of the Jhumias and other landless peasants and the poor tribals as before. It was declared from a number of meeting of the Bhumihiin Krishak Samity that if the Tripura administration failed to expedite rehabilitation and allotment of land to the jhumias and the landless peasants, the Samity would be left with no option but to launch vigorous movements. It was demanded by the Samity that permanent land rights must be given to the landless peasants on the khas land they had been occupying for long. The Samity regretted that though lakhs of rupees had been spent for setting the jhumias in colonies, that came of little use to them. It also raised the demand for implementing the provisions of the Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 without further delay.<sup>74</sup> The Upajati Ganamukti Parishad demanded time and again for implementation of the Land Reforms Act

and the Panchayat Act, prohibition of transfer of tribal land to the non-tribals, formation of an elected and powerful Tribal Welfare Board, formation of a Language Commission for the development of Kak-Barak, the language of the tribals, and steps for protection of the interests of the tribal students in the hostels <sup>75</sup>. The Parishad vehemently criticised the Government for its inaction and failure in bringing about economic, social and cultural development of the tribals and it gave out a call to the tribals to launch a vigorous movement for changing this state of affairs. It warned the tribals to be aware of 'the tricky devices' of the party in power for creating disunity among themselves and 'appealed to them to preserve and expand the solid unity that grew up amongst them at its initiative. Appeals were also made to all democratic minded people, irrespective of tribals and non-tribals, to extend their sympathy and support to the legitimate demands of the tribals in the greater interest of Tripura <sup>76</sup>.

The movement for responsible government was resumed in the last part of 1960. The state committee of the CPI from its session held in September, 1960, gave a call for launching a vigorous and united movement in the demand for responsible government. Within a few days, a large public meeting was organised by the CPI in support of the demand for Bidhan Sabha. In his address in the meeting, Communist leader Bhupesh Gupta stated emphatically that only a united movement of the people irrespective of party affiliations would be able to snatch responsible government for Tripura from the unwilling hands of the Central Government <sup>77</sup>. In the Fifth State Conference of the CPI held in the month of October, the resolution was adopted that the struggle for Bidhan Sabha would be the

principal form of struggle for the party in the coming days. A fervent appeal was made to the people of Tripura to make the coming struggle vigorous and all comprehensive. A vigorous propaganda campaign was launched by the CPI on the occasion of the 43rd November Revolution Day and public meetings were held all over Tripura spearheading the demand for the Bidhan Sabha. At these meetings, appeals were made to all political and non-political organisations to organise an all-Tripura movement in the demand for responsible government with Bidhan Sabha<sup>78</sup>. A joint meeting of the CPI, the PSP, the RSP, the Scheduled Caste Federation and the Merchants' Association was held in Agartala on 4th January, 1961 and a resolution was adopted to observe 26th January of the year as 'Demand Day' all over Tripura. At the joint call of the Left Parties and organisations, about eight thousand people assembled in public meeting held at Agartala on 26th January and a resolution was adopted there requesting the Central Government for introduction of responsible government with Bidhan Sabha in Tripura without further delay<sup>79</sup>. In response to the joint call of the left parties, public meetings were held all over Tripura on the Republic Day and resolutions were adopted to continue the movement for responsible government with legislative assembly.

It is mentionable in this context that in the contemporary period a vigorous movement in the demand for Bidhan Sabha was also continuing in Manipur and the Manipur State Congress also extended full support to the movement. Finding no scope to reject their strong demand, the Central Government gave assurance that due consideration would be given to the demand and that democratic system of

administration would be introduced soon. Quite on the contrary, the leaders of the State congress of Tripura strongly opposed the movement for Bidhan Sabha both inside and outside the Territorial Council. They openly propagated that Tripura was not yet worthy of getting a Bidhan Sabha and their mouthpiece Ganaraj consistently opposed the demand for Bidhan Sabha <sup>80</sup>. But after the movement gained momentum within a few months of its initiation, and with the possibility of having a Bidhan Sabha getting bright and the General Election of 1962 coming nearer, the State Congress seemed to change its stand and it started supporting the movement. At the pressure of the movement that continued the Central Government gave assurance that more democratic rights would be given to Tripura and other Centrally administered territories. It also assured that a bill for Bidhan Sabha would be placed in the Lok Sabha in the first part of September, but it was postponed in the last moment for unknown reasons. A joint statement was issued by Swarna Kamal Roy (P.S.P), Biren Dutta (C.P.I) and Sanatan Sarkar (Scheduled Caste Federation) strongly protesting against the postponement of the Bidhan Sabha Bill. They strongly demanded that the Bidhan Sabha bill should be put up immediately for discussion. It was also emphasised in the statement that it would be fair and proper to extend responsible government (with Bidhan Sabha) in Tripura before the ensuing General Election<sup>81</sup>. But the Central Government paid no heed to these demands and began to kill time under this and that pretext.

In the General Election of 1962, the CPI contested in 2 Lok Sabha and 20 Territorial Council Seats and supported 10 progressive independent candidates <sup>82</sup>. Both the seats

of the Lok Sabha were won by Communist candidates Biren Dutta and Dasarath Deb. In the Territorial Council the Congress won absolute majority by capturing 17 seats. The CPI and its allies got 13 seats. The P.S.P and the R.S.P candidates contested some seats, but all of them lost and forfeited their security deposits also. It is notable in this context that though the CPI and its allies got less than half of the seats this time, the total number of votes polled in their favour was more than fifty percent of the total votes cast <sup>83</sup>. On 28th March, Ashoke Sen, the Chairman of the Committee for reorganisation of the Centrally Administered Territories came to Agartala accompanied by the other members of the Committee. They discussed the question of transfer of more powers to the Tripura Territorial Council with the representatives of all the political parties. The representatives of the CPI and the P.S.P. strongly pleaded for replacement of the Territorial Council by a Bidhan Sabha <sup>84</sup>. On 4th September, the bill for the 14th amendment of the Constitution was unanimously adopted proposing legislative assemblies with ministries for the Centrally administered territories like Tripura, Manipur, Himachal Pradesh, Pondicherry and Goa. The proposed assemblies would consist of elected or partly-elected and partly nominated members.

On 21.2.63, the Union Home Minister placed a bill in the Lok Sabha for formation of ministries with legislative assemblies in the Centrally administered territories. According to the bill, the existing members of the Territorial Council would be treated as members of the assembly. The Chief Minister would be selected by the President, and he and his cabinet would give advice to the administrator from time to time. The resolutions adopted in the assembly

would require approval of the administrator in order to be effective<sup>85</sup>. The bill was accepted in the Lok Sabha on 3rd May and in the Rajya Sabha on 10th May and thus became an Act. The Act granted special powers to the administrator, so the ministry did not get full democratic right. Moreover, the administrator was given over-all power and responsibility to take necessary steps in emergent situations. He was not bound to consult Council of Ministers in administrative matter; and no Minister or member of the Legislative Assembly could criticise any action of the administrator<sup>86</sup>. On 24.6.63, the second Territorial Council of Tripura (formed in July, 1962) in its last sitting declared its own dissolution and with that was marked the end of an important chapter in the political history of Tripura. It was announced by the administrator immediately thereafter that the Tripura Legislative Assembly would be ceremonially inaugurated on 1st July, 1963 and the members of the Assembly would swear their oaths of allegiance in the ceremony.

On the eve of the formation of the Assembly, all the opposition M.L.As including the leader and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition were in jail under the D.I.R. Several deputations were given on behalf of the CPI for the release of the MLAs and other arrested leaders, but in vain. Jagaran, the only daily of Tripura of the period, in its editorial of 30.6.63 urged the Government to release the Opposition MLAs before the formal inauguration of the Assembly, but to no effect. Thus, the Communist Party, the only Opposition Party in the first Territorial Assembly of Tripura could not take part in the inaugural ceremony of the Assembly on 1st July, 1963 as all the MLAs of the Party were kept behind the bars.

We have already noted that the numerical strength of the Opposition was 12 in the first Territorial Assembly of Tripura (a house of 30 members). In the Second Territorial Assembly, the strength of the Opposition was reduced to one-fourth of that of the first Territorial Assembly. The Opposition, however, improved its strength remarkably in the first State Assembly by winning 19 out of 60 seats in the Election of 1972. But the same Opposition swept the board in the Election of 1977 and won 56 out of 60 seats of which the CPI(M) alone bagged 53 seats. This became possible as the Left Front and the CPI(M) in particular succeeded in winning over a considerable portion of traditional Congress votes to its side in the Election of 1977. Now, since the role of the legislative Opposition in Tripura during the period from 1963 to 1976 might have been one of the major contributing factors that made this historic victory possible, I have selected the period 1963-1976 for investigation and analysis.

The thesis has been done mainly on the basis of the legislative documents (1963-1976, Assembly proceedings, in particular, which have been preserved in 145 volumes in the Assembly Library of Tripura). Since all the deliberations of the Assembly other than the Government statements like Administrator's, Lieutenant Governor's and Governor's Addresses were made and kept in Bengali, I had to translate a large portion of the relevant proceedings into English.

Besides, some personal interviews have been used in order to gather information about some specific matters relevant to the main object of enquiry. I have also gone through the back numbers of local papers like Jagaran, Tripura, Tripurar Katha, Deshar Katha and Dainik

**Sangbad** for gathering information regarding the role played by the Opposition from Independence till the formation of the Assembly in 1963, and regarding the role played by it outside the Assembly during the period under review.

1. Dahl., Robert A., Political Opposition in Western Democracies, p.(i) of the preface.
2. Deol D., *Competitive Government and Politics*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. N.D., 1978, p.136.
3. Champion G., *British Government since 1918*, p.19.
4. Jennings, I., *Government and Parliament*, p.385.
5. Lowell, A.L., *Public Opinion and Popular Government*, pp.97-98.
6. Jennings, I., *Cabinet Government*, p.15.
7. Finer, H., *Governments of the Greater European Powers*, p.162.
8. Jennings, I., *Government and Parliament*, p.385.
9. Ibid.
10. Tripura District Gazetteers, Government of Tripura, Agartala, 1975, p.1.
11. Census of India, 1961 (vide Tripura District Gazetteers, p.2).
12. Patel, M.L., *changing Land Problems of Tribal/ India / Progress Publishers*, Bhopal, 1974, p.22.
13. Census Report, 1981.
14. Tripura District Gazetteers, p. 143.
15. Tripura on the March, 6th January, 1968, Publicity Deptt., Govt. of Tripura, p.33.
16. Tripura District Gazetteers, p.160.
17. Jana Siksha Samity was formed by the leaders of the Janamangal Samity and some other likeminded people. The main objective of the Samity was to spread education among the masses. Under its guidance, many schools of Primary education were started all over Tripura. Many of the laterday Communist leaders, like Biren Datta, Aghore Deb Barma and Prabhat Deb Barma were originally leaders of this organisation and they played a commendable role in spreading education as also political consciensness among the common people of Tripura (Sen, Tripur Chandra, *Tripura in Transition*, Agartala, 1970, p.6.)
18. Biren Datta (ed.) *The Prajar Katha* (weekly in Bengali), Agartala dt. 15th Baisakh, 1349 Tripura Era (Corresponding to May, 1938).
19. Tripura District Gazetteers, p. 125.
20. Deb Barma, Amarendra (Bansi Thakur), in the "Triha" (Tripura Desh), (Bengali), First Issue, Agartala, 24th October, 1972.
21. Tripura, Agartala, 1971, p. 151.
22. Tripura State Gazette Sankalan, p. 153.



23. Tripura District Gazetteers, p. 128.
24. Sanjib Chakraborty, " Tripura : Tirish Theka Aashi - Ardha Satabdir Khanda Chitra" (in Bengali) in 'Aagami' (weekly) dated 17.8.1980, p.3.
25. Sen, Tripura Chandra OP.cit., p.24.
26. Tripura District Gazetteers., p.112.
27. Tripura District Gazetteers., p.117.
28. Ibid.
29. Dutta, Dwijendra Chandra and Bandopadhyay, Suprasanna (ed.) Rajgi Tripurar Sarkari Bangla (Bengali), Education Deptt. Govt. of Tripura, p. 171.
30. Tripura State Gazette Sankalan, P. 318-19.
31. Sanjib Chakraborty, Op.Cit., In Aagami, dated 24.8.80, p.13.
32. Sen, Tripur Chandra. Op, cit., p. 71.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p.73.
35. Sen, Tripura Chandra, Op. cit., p.9.
36. Dutta, Biren (ed), Tripurar Katha (Bengali), 16th Jaistha 1361 T.E. (corresponding to June, 1950).
37. Ibid.

\* The Krishak Samity was organised in the southern part of the Sadar Division by Aghore Deb Barma under red banner in December, 1948. Many young workers got themselves united under the Samiti and laboured heart & soul to organise the villagers in hills.

38. Sen, Tripur Chandra, Op. cit., p.77.
39. Sadar Patel's Correspondence, 1973, Vol. VIII. pp.530-31 vide Roy Choudhury, N.R.; A short history of Tripura, Agartala, 1971.
40. Tripura District Gazetteers, p.4.
41. Sen, Tripur Chandra, op.cit., p.9
42. Ibid.
43. Sen, Tripur Chandra, Op. cit., p.79.
44. Tripurar Katha, 16th Aswin, 1361 T.E (Corresponding to October, 1951).
45. Ibid., 13 Agrahayan, 1361 T.E. (Corresponding to Dec., 1951).
46. Chakraborty, Sanjib, op. Cit., Dated 4.1.81.
47. Chakraborty, Biresh (ed), Tripura (weekly in Bengali), Agartala, 30.12.52
48. Quoted in Sen, Tripura Chandra, op.cit., p.24.
49. 'Tripura', dated 3.2.54.
50. Ibid., dated 21.4.54.
51. Tripura, dated 5.9. 1956.
52. Chaube, S.K., Hill Politics in North East India, pp. 189-190.

\*\* So named since 1952 following a Proposal of Nripen Chakraborty which was unanimously accepted.

53. Deb, Dasarath, Tripura Upajatider Bhumi Samrakshane Upajati Ganamukti Parishad, Agartala, p.2.
54. Ganguly, J.B., Economic problems of the Jhumias of Tripura, Agartala, p.70.
55. Quoted in Deb, Dasarath, op. cit., p.12.
56. Quoted in Deb, Dasarath, op. cit., p.3.
57. Ibid., p.14.
58. Ibid., p.14.
59. Tripura (Editorial). 14.3.53.
60. Paul, Jitendra Chandra (ed), Jagaran (daily in Bengali), Agartala, 27.9.56.
61. Sen, Tripura Chandra, op. cit., pp. 30-31.
62. Jagaran, dated 12.2.59.
63. Election Results, 1957; Election Department, Government of Tripura, Agartala.
64. Tripura, dated 10.4.1957.
65. Jagaran. 30.5.57.
66. Jagaran, 10.3.59, 11.3.59, 13.3.59, 15.3.59 and 17.3.59.
67. Tripura Katha, 25.9.60.
68. Tripura Katha, 2.4.1961.
69. Jagaran (editorial) 3.8.61.
70. Jagaran, 20.4.1960.
71. Tripura Katha, 16.5.1960.
72. Tripura Katha, 22.5.1960.
73. Ibid., 12.6.1960.
74. Tripura Katha, 16.10.1960.
75. Ibid., 17.11.1960.
76. Tripura Katha, 27.11.1960.
77. Ibid., 11.9.1960.
78. Ibid., 20.11.1960 and 27.11.1960.
79. Tripura Katha, 29.1.1961.
80. Jagaran, 2.8.1961.
81. Tripurar Katha, 7.9.1961.
82. Ibid, 20.12.1961.
83. Election Result, 1962.
84. Tripurar Katha, 14.3.1962.
85. Ibid., 27.2.1963.
86. Editorial, Tripura, 22.5.1963.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **STRUCTURE OF THE OPPOSITION**

#### **Opposition in the Territorial Assemblies :**

The first Territorial Assembly of Tripura was a bi-party Assembly at the beginning with the Congress Party in the Treasury benches and the C.P.I as the opposition. The party position in the Assembly was : the Congress-20 (18 elected and 2 nominated), and the C.P.I-12. The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly were Upendra Kumar Roy and Ershad Ali Choudhury respectively. The members of the council of Ministers were : Sachindra Lal Singh (Chief Minister), Sukhamoy Sengupta (Development Minister), and the three Deputy Ministers, Manindra Lal Bhowmik, Raj Prasad Chaudhury and Benode Behari Das. The Communist M.L.As were Nripen Chakraborty (Leader of the opposition), Bir Chandra Deb Barma (Deputy Leader), Promode Ranjan Dasgupta, Sudhanwa Deb Barma, Hemanta Deb Barma, Aghore Deb Barma, Atiqul Islam, Hlura Aung Mog, Sunil Kumar Chaudhury, Dinesh Deb Barma, Ramcharan Deb Barma and Bulu Kuki<sup>2</sup>. The Assembly was formally inaugurated by the Administrator Shri Santi Priya Mukherjee on the first day of July, 1963 and since then it started functioning under the provisions of the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963. After the split in the All India C P I and formation of the CPI(M) in Tripura in March, 1965, 8 M.L.As of the CPI joined the CPI(M). The opposition M.L.As who continued to remain in the C.P.I were Bir Chandra Deb Barma, Promode Ranjan Dasgupta (who defected to Congress in the first part of 1966), Aghore Deb Barma and Atiqul Islam<sup>3</sup>. This split, however did not lead to any disunity among the

opposition MLAs inside the Assembly. On the other hand, they stood unitedly as before against all the measures of the Government which they considered as anti-people.

In the election of 1967, the Congress bagged 27 out of 30 seats while the Communist parties together got 3 seats only (the C.P.I.(M)-2 and the C.P.I-1) <sup>4</sup>. The Communist parties alleged that the election was a rigged one. That the allegation had some substance in it was proved by the verdict of the Gauhati High court upholding the election case of Shri Biren Dutta, the C.P.I.(M) candidate of Tripura West parliamentary constituency <sup>5</sup>. The Supreme court, however, absolved the ruling party of the charge of rigging and declared the election of Shri J.K Chaudhury, the Congress M.P. from the constituency as valid <sup>6</sup>. The Second Territorial Assembly of Tripura was formed in March, 1967. It functioned upto June, 1971 and was dissolved in October, 1971, when President's Rule was imposed on the Territory. The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly were Manindra Lal Bhowmik and Usha Ranjan Sen respectively. The council of Ministers this time consisted of Sachindra Lal Singh (Chief Minister), Krishna Das Bhattacharjee (Finance Minister), Tarit Mohan Dasgupta (Labour Minister), and three Deputy Ministers, Raj Prasad Choudhury, Prafulla Ranjan Das and Mansur Ali <sup>7</sup>. The then Communist MLAs were Bidyachandra Deb Barma and Abhiram Deb Barma of the C.P.I(M) and Aghore Deb Barma of the C.P.I. Though much reduced in strength this time, the communist opposition took a united stand against all the steps of the Government which, in its opinion, went against popular interests.

### **Attainment of statehood.**

On 15th December, 1971, the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Bill, 1971 was passed in the Parliament and the bill received the assent of the President on 30th December 1971. Section 4 of the Act stated that "on and from the appointed day there shall be established a new state, to be known as the state of Tripura, comprising the territories which immediately before that day were comprised in the Union Territory of Tripura." The day of fulfilment of the hopes and aspirations of the people of Tripura came on January 21, 1972 when Tripura became a state of the Indian Union alongwith Manipur and Meghalaya by North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971. Under the provisions of the said Act, the number of Assembly seats of each of these new-born states was doubled from 30 to 60.

### **The Assembly Election of 1972 and the performance of the Opposition in the Election**

Shortly after Tripura attained statehood, the Election Commission announced its decision that election would be held in Tripura on 11th March, 1972 in order to constitute the state Assembly<sup>8</sup>. The state committee of the CPI(M) congratulated the decision and declared its resolve that it would take part in the ensuing election and would try to form a united front of all the democratic and progressive parties and forces in order to defeat the Congress and form an alternative Government in Tripura. But the CPI did not respond to the call and it posted its own candidates separately. The Congress Party contested in all the 60 seats in the election. The CPI(M) put up its candidates in 50 seats and gave 10 seats to the Independents supported

by it. The C.P.I put forward candidates in 11 seats in the election.

In the Election, the CPI(M) - led front won 18 seats (the CPI(M)-16 and independents with its support- 2) and the CPI got 1 seat. Out of a total of 5,00,988 valid votes, the CPI(M) and its allies polled 2,05,524 votes, Congress got 2,24,882 votes and other Parties and Independents together polled 74,582 votes <sup>9</sup>.

The Congress Party was thus voted to power again, but its majority was reduced considerably. Its representation fell from 27 (in 30-member Assembly) in 1967 to 41 (in 60-member Assembly) in 1972 and the percentage of votes fell from 60.84% in 1967 to 45.60% in 1972. The CPI(M), on the contrary, increased its representation from 2 in 1967 to 18 (including 2 Independents supported by it) in 1972 and the percentage of votes from 21.97% in 1967 to 41.03 % (inclusive of votes polled by Independent candidates with its support) in 1972 <sup>10</sup>. Thus, by securing only 4.57 percent more votes, the Congress got 23 more seats than the CPI(M) - led front in 1972.

This time, the CPI(M) won 12 out of 19 seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes whereas it got only 2 out of 9 S.T. reserved seats in the election of 1967. In the 12 S.T. reserved seats it won, the party got a total of 52,288 votes as against 31,042 votes polled by the Congress. The Congress party secured 31,678 votes in the 7 S.T. reserved seats it won as against 21,666 votes polled by the CPI(M). Thus the CPI(M) got a total of 74,894 Tribal votes in the Election whereas Congress share of Tribal votes was 67,720 <sup>11</sup>. The CPI(M) won its Tribal votes by an average margin of 1766 votes. It won by highest margin in

Kalyanpur seat (7267 votes) and by Lowest margin in Chellagong seat (43 votes). The Congress won by highest margin in Kulaihaor constituency (1722 votes) and by lowest margin in Pabiacherra constituency (644 votes) <sup>12</sup>. The performance of the CPI(M) in the constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes and in the open constituencies was, however, very poor where it and its allies together got only 6 (4 in its own ticket, 2 independents with its support) out of a total of 41 seats. The alliance got only 1 out of 6 Scheduled Caste reserved seats and 5 out of 35 open seats. It is, however, worthy of note in this context that the party could not win a single seat from either of these categories in the election of 1967 and also that, this time, it lost 9 open seats to the Congress by a harrow margin ranging from 21 to 500 votes <sup>13</sup>. Out of the remaining 21 open seats, the Congress won 5 seats by a margin of 501 to 1000 votes, 6 seats by 1001 to 1500 votes, 4 seats by 1501 to 2000 votes, 5 seats by 2001 to 3000 votes and 1 seat by 3301 votes. In the 6 Scheduled Caste reserved constituencies, the distribution of the total votes polled was : Congress-24,850 and the CPI(M) led front - 21,759 <sup>14</sup>.

The results of the Election show that the CPI(M) remarkably improved its strength at the expense of the Congress Party. It regained its grip on the Tribal votes and improved its position remarkably in the plains. The Congress party, of course, improved its position than that in 1962, but its strength was much reduced in comparison with its performance in 1967. The C.P.I. was reduced to ignominy compared to its performance as undivided party in 1962. It, however, retained the position it held in 1967. On the other hand, the CPI(M) remarkably increased its

strength by capturing 18 seats as against only 2 seats in 1967. Its voting strength also increased from 92,239 in 1967 to 2,05,524 in 1972 <sup>15</sup>.

### **Opposition in the State Assembly.**

The first State Assembly of Tripura first met in the Assembly Building, Agartala on Wednesday, the 29th March, 1972 at 11 A.M. and on that day Manindra Lal Bhowmik and Usha Ranjan Sen were unanimously elected as Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly. Governor Shri B.K. Nehru addressed before the members of the Assembly on 31.3.1972, but before he started his speech, all the opposition M.L.As excepting the CPI member left the House protesting against the alleged attack on Parliamentary democracy all over India by the ruling Congress Party <sup>15</sup>. The party position in the Assembly was: Congress-41, CPI(M)-16, Independents (supported by the CPI(M)-2), and CPI-1. The members of the council of Ministers were : Sukhamoy Sengupta (Chief Minister), Monorranjan Nath, Haricharan Chowdhury, Debendra Kishore Chaudhury, Kshitish Chandra Das and three Deputy Ministers, Mansur Ali, Basana Chakraborty and Sailesh Chandra Shome <sup>16</sup>. In April, 1971, Krishna Das Bhattacharjee and Tarit Mohan Dasgupta were inducted in the council of Ministers. The CPI(M) MLAs in the Assembly were : Nripen Chakraborty (Leader of the Opposition), Anil Sarkar (Deputy Leader), Sudhanwa Deb Barma (Chief whip), Bajuban Reang, Bulu Kuki, Gunapada Jamatia, Kalidas Deb Barma, Manindra Deb Barma, Niranjana Deb, Bidyachandra Deb Barma, Abhiram Deb Barma, Pakhi Tripura, Samar Chaudhury, Radha Raman Debnath, Purna Mohan Tripura and Bhadramani Deb Barma. The independent members with the support



of the CPI(M) were : Ajoy Biswas and Amarendra Sharma. The only CPI member was Jitendra Lal Das <sup>18</sup>.

At the beginning, the CPI member joined hands with the CPI(M) MLAs in opposing all the measures of the party in power which the Opposition considered undemocratic and contrary to public interest. This understanding was noticed at the time of the biennial election of a member from Tripura to Rajya Sabha in 1974 also in which the CPI candidate Bir Chandra Deb Barma was supported by the CPI(M) and the Independent members and was elected to Rajya Sabha taking advantage of the factional infighting of the party in power. On 21st May, 1975, 8 MLAs of the Opposition including its leader were arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, 1971 and the CPI MLA, in his short speech, strongly condemned the Government action and walked out from the House as a mark of protest against the arrest. But as soon as the 'Emergency' was declared, the CPI MLA changed his policy and began to give conditional support to the ruling party in the Assembly in pursuance of the policy of his all India party. This policy continued during the period of 'Emergency' and a few months after that.

The Assembly functioned upto March, 1977 with the Congress party in power and in April, the Congress Government fell as most of the Congress MLAs defected to the newly formed CFD \* party and then, the first coalition Government of Tripura was formed with the CFD and the CPI(M) and it lasted for 4 months. Then most of the CFD MLAs defected to the Janata Party and the Janata-CPI(M) Coalition Government came about and it lasted upto November, 1977 and then the Government fell and

the Assembly was dissolved and President's Rule was imposed on the state and that marked the end of the first state Assembly of Tripura.

### **The legislative means applied by the Opposition in the Territorial Assembly and the State Assembly.**

During 8 years' duration of the two Territorial Assemblies (1963-71), the Assembly met in 22 sessions covering 254 days. The yearwise break-up of the number of the sessions were: 1963-1, 1963-3, 1966-2, 1967-3, 1968-3, 1979-3 and 1971-2. The total period of time utilised in deliberation of the Territorial Assemblies was 1,270 hours approximately and the opposition properly utilised this time through the various legislative media available, e.g., amendments on motion of thanks to Administrator's and Lieutenant Governor's addresses, budget discussions and cut motions against demands for grants, questions, call attentions, adjournment motions and private members bills, resolutions and motions. Though Sub-section ii of section 9 of the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 provided that the Administrator "may address the Legislative Assembly and may for that purpose require the attendance of members",<sup>19</sup> the Administrator of the Territory started addressing the House from the year 1967 and in 1970 he was replaced by a Lieutenant Governor and the latter delivered Addresses before the House in the year 1970 and 1971. The opposition members took part in the discussions on the motions of thanks to the Address and moved a number of amendments to the motions. Again, they actively took part in each budget discussion and moved a number of cut motions on the demands for grants. Information regarding the numbers of questions, motions and resolutions admitted during 1963-66 and

1967-70 may be had from the following table <sup>20</sup>.

**TABLE**

	<u>1963-66</u>	<u>1967-70</u>
Questions given notices of -	1838	3,620
Questions admitted -	1534	3,267
Motions given notices of -	11	20
Motions admitted -	10	17
Resolutions given notices of -	62	231
Resolutions admitted -	55	171

In 1971, another 1227 questions and 4 resolutions were admitted. Besides, 121 call attentions and 22 private members' Bill and motions were initiated by the Opposition during this period. Side by side, it regularly took part in the debates on Government bills, resolutions and motions. Through the main legislative means like amendments on motions of thanks to Administrator's and Lieutenant Governor's addresses, budget discussions and cut motions against demands for grants, private members' bills, resolutions and motions, the Opposition raised and fought a number of issues on the floor of the House. Through the questions and call attentions, the Opposition ventilated public grievances in the Assembly and secured discussions on such questions as agitated public minds and tried to impress on the Government to solve them.

During the period 1972-76, the House assembled in 15 sessions covering 144 days. The year-wise break-up of the period was : 1972-25 days, 1973-32 days, 1974-30 days, 1975-33 days and 1976-25 days <sup>21</sup>. A total of approximately

720 hours' time was utilised in the deliberations of the Assembly and the Opposition was given a good share of that time. The Opposition fully and effectively utilised that time through different legislative means at its disposal, e.g. amendments on motions of thanks to Governor's addresses, budget discussions and cut motions against demands for grants, questions, short discussions, motions against demands for grants and private members bills, resolutions and motions. The opposition members took part in the discussions on the motions of thanks to the Governor's addresses and moved a number of amendments to the notions. They also actively participated in each budget discussion and moved a number of cut motions against the demands for grants. The total number of resolutions and motions as raised and fought by the Opposition during the period was 22 and 6 respectively. Further, 6 short discussions, 90 call attentions and 5 adjournment motions were raised by the opposition members <sup>22</sup>. Moreover, they actively participated in the discussions on Government bills, resolutions and motions. Through these legislative media, they raised and fought a good number of issues in the Assembly.

The issues and problems as highlighted by the Opposition during the period 1963-76 may be brought under three broad categories: Political, social and economic. A detailed estimate of how the opposition members dealt with those social, economic and political issues through the various legislative means during the period under review will now be given in Chapters Three Four and Five. In so doing, special attention will be given to the issues receiving priorities from opposition members and the way they handled them in order to see whether these issues

and the pattern of their treatment at the hands of Opposition at the legislative level have given a unique character to the legislative Opposition in Tripura.

1. Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings, dated 7.10.63. p.1. of the preface. (In all subsequent footnotes, Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings will be referred to in its abbreviated form T.L.A.P.).

2. Ibid., p. II of the preface.

3. Chakraborty, Bires, op. cit., dated 7.4.1965, p.1.

4. Results of Election, Tripura (1967), Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Government of Tripura, Agartala.

5. The "Tripura", Agartala, 14.6.1968, p.1.

6. Ibid., 9.1.1969, p.1.

7. T.L.A.P., 14.3.1967, p.1 of the Preface.

8. Desher Katha, Weekly in Bengali, ed. Biren Dutta. dt. 17.12.71 & 24.12. 1972.

9. Results of Election, Tripura (1972), Election Department, Government of Tripura, Agartala.

10. Calculated from Results of Election, Tripura, 1967 and 1972.

11. Ibid. Calculated from Results of Election, Tripura, 1972.

12. Ibid.

13. Calculated from Election Results, Tripura (1972).

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. T.L.A.P., 31.3.1972, p.1.

17. Ibid., 29.3.1972, p.1.

18. Ibid., p.2.

\*1. The full name of the Party was the Centre For Democracy and it was formed by Jagjivan Ram in the wake of the Emergency (1975).

19. Section 9 of the Union Territories Act, 1963.

20. T.L.A.P., 13.4.1971, p.67 (From the statement of the Speaker Shri M.L. Bhowmik which he made in order to refute the charges brought against him by the Opposition in course of discussion on a motion for his removal from the Speakership).

21. Calculated from the Proceedings of the Tripura Assembly.

22. Ibid.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **OPPOSITION AND THE POLITICAL ISSUE**

Among the Political issues that the opposition raised and fought in the Assembly, the important ones were : protest against arrest and detention of the leaders and workers of the political and democratic movements and demand for their release, demands for judicial enquiries and withdrawal of cases against leaders and workers of popular and political movements, criticism of the activities of the police, national integration and some other issues of national and international importance, corruption in administration, local self government, demand for the revocation of the state of emergency (1962) and the repeal of the DIR, and protest against "curbs" on civic and political rights during the 1975 emergency. It is, thus, clear that some of the issues were local and regional, and the others were national and international in character. We shall first discuss how the Opposition dealt with the local and regional issues, and then, some light will be thrown on the role of the Opposition in handling the national and international political issues of the period under discussion.

#### **The Local and Regional Issues.**

##### **A. Demand for release of the leaders and workers of the political and democratic movements and for classification of the detenues.**

The leaders and workers of the political and democratic movements of Tripura were arrested and detained in jails many a time during the period under review. The legislative opposition strongly protested against those arrests and

detention, and pressurised the Government for their release and for extension of classification and other facilities to the detainees. The issue was raised 29 times in the Assembly in the forms of amendments to the motions of thanks to Governor's addresses, budget discussions, adjournment motions, and private members' resolutions and motions. A short account of how the opposition dealt with the issue at different points of time inside the Assembly is given below.

The Opposition raised the demand for release of political prisoners in the very oath-taking ceremony <sup>1</sup> of the first Territorial Assembly of Tripura. After the oath-taking and the address of the Chief Minister was over, it sharply criticised the Government for keeping the opposition members under detention and thus depriving them of their legitimate right to take part in the deliberations of the Assembly. It criticised the Central Government also for keeping the leaders and cadres of the CPI all over India under detention for months without trial <sup>1</sup>. On 26th July, 1963, the Communist MLAs boycotted the election of the Speaker in protest against the detention of 8 MLAs and 2 MPs of their party and after they left the House, U.K. Roy was unanimously elected speaker of the Assembly. In October 1963 again, the Opposition raised its voice against detention of its members and appealed to the Government to release the detained MLAs so that the Assembly might become full and the elected members arrested might discharge their duties and responsibilities to the people of Tripura by participating in the Assembly proceedings <sup>2</sup>. The Chief Minister turned down the appeal and stated that the detention of the Communist leaders was fully justified as they were all supporters of Communist China.

The Opposition strongly repudiated the allegation stating that, on the contrary, the communist party of Tripura had strongly condemned the crossing of Indian border by the Chinese army at the time of the Sino-Indian Border dispute and after that, and that it had wholeheartedly supported the steps taken by Prime Minister Nehru for the country's defence <sup>3</sup>. In March, 1964 again, the Opposition gave notice for adjournment motion to discuss the issue of release of the political prisoners. But as the Speaker did not entertain the motion, all the members of the Opposition boy-cotted the discussion on supplementary budget for 1963-64. They, however, participated in the budget discussion after a portion of the detained MLAs and workers of the CPI were released. By the end of September, 1964, the 2 MPs, 5 remaining M.L.As and other members of the CPI were released.

On 12.3.1965, the Opposition raised the demand of immediate release of all political prisoners who were kept in detention under D.I.R., 1962 since December, 1964. It emphatically stated that the charges brought against the communist leaders and cadres were totally false. What happened actually was that these leaders and workers were arrested and detained under D.I.R. for leading the food movement in Tripura in December, 1964 <sup>2</sup>. It alleged that the state of emergency was kept alive not for the defence of India but for the sake of the 'big money bags', black marketeers and profiteers. It concluded reiterating its demand for trial of the detained leaders and workers or for their immediate release. But no heed was paid to the demand <sup>4</sup>. On the following day, all the opposition members staged a walk-out from the Assembly as a mark of protest against the arrest of 3 leaders of the CPI(M). <sup>3</sup> In the



evening session of the day, a CPI member raised the issue of arrest in the Assembly and he severely criticised the Government action. In November, 1965 again, the Opposition raised the issue of fresh arrest of some CPI and CPI(M) leaders in September, 1965. <sup>4</sup> It severely criticised the 'high handed' step of the Government and urged it to release the political prisoners immediately including elected representatives of the people so that they might take active part in the civil defence of the country, and thus strengthen the country's defence <sup>5</sup>. But no heed was paid to the request.

In March, 1966, the Opposition raised the demand that "Whereas 8 detainees of Tripura including 2 MPs and 2 MLAs are in detention without trial for about 2 years and some of them are ailing from various diseases, the Government of Tripura should immediately release them." It alleged that by keeping the leaders under detention for months without trial, the Government snatched away their constitutional and democratic right and the right of their electorates as well. The party in power took recourse to that policy in order to fulfil its narrow party interest and to take political revenge on the Opposition, it viewed. It concluded requesting the Government to release the detained leaders without any further delay, but no attention was paid to its request <sup>6</sup>. The detained leaders were released after the Tashkent Agreement in April, 1966.

On 29.8.1966 again, the Opposition raised in the assembly the incident of Police firing of the previous day<sup>5</sup> in which 2 teenagers were killed and several others were wounded, and it vehemently criticised the role of the Government in the matter. It demanded strongly that the Chief Minister must take immediate personal initiative to

stop repression by Police and the homeguards and to give adequate compensation to the bereaved families. It also expressed the hope that the Chief Minister would honour his own commitment to start a judicial enquiry of the sad incident and punish the guilty. The Opposition also gave notice of an adjournment motion on "the serious situation created by brutal lathicharges of police at Agartala on 28.8.1966", <sup>7</sup> which was accepted by the Speaker and the date for discussion on the motion was fixed on 30.8.1966. But in the night of 29th August, 4 CPI(M) MLAs- Nripen Chakraborty, Ramcharan Deb Barma, Sudhawana Deb Barma and Sunil Chaudhury, Dasarath Deb (M.P) and CPI(M) leaders Chitta Chanda and Benu Sen were arrested and detained in Jail for alleged "Subversive activities and action likely to endanger the safety and stability of the state and inciting agitations against public servants". The remaining opposition MLAs boy-cotted the rest of the session in protest against the arrest and detention of the CPI(M) leaders. The adjournment motion that was accepted for discussion fell through as the members giving notice of the same were absent. The arrested leaders were released on bail in November, 1966.

In March, 1968, the only CPI member in the Assembly boycotted the policy statement of the Administrator and left the House for the day protesting against arrest and detention of some leaders and workers of the CPI(M) including both the MLAs of the party in the month of February of that year <sup>\*6</sup>. He also raised a point of order on the issue on 26th March and on that the Speaker gave the ruling that the CPI(M) leaders were arrested under section 2(1) (2) of the Preventive Detention Act for their act of inciting the people to destroy forest plantation within the

Reserve Area. 8 detenues of the CPI(M) including Abhiram Deb Barma, MLA were released in April, but a good number of leaders and cadres of the party continued to remain in prison. The Opposition raised the issue in the Assembly in the month of August and it vehemently criticised the Government for keeping the CPI(M) leaders under detention without trial. It argued that if the charges brought against the detenues were authentic, the Government could start specific cases against them, but it would not do that as the charges were all got up and baseless. The only 'motive' behind their detention was to weaken the Opposition, it alleged. It, therefore, strongly demanded that the detenues should be released without further delay <sup>9</sup>. But the demand was turned down. The detenues were released in March, 1969.

The Opposition was equally vocal in the state Assembly in its protest against the arrest and detention of the leaders and workers of the political and democratic movements. Thus, in March, 1973, it strongly protested against the arrest and detention of a large number of agitators during the food movement of the year, and alleged that it appeared from the Government attitude that it sought to drown the movement in blood. It strongly demanded that the detenues must be released immediately and appropriate measures be taken for solving the acute food problem that prevailed at that time <sup>10</sup>. A portion of the arrested people were released subsequently, but harassment of a large number of them continued as several cases were instituted against them. In March, 1974 again, the opposition members complained that a large number of members and supporters of the left parties and particularly of the CPI(M), and workers of

democratic movements had been kept behind bars for long and a large number had been implicated in false cases and repressive measures were being taken against them. For all that, democratic movements were marching ahead day by day enlisting the support of larger and larger numbers of struggling masses and preparing the path of the future struggle, it asserted. It then urged the Government to give up its highhanded policy and to release the prisoners, but in vain <sup>11</sup>. The opposition also brought the allegation that the police went on arresting the leaders and workers of democratic movements and detaining them in jail for years without placing reports and making chargesheets against them. It strongly condemned the practice and demanded immediate release of the detenues, but no heed was paid to its demand <sup>12</sup>.

Similarly, on 10.3.1975, the opposition raised discussion on the incident of police-firing on some tribal agitators of Belonia <sup>17</sup> resulting in the death of a local leader and subsequent arrest and detention of a good number of agitators. It strongly condemned the police action and raised the demand for immediate release of the detenues and for withdrawal of arrest warrants, but to no effect <sup>13</sup>. On 13.3.75 again, it raised the allegation that "repeated" attacks were being levelled against the democratic movements by the party in power. It alleged in that connection that even murder cases were being instituted against the workers of the democratic movements and that they were being detained in jail and tortured there for years together. But those 'evil' designs would not be able to stop the advance of democratic movements, it asserted. In support of the assertion, it pointed out that thousands of students started civil disobedience movements and

were courting arrests, the workers of mills and factories, the employees, the peasants, landless farmers and land labourers had been carrying forward their movements in the face of all threats, arrests, repressions and terror tactics. It, therefore, urged the Government to discontinue its attacks on the democratic movements and to release the leaders and workers of the movements, but the Government paid no attention to the request <sup>14</sup>.

On 19.3.1975, the Opposition raised the issue of arrest of some of its MLAs and some employee leaders on the eve of the continuous strike of the employees <sup>13</sup>. The members of the Opposition started creating obstruction in the functioning of the House from the very start in the demand of discussing their adjournment motion about the arrest of the MLAs and the employee leaders, and the speaker had to adjourn the House thrice. When the House met next, 6 MLAs of the CPI(M) were suspended from the services of the House upto 21.3.1975 following a motion moved by the Chief Minister <sup>15</sup>. At this, the pandemonium started again and the speaker adjourned the House till 12.30 P.M of 20.3.75. The same was the picture of the Assembly at 12.30 P.M. of 20th and 21st March and the Speaker adjourned the House till 12.30 P.M of 28th March, 1975. Due to the pandemonium from the very start on 29.3.1975, the questions could not be replied orally and hence the Ministers had to lay the replies on the table of the House. After the question hour was over, Amarendra Sharma enquired of the Speaker about the fate of his adjournment motion on the strike of the Government employes and the Speaker informed him that it was still in the consideration stage <sup>16</sup>. Next, Sudhanwa Deb Barma regretted that though 11 days of the employees' strike were already over, the

House was still in the dark regarding the steps taken by the Government for the solution of the problem. He could not proceed further due to a pandemonium created by the Treasury benchers and the speaker adjourned the House upto 3 P.M. <sup>17</sup>. When the House met next, the speaker informed the members that he received intimation from the District Magistrate (West Tripura) that Shri Nripen Chakraborty had been arrested under the MISA, 1971 and had been detained in the Agartala Central Jail. <sup>18</sup>. Immediately after the announcement, pandemonium started and continued and amidst that noise, Tripura land Revenue and land Reforms Bill, 1975 was moved and passed without any discussion and after that, the speaker declared that the House would adjourn 'sine die' <sup>19</sup>. The strike of the employes was withdrawn unconditionally on 1st April at the request of some congress MLAs who assured the employees that they would persuade the Government to concede their justified demands, but to little effect. <sup>19</sup> The arrested MLAs were released on the eve of the Assembly session that started on and from 8th May, 1975.

Likewise, in May, 1975 the opposition strongly protested against the arrest of 8 of its members <sup>20</sup> including its leader on the eve of the budget session of 1975-76. Opposition members Ajoy Biswas, Jitendra Lal Das, Bulu Kuki and Bidyachandra Deb Barma, in their speeches in the Assembly strongly condemned the Government action. Jitendra Lal Das walked out of the House protesting against the arrest of the MLAs and before that, he demanded that the arrested MLAs should be released immediately so that they could take part in the deliberations of the Assembly. <sup>20</sup> Ajoy Biswas then moved

an adjournment motion on the arrest of the MLAs, but it was rejected and as a result, the opposition members went on creating obstructions in the functioning of the House and the House had to be adjourned for some time. When the House met next, the Deputy speaker announced that the House condemned the conduct of Sarbasree Amarendra Sharma, Ajoy Biswas and Bidyachandra Deb Barma and ordered that they should withdraw forthwith and subsequently they were suspended from the services of the House for the remaining part of the session following a motion moved by the Chief Minister to that effect.<sup>21</sup> On 23.5.1975, the speaker informed the House that he received intimation from the District Magistrate, West Tripura that 4 opposition MLAs, viz, Purnomohan Tripura, Amerendra Sharma, Ajoy Biswas and Bidyachandra Deb Barma were arrested on 22nd May under Maintenance of Internal Security Act and lodged in the Central Jail, Agartala.<sup>22</sup> The CPI(M) MLAs who stayed outside the prison-bars boycotted the Budget session of the year as a mark of protest against the arrest and detention of the leaders and members of the party.

The arrested MLAs were detained in jail for nineteen months. Further, a good number of leaders and workers of the CPI(M) were arrested and detained in jails immediately after the declaration of 'Emergency' and at different points of time after that, and subsequently, a good number of the detenues were sent to the Vellore jail of Tamilnadu. In March, 1976, the CPI(M) members in the Assembly raised the issue and they urged the Government to transfer all the political prisoners of Tripura from the Vellore jail to Agartala Central Jail. They stated with grave concern that they got the information that some of the prisoners

had fallen seriously ill due to scarcity of water, shortage of food supply and lack of proper treatment.<sup>23</sup> They sharply criticised the Government action and commented that the step of the Government to send its prisoners to a faraway state compared well with the practise of transporation of prisoners as was prevalent during the days of the British Imperialists. It was a paradox that the Government always talked of democracy and in practice, the leaders and members of the Opposition were being detained and tortured in the jail of a remote state in the name of the same democracy, they added.<sup>24</sup> The demand of the Opposition to bring back the prisoners from the Vellore jail was turned down ultimately.

When the demand of transferring prisoners from Tamilnadu was rejected, the CPI(M) members urged the Government to bring all the political prisoners under 'C' category and extend to them all the facilities that were provided for in the catagory. They alleged that the manner in which the Government arrested the leaders and workers of the political and democratic movements and kept them in the jail (without giving them the status of political prisoners) proved that its attitude was undemocratic vindictive inhuman. The Government propogated every now and then that the emergency was proclaimed in order to put the 'Right' reactionaries under check, but in actual practice, the leaders and workers of the CPI(M) and the students and youths of Tripura who fought for democracy and individual liberty were now put behind the prison bars, they added. Had the Government treated the detenues as political prisoners and given them the status to which they were entitled, it could be considered that the action was worthy of a Government of a free country. But far from



doing that, the prisoners were being kept in jails as ordinary prisoners<sup>25</sup>. Thus, the Government turned down the demand of the Opposition for treating all the detenues as political prisoners and to put them under the 'C' category. It, however, extended the facilities of classification to those prisoners who belonged to recognised political parties. The leaders and workers of the political and democratic movements were released after the state of emergency was lifted in November, 1976.

From the above discussion, it clearly follows that the Opposition availed itself of every opportunity to protest against the arrest and detention of the leaders and workers of the political and democratic movements, and to persuade the Government to give due 'classification' to the detenues and it attained some success in its attempt. Thus, the constant pressure of the opposition members during the period 1963-64 went a long way for the release of the leaders and cadres of the CPI from arrest and detention. During the period from December, 1964 to March, 1966 also, the Opposition exerted much pressure on the Government for the release of its members, but as the Government attitude was very stiff this time, the pressure was not fruitful. The Government took the advantage of a weak Opposition during the period 1967-69 to ignore the pressures exerted by the Opposition for the release of the political prisoners. During the period from March, 1973 to March, 1975, the Opposition attained some success in this regard, but its pressure was almost ineffective during the emergency as the Government was then well-equipped with 'emergency' powers to ignore all the pressures of the Opposition. Further, the scope of the Opposition members to raise the issue in the Assembly during the emergency

was curtailed to a great extent by the Government motion that was moved at the beginning of almost each session that "..... only Government business be transacted during the session and no other business whatsoever including questions, calling attention or any other business to be initiated by a private member be brought before or transacted in the House during the session ...." <sup>26</sup>

### **B. Demand for judicial enquiries and withdrawal of cases against leaders and workers of popular and political movements.**

Several militant popular and political movements took place in Tripura during the period under review and Police opened fire on the agitated gatherings which sometimes resulted in death and injury to some people. The legislative opposition strongly condemned those incidents of firing and demanded judicial enquiries into the incidents and punishments of the guilty. It also demanded time and again that the cases instituted against the leaders and workers of those and other movements should be withdrawn, though with limited success. The issue was raised 19 times in the Assembly by the Opposition through legislative media like amendments on the motions of thanks to Lieutenant Governor's and Governor's addresses, budget discussions, adjournment motions, discussions on Government motions and private members' resolutions and motions. An estimate of the role played by the Opposition in handling the issue is given hereunder.

During the food movement of 1967 <sup>21</sup>, one agitator named Gouranga Das was killed in police firing at Udaipur and some agitators were arrested from Udaipur and Kailashahar. As the Assembly was not in session then, the

incidents could not be raised in the Assembly for discussion. Subsequently, the demands for judicial enquiry into the death of Gouranga Das, release of detenués of the food movement and withdrawal of all cases against them were voiced several times on the floor of the Assembly by the Opposition MLAs, and the pressure was to some extent effective. The prisoners of the movement were released in December, 1967, but no step was taken towards judicial enquiry and withdrawal of cases against the agitators.

During the food movement in Kamalpur in 1968<sup>12</sup> again, an agitator was killed in police-firing and several others were wounded. As the Assembly was not in session then, that incident could not be raised for discussion. In the August session of the Assembly, a private members' resolution was moved on the incident on behalf of the Opposition condemning the incident of policefiring and demanding immediate judicial enquiry into the incident and punishment of the guilty. Members from both sides participated in the discussion on the resolution and after a prolonged and heated debate, the resolution was put to vote and lost.<sup>27</sup>

Again, in March, 1969, a farmer of Kailashahar named Rabindra Malakar died as a result of indiscriminate lathi and baton charges by the police and some other farmers were wounded<sup>28</sup>. On 20th March, an opposition member moved a Private members' Resolution in the Assembly demanding "a commission of enquiry with retired judge of a High court to enquire into the cause which led to the death of Rabindra Malakar" and punishment of the guilty<sup>29</sup>. Speaking in support of the resolution, another member warned that if the Government continued to snatch the hard-earned foodgrains of the poor peasants in that manner

in total disregard of its own procurement policy, they would be left with no option but to resist such move at any cost<sup>30</sup>. After a heated debate, the resolution was rejected by the Government side. The Opposition launched a vigorous movement all over Tripura and observed a 'Tripura Bandh' in protest against the shocking incident and the 'reactionary' food procurement drive of the Government.

In August, 1970, police opened fire at Melaghar on an agitated gathering organised by the local Unemployed Association and a student named Kajal Barman was killed in the firing.<sup>31</sup> This incident created serious repercussions all over Tripura and it added fuel to the fire of factional feud in the ruling party also that had its roots in the split of the party at national level in November, 1969. On 15th September, 1970 Chief Minister Shri Singh moved a motion that "The incident at Melaghar on the 20th August, 1970 in which firing took place be taken into consideration." An amendment on the motion was jointly moved by D.K Chaudhury of the congress and Aghore DebBarma of the C.P.I. that after the word 'consideration on the subject of incident at Melaghar, the following should be added --" And having considered the same, the House requests the Government of Tripura for Judicial enquiry." After the movers of the amendment made their speech, Bidyachandra Deb Barma and Abhiram Deb Barma of the CPI(M) and Promode Dasgupta and U.K.Roy of the Congress spoke strongly supporting the amendment and some members from the Government side opposed it. While the Government side advocated a Magisterial enquiry, the movers and supporters of the amendment firmly demanded judicial enquiry and vehemently opposed

Magisterial enquiry arguing that there was every likelihood of its being partial, farcical and tempered and hence it would not serve the purpose of finding out the guilty.<sup>31</sup> After a prolonged and heated debate, the amendment was voted down and the motion moved by the Chief Minister was accepted. The amendment was lost, but the factional infighting of the ruling party was brought to light by the amendment.

It is evident from the above discussion that all the demands of the Opposition for starting judicial enquiries into the police firings that took place in different places of Tripura at different points of time during the period under discussion were turned down by the Government side on the floor of the Assembly. But the demands were fulfilled to some extent at least ultimately and this fact is evident from a Government Statement that showed that the commissions were set up to enquire into the police firings at Agartala in 1966 and at Kamalpur in 1968 and they submitted their reports and those had been under examination of the Government<sup>32</sup>.

The Opposition also carried on constant criticisms against the steps taken by the Government against democratic movements and it strongly pressurised the Government to withdraw cases against the leaders and workers of the movements. Thus, throughout the whole of the year 1969, number of democratic movements were launched by the Government employees, workers, peasants, students and youths of Tripura for fulfilment of their demands. All those movements were dealt with in an iron hand and hundreds of cases were instituted against the leaders and workers of the movements. In March 1970, the legislative opposition raised the demand that all such

cases must be withdrawn immediately. It complained that though the Government assured time and again that the cases would be withdrawn, the assurances were honoured more in breaches.<sup>33</sup> In the budget session of the year, the Opposition alleged that while the cases instituted in connection with the food movement of Udaipur, and the food procurement drive resulting in the death of Rabindra Malakar of Kailashahar were still kept pending, more than one thousand cases in connection with the conflicts of the tribals of Amarpur, Karbook and Silaichari with the Forest department were kept pending in order to harass the innocent tribals. Despite repeated demand of the Opposition and the assurances of the Government, no step towards withdrawal of those cases was taken, it added<sup>34</sup>.

In April 1972 again, an opposition member raised a number of complaints in support of his allegation that the Government carried on 'attacks' on democratic movements. He pointed out that about three years back, some cases were started against the workers of the tea-gardens of Dharmanagar and Kailashahar who resorted to strike in demand of wage rise. Cases were lodged against the students and youths also who launched a sympathetic strike in support of the movement, he added. Thenceforth, those people had to appear before the courts of the S.D.Os of Kailashahar and Dharmanagar and also the judicial courts of Agartala at regular intervals in order to secure bails. Likewise, some tribal and non-tribal women and some landless peasants of Paratia and Gorgi areas of Udaipur causing reclaimed some khas lands and were cultivating there; but the officials of the Forest department attacked them, forcibly occupied that land and instituted cases against them. The cases were still continuing in the

courts of Udaipur untold harassment to those people. Similarly, in Bainkhora area of Belonia, more than a hundred land dispute cases were continuing and the poor innocent people were being subjected to attacks, eviction and harassment. Land dispute cases were continuing in Mahabir Tea Garden of Kamalpur also where attempts were being made to evict the landless peasants from the khas lands they had been occupying for long and cases were continuing against them. Narrating thus, the member requested the Government to give up the policy of continuing 'attacks' on the democratic rights of the people and on democratic movements.<sup>35</sup>

Another opposition member regretted eviction of thousands of jhumias who had been carrying on shifting cultivation in the reserved forest areas ever since 1952 and even earlier, and demanded withdrawal of false cases against them. He stated with regret that those people had been evicted from the khas lands they had been occupying in total disregard of Rule 10 of the Forest rules which provided that the jhumias who had been carrying on shifting cultivation in the khas lands would be allowed to continue the practice so long as they were not suitably rehabilitated. To worsen the situation, hundreds of false cases were instituted against those jhumias in order to harass them, he alleged. He concluded urging the Government to de-reserve the cultivable land within the reserved forest areas and distribute the same among the landless jhumias, and to withdraw the 'false' cases against some of them.<sup>36</sup> But Government did not pay and heed to the demands and suggestions of the opposition.

Similarly, in March, 1973, a resolution was moved on behalf of the opposition requesting the Government to

give tenancy rights to the landless peasants on the 'khas' land they had been occupying for long. In course of discussion on the resolution, the opposition members pointed out that the lands that the landless peasants reclaimed within the reserved forest area were being occupied by the forest department in a comprehensive scale. Further, hundreds of false cases were being instituted against those peasants in order to evict and harass them. Hence, they requested the Government to put a stop to the eviction process immediately and to withdraw the cases against the poor landless peasants. After a heated debate, the resolution was voted down.<sup>37</sup>

In March, 1974 again, the opposition gave reference to some specific incidents in which the Government allegedly used the police against the processions and demonstrations of the unemployed youths for jobs; for evicting the landless jhumias from the Government land they had been occupying; and for suppressing the movement of the famine-stricken people for food and ration. In Golakpur Tea garden of Kailashahar, for instance, the labourers struck work in demand of wage rise, supply of regular rations and some other vital demands; and the police and C.R.P. who were sent there, tortured the labourers, set fire on their houses, arrested the leading workers and sent them to jail, it added. It, therefore, requested the Government to release the prisoners of the democratic movements and to withdraw cases against them and other participants of the movements, but no heed was paid to its request.<sup>38</sup>

From the above discussion, it is evident that the opposition attained partial success so far as its demands for judicial enquiries were concerned. But its pressures for withdrawal of cases against leaders and workers of popular



and political movements were almost ineffective . The Government, of course, gave assurance to withdraw the cases in the face of consistent opposition demand, but precious little was done in practice in that regard.

### **C. Criticism of the activities of the Police.**

The legislative opposition in Tripura raised its voice consistently against the 'excesses' of the police during the period under review. It levelled severe criticisms against police budgets also, alleging that those aimed at taking 'Political revenge' on the members and supporters of the opposition Parties, especially the communist Parties. It alleged further that the "ever fattening" police budgets were meant for curtailing the civic and political rights of the masses and for suppressing the growing democratic movements. The issue was raised 28 times in the Assembly through budget discussions, debates on Governor's addresses, and private members' resolutions and motions. An account of the role played by the Opposition in this regard is furnished below.

The Opposition strongly and continuously protested against the Government policy of opening and maintenance of the police out-posts in the interior parts of Tripura. In support of opening new outposts in some interior areas of Tripura, Chief Minister Shri Singh stated in October, 1963 that " ..... there are several pockets within our territory that had so long remained cut off from the effective control of Administration due to difficulties in the means of communication. The result was that unruly elements had got opportunities and had carried out their nefarious activities <sup>39</sup>. Protesting against the opening of new outposts and challenging the statement of the Chief

Minister, an opposition member said, "..... I request the Hon'ble Minister to mention the name of any place within the Territory of Tripura where in course of last ten years for want of administrative machinery, taxes could not be realised or where Government Tehsil or collection centres were destroyed or parallel Government was formed and anti-social activities started necessitating establishment of police outposts. I am sure the Hon'ble Minister will fail to name any such place. " He, therefore, demanded that the police budget should be replaced by a new one framed in conformity with the 'present' situation. He also requested the Government not to let police be utilised for the purpose of 'taking political revenge' on the Opposition. <sup>40</sup> In March, 1964 again the Opposition brought the allegation that the new police outposts were opened in the interior areas in order to curb communist influence there by resorting to atrocities and repressions by police. Hence it demanded that the Government should refrain from opening new outposts in the interior areas. <sup>41</sup> The Chief Minister turned down the demand stating that the outposts were opened and maintained in the interior areas in order to keep close watch on the 'Fifth Columnists' in the interior. <sup>42</sup>

The Opposition also alleged that far from paying attention to the peace and security of the public in interior areas, policemen of those areas were engaged in corrupt practices and in creating chaotic situation, and hence it demanded immediate withdrawal of the outposts in the interior areas. In March, 1966, for instance, the Opposition complained that the police of the interior areas engaged themselves in harassing the illiterate and ignorant masses of those areas, especially the simple tribals and in squeezing money from them under various pretexts. It, therefore,

demanded that the outposts in the interior areas should be withdrawn forthwith, but the motion was lost. <sup>43</sup> Likewise, in March, 1967, it alleged that policemen of the outposts of the interior areas were engaged in harassing the innocent villagers and in collecting money from them under threat of arrest and intimidation. To worsen the situation, hundreds of 'false' cases were being instituted against the villagers and a good number of them were already sent to jail. It, therefore, demanded that those malpractices must be stopped and the outposts should be withdrawn immediately. <sup>44</sup> Similarly, a motion was moved by an opposition member a few days later alleging that the people in the interior areas were being subjected to inhuman torture by police. The intoxicated policemen often used to enter the houses of the villagers and to lift ducks, chickens, etc. and resort to physical torture whenever any resistance was offered, he added. He, therefore, demanded that police outposts in the interior areas should be transferred to the border areas. <sup>45</sup> But no heed was paid to the opposition demand.

The Opposition also demanded that police excesses must be stopped and steps taken against the guilty. Thus, in December 1964, an opposition member moved a resolution alleging that police excesses in the rural areas of Tripura committed during the last two years seriously threatened the civil liberties and fundamental rights of the people of Tripura. He alleged further that at the instigation of the agents of the ruling party, lands of the tribals of interior areas were being occupied forcefully by non-tribal money-lenders. When the tribals tried to resist, they were arrested by police under charges of murder, kidnapping, cattle lifting, etc. He demanded a commission

of enquiry into all such police excesses and punishment of the police officials found guilty. Members from both sides took part in the discussion, and the resolution was voted down after a prolonged and acrimonious debate.<sup>46</sup> In March, 1967 again, an opposition member brought the allegation that police was torturing the members of the public in the name of preservation of peace. Though a large regiment of Provincial Armed Constabulary, Bihar Military Police, Border Security Force and Tripura Police were there, the border areas were not well-protected and preserved, he added. He, therefore, demanded that immediate steps must be taken to put a stop to police atrocities and to protect the border areas, but no heed was paid to the demand.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, in April, 1973, the opposition members alleged that C.R.P and B.S.F. camps had been set up near the thickly populated areas like Panisagar Halam Bustee, Bagpasha and Champaknagar and the personnel of those camps had been torturing the people of the areas under various pretexts.<sup>48</sup> They also gave reference to a number of incidents in which the C.R.P and B.S.F. personnel allegedly tortured and harassed the people living in border areas. The affected people complained to the appropriate authorities, but no step was taken against the culprits, they alleged. They alleged further that in the name of curbing Naxalite activities in some areas of Dharmanagar, untold repressions were let loose on the entire people of the areas and forced subscriptions were collected from them and thus, their harassment continued. They added that on the day of the mass Satyagraha on 19th February, 1973, police atrocities crossed every limit in Dharmanagar, Belonia, Mohanpur and Sonamura and that a few days

later, Police resorted to indiscriminate lathi charges on the faminestricken people of Mohanpur when they approached the local B.D.O. for some gratuitous relief.<sup>49</sup> They viewed further that the experience of the common people during the last 25 years was that police had always taken the side of the oppressors and exploiters and carried on torture on the struggling masses. In that context, they cited the examples of the false cases instituted by police against the landless peasants of Bainkhora who struggled for land, and of the police atrocities on the poor people of Belonia who tried to reoccupy their lands from the clutches of the illegal occupants. They, therefore, inferred that police was not meant for protecting popular interests, rather it was meant to give protection to corrupt practices and anti-people activities and also to oppress, repress and suppress the struggling masses.<sup>50</sup>

The Opposition brought the allegation of police and C.R.P. excesses during food procurement drive of the Government also. It alleged that officials of the food department often collected paddy from the middle and poor peasants under threat of arrest and intimidation and they utilised police and C.R.P. for the purpose. In support of its allegation, it cited the instances of police and C.R.P. atrocities in some interior tribal gaon panchayats at the time of collection of paddy. Thus, at the instruction of the Revenue Inspector of Ampinagar, C.R.P. personnel allegedly raided the houses of the poor farmers under the Taidubari gaon sabha, beatup many of the farmers and forcibly collected huge amount of paddy from them. In the same manner, police and C.R.P. reportedly procured large amount of paddy from the villagers north of Ampinagar. The Gaon Pradhan was asked to collect 150 maunds from the

area and when he expressed his inability to procure more than 75 maunds, the local B.D.O. himself went to the area well-equipped with police and C.R.P. and collected the paddy earmarked by application of force. <sup>51</sup>

The Opposition also criticised the failure of the Border police to give protection to the Border people, alleging that thousands of cattle were being lifted and other belongings of the people of border areas were being stolen away every year inspite of the fact that a good number of police outposts were there. Thus, in April, 1965, it complained that though repeated demands were made by Opposition for protection of cattles and other belongings of the border people, no preventive measure was taken in that regard till then. It demanded that attention must be paid that money earmarked for police budget was utilised properly and proper protection given to the lives and property of the people living in border areas, but no heed was paid to the demand. <sup>52</sup> Similarly, in March, 1971, it alleged that though the Mozo-Sangkraks <sup>14</sup> had been carrying on dacoities, plunders, kidnapping, murders and such other criminal offences in North Tripura for the last 3-4 years, yet no step worth the name was taken till then for suppressing the miscreants. Cattle-lifting from the border areas became so rampant that such lifting was often taking place in broad daylight also. Moreover, smuggling of goods was going on in full swing. The failure of the police in all those regards was unpardonable, it added. <sup>53</sup> It alleged further that law and order situation was deteriorating day by day. Judged from the point of view of security, people reached a stage of helplessness. Far from giving punishment to the culprits, the ruling party was giving them protection in their narrow partisan interest

and as a result, anti-social activities were becoming more and more rampant day by day, it alleged. <sup>54</sup> Likewise, in March, 1975, it pointed out with regret that over and above lifting cattle, the miscreants carried on dacoities and murders and went on plundering the belongings of the border people at regular intervals, but the police and the para-military personnel posted in those areas had been playing the role of silent spectators. It, then, gave reference to a number of incidents that happened in the bordering areas of Simna, Mohanpur, khowai, Sadar South, Sabroom, and Belonia in which thousands of cows and buffaloes were lifted within a few months. In addition, large quantities of paddy and rice, oil, salt, chilly, etc., were being smuggled to Bangladesh without slightest resistance from the C.R.P. and B.S.F., it added. It alleged that those people were only interested in forcibly collecting their so-called 'share' in cash and kind from the border people when they brought their ducks, chickens, etc. to market for sale, and also in harrassing those people in well other possible ways. <sup>55</sup> In March, 1976 again, it brought the allegation that though police stations and outposts had been set up in almost every village and each of those were all-equipped with armed police, no effective step was being taken to stop cattle lifting, rather the police often helped the smugglers and cattle-lifters in the lifting of cattle, taking bribes from them. <sup>56</sup>

The opposition members also alleged that the police budgets were fattened year after year in order to curb the civil and political rights of the masses. They alleged further that as the common people of Tripura had been agitating against the 'misrule' of the party in power, a large number of police and Para-military personnel were

being employed to suppress that voice of protest. On 2nd July, 1972, for instance, the opposition members alleged that the money earmarked in the budget for the police was much more than the amount for development purpose, and remarked that such a large sum was demanded on police head for suppressing the rights of the masses, and that large number of para-military personnel was being kept as the party in power could not rely solely on the police for the suppression of popular movements.<sup>57</sup> They further alleged that all the black laws of the British regime were being kept alive and the police were given free hands to apply those laws in suppressing democratic movements in the name of law and order. Further, the police went on implicating the innocent villagers in false cases and those cases continued for ten to twelve years putting those people to great hardships and harassment.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, in March, 1973, an opposition member alleged that the Government continued to fatten its police budget in order to subdue popular discontent that had been mounting due to the failure of the Government to solve the basic problems of the masses. In that connection, he stated that the decisions of the Government to build up newer and newer armed police battalion, modernise the police force and bring some more C.R.P. units from other provinces (in spite of the fact that 18 such units had already been there) were all taken in order to counter the growing mass movements.<sup>59</sup> In April, 1973 again, a member of the opposition remarked that since the democratic movement was very strong in Tripura, the Government became afraid and hence it fattened its police budget in order to crush the movement. He also alleged that the only 'Motive' behind the plan of strengthening the police force was to set



up a semi-fascist regime and to silence the voice of the political opposition. He concluded his speech with the emphatic declaration that his party would continue its struggle against the 'band of legal hooligans' that was being built up through the police budget. <sup>60</sup>

Likewise, in March, 1974, an opposition member stated that, in pursuance of the capitalist path, the ruling party had been giving scope to the capitalists and landlords to earn crores of rupees as profit at the expense of the workers, peasants and employees. At this, the toiling masses all over India became aggrieved; they were observing bandhs, taking out processions and organising large protest meetings and the police budget was being fattened in order to silence that voice of protest. He alleged that the state of emergency was kept alive in order to suppress the struggling workers of mills and factories, farmers and employees; and that the expenditure for police, C.R.P., B.S.F. etc. was ever on the increase in Tripura as in the rest of India in order to suppress mass movements. He concluded with firm conviction that all the attempts of the party in power to shift the burden of all exploitation and crises on to the shoulders of the struggling masses and to perpetuate the reign of profit and black-money with the help of the police was sure to fail in the long run, and hence he gave out a call to the toiling masses to order to baffle the 'conspiracy' of the ruling class. <sup>61</sup>

In March, 1975 again, the same member alleged that the party in power had been trying to pass an amount of over sixty four lakhs of rupees as additional grant in order to equip its forces to crush the movements launched by the toiling masses. He alleged further that thousands of C.R.P., B.M.P. and armed police personnel had been

brought from other provinces with that end in view and those personnel had carried on 'attacks' on the movements of the famine-stricken people for food, unemployed youths for jobs, landless peasants for land and employees and workers for living wages. He, therefore, opposed the demand for Supplementary Grants for police stating that a budget that was formed with the 'motive' of perpetuating the exploitation of men by men and for taking away the democratic rights of the masses was not their budget and hence they could not support it.<sup>62</sup>

The Opposition put forward certain suggestions also for bringing about a qualitative change in the police force. It requested the Government to engage police for preventing thefts, dacoities and such other anti-social activities only, and not to employ them for suppressing mass movements.<sup>63</sup> It suggested further that the Government should see to it that police became a medium of co-operation and assistance to the masses in lieu of becoming an object of hatred and fear. It demanded that Government must punish the police officials who would be found guilty of harassing and torturing the innocent people. The effectiveness and efficiency of the police should be judged by their successful detection of the offenders of theft, dacoities, murder and such other anti-social and anti-people activities, it viewed. It also suggested that the conduct, the behaviour and the mode of activity of the police-force should be so remodelled as to be commensurate with the requirement of a free and developing country like ours.<sup>64</sup>

From the above discussion, it is evident that the Opposition availed itself of each and every opportunity to criticise the excesses of the police, and alleged that the Government went on utilising the police for suppressing

the popular and democratic movements against price rise, food crises, unemployment and deteriorating law and order situation in the state. At the same time, it pinpointed the 'atrocities' perpetrated by the police on the innocent masses and requested the Government to take steps to put a stop to their recurrence, but not much attention was paid to its request.

#### **D. Corruption in Administration :**

The opposition members from time to time raised discussions on the corrupt practices that allegedly prevailed then in the different departments of Government through legislative media like amendments on motions of thanks to Administrator's, Lieutenant Governor's and Governor's Addresses, budget discussions, vote of no confidence in the Council of Ministers and private members' resolutions. The issue was raised 31 times in the Assembly and the opposition members tried their utmost to expose the public corruptions and they pressurised the Government to take appropriate measures to put a stop to the malpractices.

The Opposition regretted that no sincere Government effort was noticeable for eradication of corruption that engulfed the different department of Government. Thus, in March 1967, it argued that even the men at the helms of affairs of the Administration were to admit that corruption had become all pervading; hence it opined that the Government should have formulated certain specific steps for combating that infective disease that had been penetrating into all the department of Government and thus spreading its cancerous effect on the public life of Tripura.<sup>65</sup> It then raised the allegation that though about 50 lakhs of rupees had been expended during the last few

years in the name of development of small and cottage industries, the major portion of the money was in fact pocketed by a few agents of the ruling party and some dishonest officers, but no step was taken against those people till then. Again, no assurance was there that investigation would be made into the questionable deals of the people connected with some co-operative societies of the state who were accused of misappropriating lakhs of rupees of those societies, it added. It alleged further that though crores of rupees were expended for rehabilitation of the jhumia and other landless peasants, not even 10 percent of those people got real rehabilitation as the lion's share of the sanctioned money went to the pockets of the agents of the party in power and no step was taken against those corrupt people despite repeated demands of the Opposition, It regretted. <sup>66</sup>

Similarly, in March, 1970, it alleged that though the congress party had ruled for the last 22 years, it could not take any effective step to prevent corruption in administration. On the other hand, it allegedly gave scope to the corrupt people in society to go on with their mischievous activities. Even the aggrieved section of congressmen was raising complaints of corrupt practices against their own partymen, it added. <sup>67</sup> In March, 1971 again, it raised the allegation that though all the departments of the Government had become abodes of corrupt practices, yet the Government was not at all up and doing to root out corruption. The Government propagated a lot, it observed, about its plan to raise the lot of the farmers through the co-operative societies, but that plan would never be materialised until and unless appropriate steps were taken against the corrupt societies

that indulged in the practice of misappropriating the money borrowed from banks in the name of giving assistance to the farmers. The Government also claimed that it had given proper attention to the development of irrigation system of rural Tripura, but due to corrupt practices of the people entrusted with the task, the progress in that respect was not at all satisfactory, it added.<sup>68</sup>

Likewise, in April, 1974, it alleged that the food department of the Government was turned into an abode of corruption. There was no account of the department ever since 1964-1965; no one knew how much food-stuffs were deposited and how much spent at different points of time, it added. Foodstuffs valuing crores of rupees were imported ever since 1964-65, but no proforma account regarding the food deposited and spent, expenditure incurred in carrying, profit or loss etc. was ever maintained. It then pointed its finger to the 'Corrupt practices' prevailing in the Tripura Road Transport Corporation. Diesel, mobil, and spare parts were being sold out in the black-market from the Central Store of the Corporation, but no preventive step was there, it regretted. When complaints were made to the Anti-Corruption Department about the Corrupt practices in different departments and the Department started giving attention to them, the Government bribed the S.P. of the department by giving a fat-salaried job to his younger brother, it alleged.<sup>69</sup> In March, 1975 again, it gave reference to the reports of the Public Accounts Committee which revealed that food department of the Government did not maintain any accounts of its incomes and expenditures and the department of electricity had been running at a great loss. In the like manner, misappropriation and other corrupt practices were

noticeable in the department of co-operative, T.R.T.C., Dairy, Industry and Fishery, but no step was taken to stop those malpractices, it added. <sup>70</sup>

The Opposition brought several corruption charges against some Officers and employees of different departments of the Government and demanded enquiries and punishment of the guilty. Thus, on March 15, 1973, it stated that though the Central Bureau of Investigation investigated against 11 Officers of the State during the last 5 years and found all of them guilty, the Government had been giving them 'protection' and was unwilling to disclose their names in so-called 'public interest'. The Audit Reports of 1969 and 1970 raised as many as 5306 and 5716 objections respectively, but no step was taken against any and no punishment was given to the guilty, it alleged. <sup>71</sup> It, therefore, demanded that proper steps should be taken against the officers and employees used to corrupt practices, but no heed was paid to the demand. Similarly, on March 28, 1973, it alleged that the Government was not at all serious about taking steps for implementing the recommendations of the Santhanam Committee (appointed by the Central Government) regarding prevention of corrupt practices. Though a vigilance committee was formed and it placed its reports to the Government, yet the Government did not publish its reports in the name of so-called 'public interest', it alleged. It then suggested that a secret session of the Assembly should be convened in case the Government felt that the discussions on the reports should be kept secret and in that session all information regarding the report of the C.B.I. about the corrupt officers, its findings and recommendations and the steps already taken or proposed to be taken by the Government should

be given in full details, but no heed was paid to the request.

In October, 1974 again, the Opposition alleged that the cases lodged by the Anti-corruption Department against some 'pet' Officers of the party in power were withdrawn at the instruction of the Government. One officer got a large plot of 'khas' land at Udaipur recorded in his name that was inhabited by some tribal families and he was trying to evict those people from that land ; another officer of Khowai intentionally allotted some lands to some Bengali peasants that were under the possession of the tribal jhumias, and that led to a serious clash, it added. It regretted that the Government gave protection to such officers and even requested the C.B.I. to withdraw its cases against some such corrupt officers. According to a Government Report itself, more than six hundred cases were lodged against 88 officers within 1972 and 1973 alone, but the Government was reluctant to proceed against those officers, rather it was trying to whitewash the cases, it alleged.<sup>73</sup> It, than, brought allegations of different types of corrupt practices resorted to by the then District Magistrate and Collector, West Tripura, the Chief Engineer, Superintending Engineer R.K. Roy Choudhuri, the Headmistresses of Kailashahar Government Girls' Higher Secondary School and Dharmanagar Government Girls' Higher Secondary School and the Headmasters of Hrishyamukh Government Higher Secondary School, Manu Government H/S School, Srinath Vidyanikatan, Kanchanpur Government High School, Melaghar Government H/S School, Bilthai Government H/S School and Khairpur Government H.S. School. It then bitterly criticised the Government action of granting extension to the then Director of Education Shri A. Dasgupta and

remarked that his appointment was made in violation of recruitment rules and that it was politically motivated and a corrupt practice. <sup>74</sup>

Likewise, in March, 1976, it alleged that corrupt practices were resorted to by the officials of the Tribal Welfare Department at the time of allotment of land and disbursement of financial assistance to the Jhumia and landless tribal families. Giving reference to the claim of the Government that it had disposed of more than a lakh of applications for mutation within 1975-76, it alleged that the common people and the tribals in particular were harassed beyond measure in the name of mutations and they had to pay large amounts of money as bribes to the officials of the department concerned for securing nationality and citizenship certificates which were demanded as essential prerequisites for mutation purposes. Further, they had to pay bribe to the employees who dealt with mutation, and thus their exploitation and harassment continued, it alleged. <sup>75</sup> It alleged further that though the Government proclaimed time and again that it would seize the surplus and illegally occupied and khas lands from the jotedars and distribute those among the landless peasants; in actual practice, only the 'khas' lands in possession of ordinary middle class peasants were being occupied and distributed. It added that the officials of the settlement department indulged in the immoral practice of recording the lands of middle and poor farmers in the name of big landlords taking bribes from the latter and thus newer and newer problems had been cropping up. In view of all this, it stated with regret that the MISA was meant for those who protested and stood against those misdeeds and not for dealing with the corrupt persons and



officials. <sup>76</sup>

The opposition members brought some specific charges of corrupt practices against several ministers of the state also. Thus in October, 1974, in course of discussion on his motion of no confidence in the Council of Ministers, the leader of the opposition gave reference to various 'questionable deals' of some ministers and of the Chief Minister in particular like giving licences for some cinema halls and flour mills and purchase of the office houses for Tripura in Delhi and Calcutta and purchase of pumping sets, rig-machines, etc. in which they allegedly took lakhs of rupees as bribes. <sup>77</sup> In course of his speech in support of the motion, an opposition member alleged that the Deputy Minister-in-charge of Education was connected with many types of corrupt practices like bribery and other unfair deals and by virtue of those, he built up a property valuing several lakhs of rupees. He, then, brought allegation of nepotism and bribery against the deputy minister for social welfare and the Jail Minister who allegedly earned a lot as bribe as price for giving appointment to a number of unemployed youths of their constituencies. <sup>78</sup> Another member, in his speech, alleged that the Chief Minister had set an example of 'legal corruption' in the name of constructing security fencing around his own residence. In that context, he gave reference to a memo issued by the secretary (P.W.D) allotting rupees 12,000/- 'for providing security fencing around the residence of the Chief Minister at Banamalipur including provision for front verandah in the existing building' and alleged that taking advantage of that, the Chief Minister had his entire house repaired and renovated by the Government money that ultimately amounted to the tune of Sixty thousand rupees. <sup>79</sup>

In March, 1976 again, an opposition member raised some charges of nepotism and favouritism against the Minister for Social Welfare in respect of selection of trainees for the Centrally sponsored Anganadi works scheme in North Tripura. Most of the trainees for the scheme were recruited from her own constituency and the same practise was adopted in recruiting the 'Gram Lakshmis' for the Balwadi centres, he alleged.<sup>80</sup>

The opposition also alleged that though thousands of maunds of rice were being smuggled to Bangladesh and the food problem of the state was worsening, no arrangement of cordoning was there in the border areas. Notorious gangs of corrupt and antisocial elements had been functioning in the bordering regions of the state, but the Government had been playing the role of silent spectator, it added.<sup>81</sup> It alleged further that at a period when reports of starvation deaths were being published in the local dailies, many ration shop dealers were selling out paddy and rice in the black -market; some of them had been caught redhanded and handed over to the police, but no step was taken against them. It added that it was the procurement policy of the Government that gave scope to the big landlords, jotedars and money-lenders to hoard large amount of paddy and to carry on blackmarketing and that was mainly responsible for the acute food crisis, but the Government was not up and doing in taking steps against the hoarders, blackmarketeters and smugglers.<sup>82</sup>

The opposition raised the demand of formation of a high power tribunal also for trying the cases of corrupt practices committed by the officials and individuals irrespective of their ranks and position. An opposition members moved a resolution in the Assembly to that effect in October, 1974.

There was no denying the fact that corruption had vitiated our society, he stated; but it was also to be kept in mind that there could not be a corrupt society, and attack must be concentrated on the breeding ground from where corruption originated and spread, he opined. No one believed that corruption would wither away from Tripura if such a tribunal was formed, but there must be made a beginning somewhere from where a struggle could be launched, and in that struggle, all democratic and progressive forces should take part in order to subdue corruption, he added. One might argue that the existing rules and regulations were adequate enough to fight out corruption, but in actual practice it was noticed that previous permission from higher authorities was required even when a case was to be lodged against an ordinary police constable, and in case a common citizen had any complaint against a minister or a high officer, he would find it almost impossible to get justice, he contended. It was true that corruption could not be rooted out with the socio-economic structure of our society remaining unchanged, but it might be contained to a great extent if sincere effort was made for the purpose, he added.<sup>83</sup>

Taking part in the discussion on the resolution, the leader of the opposition observed that the method in which the administration in Tripura as in the rest of India was being run was capitalist method and that method stood for giving increasing facilities to a few landlords and businessmen who earned superprofits that gave birth to blackmoney. In order to prevent the growth of blackmoney, demonetisation was a must and that was what the Wanchoo Commission recommended, but the Government would not implement the recommendation for

'understandable reason', he added. He concluded observing that since bribery, pay offs, misappropriation and embezzlement of Government funds by politicians and officials of every rank and station had always been characteristic of each capitalist society and since India, and for that, Tripura pursued the same capitalist path, it was not possible that formation of any committee or commission or tribunal would guarantee the abolition of corrupt practices though such a tribunal might, to some extent, contain the recurrence of corruption.<sup>84</sup> Some members from both sides then took part in the discussion on the resolution and after a prolonged and vociferous debate, it was put to vote and lost.

It is clearly evident from the above discussions that the opposition availed itself of every opportunity to focus the 'Corruption' in administration and that it pressurised the Government to take appropriate measures in order to put a stop to, and prevent recurrence of all those malpractices. Though all the demands and suggestions of the opposition in the Territorial Assembly in that regard was turned down, the justification of the Opposition's demands was admitted by a Government statement that indiscipline and corrupt practices in the administration would have to be dealt with appropriately.<sup>85</sup> Again, from a Government Statement in the State Assembly, it was learnt that in order to stop smuggling, blackmarketing and profiteering, 3201 India Nationals and 537 Bangladesh nationals were apprehended when indulging in smuggling activities in the border and 22 persons were detained under the conservation of Foreign Exchange and prevention of Smuggling Activities Act, 1974 for smuggling and blackmarketing.<sup>86</sup> A subsequent Government Statement

revealed that the detentions of smugglers and economic offenders under the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and prevention of smuggling Activities Act and the determined drive against crime and antisocial elements had resulted in an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity conducive to a constructive and concerted approach to the state's problems.<sup>87</sup> It is thus clear that the pressures of the legislative Opposition for taking measures against corrupt practices were effective to a great extent, though not instantly, but eventually.

### **E. Demand for full -fledged legislature and statehood.**

The demand was raised a few times in the Territorial Assembly by the Opposition, but the Government did not pay much attention to the demand. Thus, in March, 1969, the demand for a full-fledged legislature was raised in the Assembly by the Opposition. Throwing light on the inadequacy of provision for rehabilitation, industry, power, agriculture, etc. in that year's budget, it repressed apprehension that the sanction of that inadequate provision also might not come from the Centre in due time. Pointing to the chronic problem and difficulty, it strongly argued that the problem would persist so long as adequate power was not given to the Assembly. In view of this, it demanded that Tripura Assembly should be turned into a full-fledged Assembly. Otherwise, all development works would remain stranded as the Assembly had no power to make and pass budgets according to its own choice and requirement.<sup>88</sup> But no heed was paid to the demand.

In April, 1969 again, the Opposition raised the demand in course of discussion on the Tripura Land Revenue and

Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill, 1960 as moved by the Chief Minister. It welcomed the Government for introducing the bill, but pointed out at the same time that much more benefit could have been extended to the people if the Tripura Assembly would have been a full-fledged Assembly. It added that a full-fledged Assembly enjoyed much more powers and in the absence of those powers many more things that were urgently required, could not be taken up for implementation. It, therefore, appealed to the Government to do everything within its means in order to secure a full-fledged Assembly for Tripura.<sup>89</sup> But this demand also met the same fate.

Similarly, in March, 1970, the Opposition expressed regret that there was no mention in the Lieutenant Governor's policy statement of 1970-71 about any action of the Government in raising the standard of the Union Territory Legislative of Tripura to that of full-fledged Legislative. In that connection, it pointed out that it demanded time and again for full-fledged Legislature and Statehood of Tripura both inside and outside the Assembly and some congress M.L.As also spoke in support of the demand in the Assmbly in the past. It then expressed wonder that though the ruling party claimed that it was in favour of Tripura's Statehood, there was no mention in the policy statement regarding the process through which the desired statehood might be attained. At the same time, the Union Territory Legislature was still a powerless body and no mention was there regarding steps to be taken for raising its standard to that of a full-fledged legislature. It, therefore, appealed to the Government to take immediate necessary steps in that regard, but the amendment was voted down as usual.<sup>90</sup>

In April and September, 1970, the Government side moved two resolutions demanding full-fledged State-hood of Tripura, but the members of the Opposition could not take part in the discussions on the resolution due to two peculiar circumstances. In April, 1970, a congress member moved a resolution requesting the Central Government to amend the Constitution of India for incorporating provisions for raising the status of the Union Territory of Tripura to a full-fledged state. Some members of the Treasury benches participated in the discussion on the resolution and extended full support to it. The Opposition members boycotted the discussion on the resolution and left the house protesting against allotment of one hour's time for the discussion by the Speaker in contravention of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the House which provided for the last two and a half hour of a sitting for the transactions of private Member's Business.<sup>91</sup> The resolution was then put to voice vote and unanimously agreed to.

Likewise, in September, 1970, Chief Minister Sri Singh moved a Government Resolution expressing satisfaction at the declaration made by the Prime Minister to raise the status of the Union Territory of Tripura to that of a state. He highly appreciated that the action of the Prime Minister of India was 'in the interest of the development of Tripura and a step toward advancement of democratic socialism in India as a whole' and he requested the Central Government 'to bring necessary bill to the effect in the next session of the Parliament along with the case of Himachal Pradesh with a view to early implementation of the decision of the Prime Minister'. Some members of the Treasury benches then took part in the discussion on the resolution and

congratulated the decision of the Prime Minister in one voice. Incidentally, before that resolution was moved, a Government motion was tabled by the Chief Minister that 'incident at Dambur area regarding Mizo attack on 2nd July, 1970 be taken into consideration'. Opposition members Aghore Deb Barma and Bidyachandra Deb Barma and Congress member Promode Ranjan Dasgupta, had their amendments on the motion. But the Speaker disallowed their amendments and the members concerned went on strongly urging the speaker to allow them to move their amendments. The Speaker then suspended Promode Ranjan Dasgupta and Aghore Deb Barma for the rest of the day and asked them to leave the House. The two other opposition members strongly protested against that measure and began to interrupt when the Government resolution was being discussed. The Speaker then asked them to withdraw from the House for the rest of the day, but they did not pay any heed. The Speaker then ordered the Marshal to remove them from the House by force and accordingly they were removed by the Marshal. After that the resolution was put to voice vote and carried unanimously.<sup>92</sup> But the desired statehood did not come about within that year and the next. Tripura, however, attained her statehood in January, 1972 following the passing of the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Bill, 1971 in the Parliament.

#### **F. Demand for democratisation of the local self-government institutions.**

During the period under review, the legislative opposition on several occasions raised the demand for formation of Panchayats and transfer of budgetary and other powers to them, election to the Agartala Municipality,



and formation of notified area committees, in the Sub-Divisional Towns. The demands were raised 24 times in the Assembly in the forms of debates on Administrator's, Lieutenant Governor's and Governor's Addresses, budget discussions, cut motions on demands for grants, and Private members' bills and resolutions and the Opposition went on exerting pressures on the Government to concede those demands, but to little effect.

The United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act, 1947 was extended to Tripura during the days of the Territorial Council. At that time, the Councillors of both the Congress and the CPI protested against the provisions of the Act and the Rules framed under it regarding the procedure of election of Panchayats and transfer of powers to them. The congress side then expressed its inability to frame Panchayat rules to suit popular needs and aspirations as the Territorial Council had no such power. In 1962, some panchayats were formed all over Tripura, but no step was taken for transfer of powers to them. The Opposition strongly opposed that 'attitude' of the Government and it repeatedly raised the demand for democratically elected Panchayats and delegation of powers to them. Thus, in order to highlight the demand, the Opposition introduced a bill in the Assembly in March, 1965, entitled 'the United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act, 1947 (Repeal) Bill 1965'. It contended that though the U.P. Panchayat Act had been amended several times in the past, none of the amendments was till then introduced in Tripura. The result was that all Government Officials starting from the Chief Commissioner down to the Panchayat secretary were at liberty to interfere in the functioning of the Panchayats any and every time they liked. Moreover, since the

provisions for transferring powers to the panchayats were quite inadequate in the Act, the real purpose of forming the panchayats was defeated. In consideration of the limitation of the Act, the Opposition demanded that the 'Present' Act should be repealed and a new Panchayat Raj Bill be introduced in the Assembly at an early date.<sup>93</sup> But the bill was voted down after a heated debate.

In April, 1967 again, the Opposition moved a resolution requesting the Government to hand over the powers and responsibilities to the Panchayats as mentioned in Art. 4 of the U.P. Panchayat Raj Act, 1947. It alleged that the Government was depriving the Panchayats of their legitimate powers for long and as a result, those were turned into defunct institutions. If that state of affairs continued, the scheme of the Government of India for introducing Panchayati Raj and decentralisation of powers to Panchayats would end in smoke, it maintained. Hence it requested the Government to delegate adequate powers and responsibilities to the panchayats so that those might discharge their functions properly. At the same time, substantial amount of money should be made available to them so that they might engage themselves in taking up developmental activities in their respective areas.<sup>94</sup> Some treasury benchers then took part in the discussion and after a prolonged and heated debate, the resolution was put to vote and lost.

In course of his budget address of 1968-69, the Finance Minister informed the House that the Government had already taken steps for transferring 'some' powers to the Panchayats. Contradicting the claim, the Opposition stated that no such transfer of powers was evident till then. It sarcastically commented that the only function being

discharged by the Pradhans and members of the Panchayats was to arrange palatable dishes for the officials of the police department and those of the block, whenever they happened to visit their localities. Hence it observed that it was farcical to form the Panchayats and then to turn them into defunct bodies in that manner. It, then, demanded that steps should immediately be taken for strengthening this democratic institution of rural Tripura by giving it scope to engage itself in developmental activities, but no heed was paid to the demand. <sup>95</sup> In April, 1970 again, the Opposition moved a motion to point out the mismanagement in the Panchayat Raj Training Institute and inadequacy of provision for grants to the Panchayats. It regretted that Panchayat Raj Training Institute at Arundhutinagar was more busy with the arrangement of delicious dishes for the Ministers, the B.D.Os and the Extension Officers of the Blocks, who used to address before the trainees than with imparting meaningful training to the Panchayat secretaries and other trainees. It complained further that though Panchayat rules categorically mentioned that adequate powers should be delegated to the Panchayats, no transfer of power worth mentioning took place till then. The motion was lost as usual. <sup>96</sup> Likewise, in April, 1971 the Opposition moved a motion to protest against inadequacy of budgetary provisions for education, Public health, communication etc. for the Panchayats. It mentioned on that context that after constant pressure from the Opposition for long, the Government was compelled to give powers to the Panchayats to make and pass budgets of their own to discharge those functions; but as the money required for the purpose was not given to them, they could not take up developmental programmes of their areas. As

a result, the Panchayats were unable to undertake the responsibilities of construction and repair of village roads, supply of medicine to the poor villagers through charitable dispensaries, and impart basic education to the illiterate boys and girls of rural Tripura. The motion was voted down as usual.<sup>97</sup>

In course of his budget speech of 1972-73, the finance Minister assured the House that the entire task of executing the development plans of the localities for the year would be entrusted to the Panchayats. The Opposition commented that it was doubtful whether the assurances given by the Minister would be honoured in practice. On the other hand, it only logically followed from the 'sad' experience of the past that the assurances would remain on paper and would never be made effective, it added.<sup>98</sup> In June 1972, a motion was moved by the Opposition to protest against the 'reluctance' of the Government to transfer powers to the Panchayats. It mentioned in that context that though Provision for some money had been made for the Panchayats in the budget of 1972-73, the money so earmarked was so meagre that it would hardly meet the requirements of development of the Panchayats. It wondered whether it was at all consistent on the part of the Government to make so meagre a provision for the Panchayats after saying so much about rural uplift through the Panchayats.<sup>99</sup> the motion was put to vote and lost.

In March, 1973 again, the opposition alleged that though the Government assured time and again that democratic decentralisation was its motto and that it was trying to revitalise the panchayats with that end in view, yet in actual practice, no such step was evident till then. Though transfer of powers was one of the essential prerequisites

for activating the Panchayati Raj in the Villages, the Government was not at all serious about the required delegation of powers, it added. It, therefore, demanded that immediate necessary steps should be taken to activate the Panchayats by amending the existing act in order to provide for delegation of more powers to them,<sup>100</sup> but no heed was paid to the demand. An official Statement in the House of March, 1974 revealed that the government intended to gradually hand over to the Panchayats more and more works connected with development, food distribution etc., and thus train them up to take over higher responsibilities in future<sup>101</sup>. The opposition observed that those were all pious wishes and hence the Panchayats would remain as defunct as before. It then alleged that most of the Pradhans and members of the Panchayats had been turned into stooges of the ruling party by then and it cited a number of instances in support of its allegation. Instead of delegating powers to the Panchayats, the government was utilising them in procuring paddy and rice from the middle and poor peasants as levy and in collecting arrear rent and taxes from them, very often forcibly, it added. The only 'power' that the gaon pradhans got was to always remain at the back and call of the officials like S. D. Os, B. D. Os and officers-in-charge of Police stations and the only 'duty' they had to discharge was to collect subscriptions from the villagers in order to entertain the ministers and high officials in a 'befitting' manner, whenever they happened to visit their areas, it commented ironically.<sup>102</sup>

The Opposition also raised strong protest against the 'reluctance' of the Government to hold election of the Agartala Municipality and transfer of powers to the elected

representatives of the people. Thus, in June, 1972, it stated with deep regret that despite repeated requests and demands of the Opposition for holding the election of the Agartala Municipality, it had been kept in abeyance for the last fourteen years. It wondered whether there was any precedence of the kind in the entire history of the Municipal elections in India. Strongly opposing the practice of withholding the election for such a long period of time, it branded the practice as 'undemocratic' and observed that the 'reluctance' of the Government to hold the election of the Municipality and to transfer powers to an elected body proved it beyond doubt that it was averse to all democratic principles and practices.<sup>103</sup>

In March, 1974, the Government informed the House that it was its ardent desire to hand over the Municipal administration to an elected body at the earliest opportunity.<sup>104</sup> It was learnt from another official statement of March, 1975 that the Bengal Municipal Act, 1932 had been amended and the Tripura Municipal Election Rules, 1961 were under process of amendment.<sup>105</sup> The opposition regretted that there was no mention in the statement regarding holding of election to the Agartala Municipality and formation of Municipalities in other towns of Tripura. In that connection, it alleged that the Government stated about the amendment of Tripura Municipal rules and a lot about the improvement that had been effected in the municipality in the field of conservancy service, setting up of markets, sanitation and supply of drinking water, but it did not utter a word about any specific time within which it would hold the municipal election.<sup>106</sup>

The Opposition also exerted pressures on the Government to implement its own decision to form notified

area committees in four Sub-Divisional Towns of Tripura. In March, 1973, the Government informed the House through a statement that it had decided to declare the Sub-Divisional Towns of Dharmanager, Kailashahar, Udaipur and Belonis as notified areas under the Bengal Municipal Act, 1932 as extended to Tripura. Issue of final orders was under process, it added.<sup>107</sup> In March, 1974 again, an official statement declared that with a view to declaring the four towns as notified areas, a committee had been formed to examine and recommend as to which of the provisions of the rules, by-laws, etc., of the amended act should be made applicable to the proposed notified areas. The report of the committee which had been received recently was under consideration, it added.<sup>108</sup> The Opposition, in its turn, alleged that though the Government informed in previous year that it had decided to declare four towns of Tripura as notified areas and the latest order in that regard was in final stage, no progress in that direction was evident till then. Referring to the Government announcement that a Sub-Committee was formed to 'examine and recommend as to which of the provisions of the rules, by-laws, etc., of the amended act should be made applicable to the proposed areas', and that the report of the committee was under consideration, it commented that it was a dilatory tactics as the previous one and hence it could not at all rely on that assurance. It then, urged the Government to take appropriate necessary steps in that regard, but to little effect.<sup>109</sup>

Similarly, in March, 1975, the opposition members alleged that though the Government assured the House in the two previous years that notified area committees would be formed in four towns of Tripura, no step was

taken in that direction till then and no mention was there whether any concrete step would be taken in that regard in near future. They pointed out in that context that though it was clearly mentioned in the Government statements of the last two years that notified area committees would be formed and also that a committee was formed to examine and place report in that regard and that decision would be taken after the report of the committee was examined, no mention was made in any official statement of 1975-76 as to when the proposed committees would be formed and when they would be entrusted with powers and responsibilities. It, therefore, strongly demanded that steps towards formation of the proposed committees and delegation of powers to them must be taken without further delay, but no heed was paid to its demand.<sup>110</sup>

It is evident from the above that the Government rejected all the demands of the opposition for democratisation of the local self-Government institutions. But a deeper analysis will show that the level of success of the opposition in this regard also was quite high. Thus, though the demand of the opposition for transfer of powers to the Panchayats was rejected repeatedly, the rationale of the demand was admitted by the Government side when the resolution of congress member Sunil Datta that "This Assembly is of opinion that all the Panchayats formed upto now be authorised early to function and discharge duties according to the provisions of the Panchayats Act in force in Tripura and similarly empowered within the least possible time of their formation"<sup>111</sup> was accepted unanimously. Subsequently, the Government, in effect, accepted the demand partially by declaring its resolve to



"gradually associate them with work connected with development, food distribution, etc. and thus enable them to shoulder higher responsibilities in future"<sup>112</sup> similarly, the demand of the Opposition for election of the Panchayats through secret ballots was met on principle when the Tripura panchayat Raj (Amendment) Rules pertaining to election was enforced" thereby introducing the secret ballots in place of show of hands."<sup>113</sup> Likewise, though the demand of the Opposition for holding the election of the Agartala Municipality was voted down repeatedly, the Government in affect accepted the demand when it declared its decision to "hand over the Municipal Administration to an elected body at the earliest opportunity".<sup>114</sup> In the like manner, the demand of the opposition for implementing the Government's own decision to declare some Sub-Divisional towns of Tripura as notified areas was accepted on principle when the Government announced that it would soon form notified area committees in four Sub-Divisional towns and that issue of final order in that regard was under process.<sup>115</sup>

### **G. Separation of Executive and Judiciary.**

In Tripura, Judiciary continued to remain amalgamated with the executive for a long time. The Opposition raised the demand of Separation of Judiciary from Executive 14 times in the Assembly through budget discussions, cut motions against demands for grants and private members' resolutions and motions; but the Government did not pay any heed to the demand. It, however, conceded the demand eventually and this was evident from a Government statement of the year 1975.

The opposition alleged time and again that the common

people of Tripura were being deprived of real justice due to non-separation of judiciary from the executive, and hence it pressurised the Government time and again to take immediate necessary steps to separate judiciary from executive. Thus, in March, 1964, it contended that in spite of the fact that the real function of the Judiciary was to guarantee the constitutional rights against infringement by others, and that the Directive Principles of State Policy clearly stated that "State shall take steps to separate judiciary from the executive", and also that the demand was voiced every off and on by the Opposition in Tripura, the Government by-passed the demand on the plea that steps would be taken after decision in that respect was taken by the West Bengal Government. It strongly demanded that the Government of Tripura must have its own initiative in that regard. It further contended that as the appointing authority of the Judges was the executive, the Judges could not be impartial. Again, as some of the executive authorities performed the functions of both the executive and the judiciary, so no proper justice could be expected from them, it added. In that context, it referred to the then Law Minister Ashoke Sen's comment that if Judiciary was not separated from the executive, that would be simply the mockery of Justice. It further complained that as there was only one Judicial Commissioner for Tripura and Manipur, cases in his court were kept pending for years together. As justice was delayed in that manner, people were to suffer much, it added. It, therefore, demanded that steps must be taken for appointment of a separate Judicial Commissioner for Tripura and for separation of judiciary from the executive.<sup>116</sup> But no heed was paid to the demand.

In July 1965, again, a resolution was moved on behalf of the opposition demanding that "The Government should take immediate step to separate judiciary from the executive within this financial year so that administration of justice may be done without the least interference of the executive." The mover of the resolution argued in support of his resolution that if the executive officers were entrusted with judicial powers also, they might often be influenced by the party in power and hence they might develop a partisan spirit. Hence, they might do injustice to the people at the time of executing the orders of the Government and enforcing its laws. He also pointed out that in Tripura as in other parts of India, thousands of innocent people were being subjected year after year to such illegal and unjust treatment due to non-separation of judiciary from the executive. In view of the above, he demanded that judiciary should be separated from the executive without any further delay.<sup>117</sup> Taking part in the discussion on the resolution, an opposition member commented that "Justice is not only to be done, it is to be shown also", and in order to show justice to the people, steps should immediately be taken for separation of executive and judiciary.<sup>118</sup> Moving an amendment on the resolution, a Congress member proposed that "the Government should take necessary steps to separate judiciary from the executive as early as possible." Members from both sides participated in the discussion on the amended resolution and extended whole-hearted support to it and it was passed unanimously.<sup>119</sup> But no step was taken to make the resolution effective.

Similarly, in March, 1966, the Opposition moved a motion alleging that the common people were suffering a lot due to the inaction of the Government regarding

separation of judiciary from the executive. It contended that as the executive officers were overburdened with their departmental work-loads, they could hardly find time to regularly attend the courts to dispense justice to the common people. As a result, cases were to be kept pending for months and years causing untold harassment to the persons concerned. This lingering process of justice became so much expensive that the common people could hardly cope with it. Thus, due to this delaying process, justice was in fact denied to those people, it alleged. In consideration of the untold sufferings of the people, it urged upon the Government to take appropriate necessary steps for separation of judiciary from the executive, but the motion was opposed and voted down by the Government side. <sup>120</sup>

Likewise, in March, 1967, the Opposition moved a motion to ventilate the grievances on non-separation of executive from judiciary. It alleged that cases were kept pending for years resulting in untold sufferings of the people connected with those cases. In support of its allegation, it cited a number of cases that were kept pending in the courts for a long time. Thus, cases like G. R. 1065 of 1961 state vs. Rajmohan Deb Barma, G. R. 862 of 1961 state vs. Krishna Chandra Deb Barma and others, G. R. 863 of 1958 State vs. Sangha Ram Deb Barma and others, and G. R. 844 of 1963 state Vs. Narendra Deb Barma and others were kept pending in the courts. many other cases of that type were kept pending in the Sessions Judge Court, Munsiff Courts and District Sessions Judge Courts all over Tripura, and the sufferings of the people connected with those cases beggarred description, it added. The root cause of the problem, in its view, lay in the fact

that the executive officers were entrusted with the task of dispensation of justice over and above their normal administrative functions and responsibilities. It, therefore, demanded that separation of Judiciary from the Executive must be effected immediately, but the motion was rejected.<sup>121</sup> In June, 1967 again, the Opposition moved a resolution that "This Assembly directs the Government to implement the decision of the Assembly regarding separation of executive from Judiciary". It alleged in course of discussion that though a resolution to that effect had unanimously been passed by the House long ago, no step worth the name was taken to implement it or to make it effective as a result of which multifarious problems were cropping up. It, therefore, demanded that the resolution must be implemented without any further delay.<sup>122</sup> Members from both sides took part in the discussion on the resolution and after a heated debate, the resolution was put to vote and lost.

At long last, the Lieutenant governor of Tripura, in course of his policy statement of 1970-71, declared that "with a view to giving effect to the Directive Principle in Art. 50 of the Constitution to separate judiciary from the executive in the public services of the State, the Parliament has enacted for all Union Territories other than Chandigarh, the Union Territories (Separation of judicial and executive Functions) Act, 1969. Steps to implement the scheme of separation in Tripura as early as possible are in hand."<sup>123</sup> But the promised separation did not come about during the life-time of the territorial legislature.

In March, 1972, the governor of Tripura informed the House that a circuit bench of the common court for states of Assam, Nagaland, Meghalay, Manipur and Tripura

were established at Agartala and viewed that it brought the services of the highest judiciary at the door step of the common citizen of Tripura.<sup>124</sup> But he did not tell a word about the long-awaited separation of judiciary. The opposition moved an amendment on the motion of thanks to the address of the Governor regretting that no mention about separation of judiciary from the Executive was there, and demanding immediate steps in that direction.

It was learnt from a government statement of 1973 that the Government had "taken in hand a scheme for the separation of Judiciary from the Executive"<sup>125</sup>, but the promised separation did not take place in that year also. The policy statement of the Governor for 1974-75 revealed, "The separation of the Judiciary from the Executive has been engaging the attention of the Government for the last one year. This, however, could not be taken up earlier as the government of India had undertaken a substantial amendment of the criminal procedure code covering also the separation of Judiciary ..... Now that the criminal procedure code has been passed by Parliament and will come into force with effect from 1st April, 1974, the state Government is taking necessary measures for the implementation of the scheme of separation of judiciary in consultation with the High Court".<sup>126</sup> Thus, the long-awaited separation of Judiciary took place in Tripura with effect from April, 1974.

From the above discussion, it clearly follows that though the demand of the opposition for separation of judiciary from executive was voted down time and again, the party in power accepted the demand ultimately. In 1965, the Government side accepted the demand on principle, by unanimously accepting a resolution of the opposition as it

stood amended by a member of the treasury bench that the Government should take necessary steps to separate judiciary from the executive as early as possible. The Government accepted the demand eventually and it is evident from the Governor's policy statement of 1975-1976 that read: "In conformity with the directive principles of the constitution, my Government have taken up steps to separate judiciary from the executive with effect from 1.4.74 and in pursuance of the code of criminal procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974) a scheme of decentralising the administration of justice has been approved. The state judicial service has also been reconstituted."<sup>1</sup>

#### **H. Demand for revocation of the State of Emergency (1962) and repeal of the D. I. R.**

The state of emergency was declared by the President of India immediately after the Sino-Indian Border Dispute started. Together with it, the Defence of India rules were also promulgated. As in other parts of India, in Tripura also many leaders and cadres of the CPI were then arrested and detained under the D. I. Rules. The legislative opposition moved some motions and resolutions sharply criticising the 'excess' of the emergency provisions and the misuse of the DIR and demanding revocation of the emergency and repeal of the D. I. R.

Thus, in April, 1964, the Opposition alleged, in course of discussion on a demand for grant, that in Tripura in particular, the D. I. Rules were being applied right and left for suppressing the opposition parties and the communist party in particular. It went to the extent of challenging the constitutionality of the D. I. Rules as applied in Tripura by citing from a verdict of the Supreme Court in this regard

which read : "It is quite true, if the act has contravened the citizens' fundamental rights under Art. 14 and 22, it would be void and detentions effected under the relevant provisions of the said act would be equally imperative." It argued that though the P. D. Act was there for maintenance of law and order and for preventing anti-social activities, yet emergency and the D. I. R. had to be kept alive for serving the political interest of the ruling party and for harassing the opposition. It therefore, demanded that emergency should be withdrawn and the DIR repealed immediately, but the demand was rejected.<sup>1</sup>

In December, 1964 again, the opposition moved a resolution alleging that in Tripura, the D. I. Rules were being indiscriminately used in order to gag the political opposition. Even when the detenués of all other states were released, Tripura's political prisoners were being kept under detention, it regretted. When the detenués applied to the Supreme court for their release, the Honourable Court commented that the Government of Tripura violated the D. I. Rules also, and that it kept the communist leaders and workers under detention quite illegally. Subsequently, the Government of Tripura had to release the prisoners in deference to the verdict of the Supreme Court; but even after that, hundreds of members and supporters of the CPI were arrested and detained in jails under the same D. I. R. and several false cases were instituted against them, it alleged. It, then, raised demand for judicial enquiry into the incidents of arrest which, it thought, would expose the misuse of the D. I. Rules. It concluded with an appeal to the ruling party to release the leaders and cadres of democratic movements and to withdraw all cases against them and thus bring back an



atmosphere in which democratic forces might work.<sup>129</sup> But the resolution was voted down after a prolonged and heated debate.

Similarly, in March, 1965, a resolution was moved on behalf of the opposition demanding repeal of the D. I. Rules. The opposition alleged that in Tripura as in the rest of India, the D. I. Rules were being applied against the toiling masses - the workers, peasants, employees and others, who carried forward the democratic movements demanding supply of foodstuffs at cheap rates and increase of emoluments in order to cope with the soaring prices of the essential commodities. It further alleged that the D. I. Rules were being applied against the leaders and followers of democratic movements in order to silence popular discontent against price-rise, corruption and artificial crisis. Demanding release of the persons arrested in connection with food and other movements and the repeal of the D. I. R., the resolution warned that the people would not tolerate that injustice for long.<sup>130</sup> After a heated debate, the resolution was put to vote and lost.

An opposition member moved a motion in the same month alleging that in the name of the Country's defence, conspiracy was being hatched to kill democracy. Newer and newer rents and taxes were being unjustly imposed on the masses, and the blackmarketeers and hoarders were given free hand to plunder the wealth of the nation, he added. The anti-social elements who created artificial crisis of essential commodities were given free hand to go on with the mischievous activities, while the democratic and anti-Government forces were being arrested under the D. I. Rules with the specific motive of silencing the voice of the opposition, he concluded.<sup>131</sup> Speaking in support

of the motion, another member of the opposition said that emergency situation was no longer there, yet emergency was kept alive as a facade to curb the democratic right and liberty of the opposition parties, especially the CPI and the CPI(M). He alleged further that only with the ill motive of curbing the democratic rights of the opposition parties, leaders and cadres of the opposition were being arrested and detained in Tripura and other parts of India under the D. I. R. and in the name of emergency. He concluded demanding immediately ending up of the state of emergency and the D. I. Rules,<sup>132</sup> but the motion was rejected.

Likewise, In March, 1966, a resolution was moved on behalf of the Opposition demanding immediate ending up of the D. I. Rules and emergency. In support of its demand, the opposition mentioned that a few days back, Sri M. C. Sitalbad, a former Attorney General of India and 33 other prominent citizens of India, in a letter addressed to the president and the Prime Minister of India demanded immediate withdrawal of emergency. In that letter, they mentioned that continued state of emergency was turning India's Parliamentary democracy into a constitutional dictatorship.<sup>133</sup> Members from both sides participated in the discussion on the resolution and after a prolonged debate, it was put to vote and lost.

In April, 1966 again, an opposition member moved a resolution that : "In consideration of the Tashkent Agreement and in consideration of the fact that normal situation has almost been restored in the internal sphere, let the Central Government be requested to declare that Emergency is revoked and the Defence of India Acts and Rules repealed." He contended that arrests and detentions under the D. I. R. were anti-democratic; and hence so long

as the D. I. R. would remain, the voice of the democracy would remain gagged. Though assurances were given at the time of proclamation of emergency that the D. I. R. would be applied for thwarting external dangers only, more than three thousand leaders and workers of the opposition parties had been languishing in different prisons of India for launching democratic movements, he alleged. He added that it was learnt from the ruling circle that these prisoners would not be released before the coming General Election and in this connection he made reference to what Sitalbad commented - "The Government has to consider the fact that with thousands of people put behind the prison bars and fundamental rights taken away, it would be a farce to hold the democratic election." He further added that agreement with China would have also been possible in the same manner as the settlement of dispute with Pakistan was reached, but the ruling party was not up and doing in that regard in order to keep the emergency and the D. I. R. alive. In view of the above, he demanded that the emergency be immediately lifted and the D. I. R. repealed.<sup>134</sup> Three members from the opposition and two from the treasury benches then took part in the discussion on the resolution. The Chief Minister opposed the resolution saying that "Emergency and the D. I. R. are horrible to those who are fifth columnists. Hence we must keep Emergency and the D. I. R. alive in order to crush the fifth columnists."<sup>135</sup> The state of emergency, however, was revoked and the D. I. R. repealed before the General Election of 1967 in pursuance of a decision taken by the Government of India in that regard.

### **I. Protest against 'curbe' on political and democratic rights during the 1975 emergency.**

The Opposition strongly and consistently opposed the measures taken by the Government during the 1975 emergency for curtailing the political and democratic rights of the masses. The issue was raised 24 times by the opposition in course of discussion on budget estimates and government resolutions and motions. Side by side with its searching criticism of the Government measures which it considered undemocratic and anti-people, it went on urging the Government to withdraw such bills and resolutions as, in its view, aimed at curtailing the civic and political rights of the masses, but no heed was paid to its appeals. A short account of the part played by the opposition in this regard is given below.

On 28th July, 1975, Law Minister Sri Monoranjan Nath moved a Government Resolution regarding rectification of the "The constitution (39th Amendment) bill, 1975" brought and passed in the Houses of the Parliament on 23rd and 24th July for amending articles 123, 230, 239 (B), 352, 356, 359 and 360 of the constitution. Taking part in the discussion on the resolution, a CPI(M) member argued that the situation existing in India at that period did not justify proclamation of emergency. He alleged that the emergency was declared in order to thwart the rising democratic movements and to take away the rights of the working people to agitate and strike for realisation of their just demands. The owners of mills and factories hailed the emergency as it took away the right of the workers to wage movements in support of their demands, he added. It was highly regrettable that the fundamental rights as conferred by Part III of the Constitution were suspended and thus individual liberty was seized and the country was turned into a police state, he alleged. The opposition was not

opposed to the 21 point programme and it supported the steps for containing price rise, but for that emergency was not required, he added. He alleged further that the politics of a particular party was getting upperhand and slogans like "Indira is India" was being raised, and that signalled the advent of fascism and one-party dictatorship in the country, and he expressed grave doubt whether the common people of India would tolerate the state of affairs for long.<sup>136</sup> After he finished his speech, he and the other C. P. I. (M) M. L. As staged a walk out as a mark of protest against the resolution.

Bulu Kuki [Independent, previously C. P. I (M)] then took part in the discussion on the resolution and alleged that the emergency was declared in order to subdue the opposition parties and forces in the country and to build up the dictatorship of the ruling party. He alleged further that the party in power had been trying to weaken and harass the democratic forces in the opposition using the emergency provisions and the Internal Security Act as instruments. The present proposals for amendment of the Constitution were brought in order to take away the democratic rights of the constitutionally recognised parties to criticise the ruling party, and also to suspend the fundamental rights of the citizens, he added. He opined that the party in power should have taken the opinions of the public before taking steps for bringing about such a major change in the Constitution. He was further of the view that if the internal security was really at stake, it was due to the failure of the ruling party to solve the deepening economic problems of the masses and for a real solution of the problem, steps should have been taken to formulate such policies as might bring about self-sufficiency in the

economic sphere. But far from doing that, the party in power was guided solely by narrow party interests, he alleged, and that was why he could not but oppose the resolution for ratification of the amendment proposal, he concluded.<sup>137</sup> Tarit Mohan Das Gupta, Radhika Ranjan Gupta and Jitendralal Das spoke in support of the resolution and Chief Minister Sri Sen Gupta concluded the discussion on the resolution. The resolution was then put to vote and passed by 37-0 votes, one abstained.

On 9.8.1975 again, the Law Minister moved a Government resolution for ratification of the Constitution (40th Amendment) Bill, 1975 for keeping the post of the President, the Vice-President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker outside and above the jurisdiction of the Judiciary. A C. P. I (M) member opposed the resolution because, in his opinion, the proposed amendment would tarnish the image of Indian Democracy and thus undermine the prestige of India in the eye of the outer world. He argued further that it was not determined who would be President, Vice-President, Prime Minister and Speaker before the elections to the posts were held and before the election every body was equal in the eye of law, and hence if the jurisdiction of the Judiciary was curtailed and curbed in the manner as proposed, the principle of equality in the eye of law would be seriously and adversely effected.<sup>138</sup>

The C. P. I member extended his whole-hearted support to the resolution as, in his view, the proposed amendment would, to a great extent, meet the requirements of a developing society like India. He opined that it was wrong to conclude that democracy would be at stake if some restrictions were imposed on the Supreme Court and the High Courts. Contradicting the demand of the C. P. I. (M)

member for same democracy for all, he queried whether the same democracy could be extended to both the Birlas and their workers. While the interest of the Birlas was profit and that of their workers more emoluments, how could the same democracy be conceived for both of them, he queried further. In conclusion, he expressed his conviction that the promulgation of emergency and proclamations and constitutional amendments at its aftermath would steadily lead India towards rapid development and progress.<sup>139</sup> Some members from the treasury benches then took part in the discussion on the resolution and after that, the resolution was put to vote and passed.

On 11.3.1976, Krishna Das Bhattacharjee, the Minister-in-Charge of the Revenue Department moved a motion "That the West Bengal Security (Re-enacting) third Amendment Bill", 1976 (Tripura Bill 1 of 1976) be taken into consideration. Taking part in the discussion on the motion, a C. P. I (M) member alleged that it was brought in order to suppress the mass movements that would erupt in future. Due to the failure of the Government to solve the problems faced by the common people, popular discontent mounted and such an act was required to subdue a possible eruption of that discontent, he added. The Governor and Ministers in their addresses claimed that momentous changes were brought about in all spheres in the wake of the emergency. If it was the fact, then why should the Government take recourse to re-enacting the security Act, he queried. He alleged that when the emergency would be lifted, the act would be used to suppress the movements that would erupt - it would then be applied against those who would place the problems of

the masses before the Government, exert pressures on it and start movements for realisation of the popular demands. Though the Government sought to assure the members that the act would be applied against the reactionary elements who opposed democracy and socialism in India, and against the blackmarketeers and other anti-social elements, in actual practice, it had been applied mainly against the leaders and workers of the democratic movements in the past days, he complained. He, therefore, opposed the bill and called upon the Government to withdraw it.<sup>140</sup>

Bulu Kuki also opposed the bill and stated that the mode of application of the act in the past revealed the fact that the people who organised and carried on democratic movements became its target and the money-lenders, profiteers and other mischief-mongers as also the enemies of Indian socialism were spared. He then alleged that the Government carried on repression on the people in the shape of forcible collection of levy, arrear rents, etc., and imposition of more and more taxes taking the advantage of the emergency and the people and their leaders in the Assembly were unable to raise their voices against those repressive measures. But when the emergency would not be there, all would stand against that injustice, and the bill for re-enactment of the act was brought in order to counter that imminent upsurge, he added. The Government had enough legal weapons in its arsenal to punish the anti-social and anti-national elements and hence there was no justification for re-enacting the Security Act, he opined, and urged the Government to withdraw the bill.<sup>141</sup>

Taking part in the discussion on the motion, the C. P. I. member stated that he was not in one with those who



opposed the bill. He opined that Security Act was necessary side by side with the existing laws and in support of his contention, he stated, by way of example, that in case a smuggler was caught with a bag of salt in the border area one foot inside the Indian territory, he could not be arrested by any act other than a security act. In view of this, he extended support to the bill, but cautioned at the same time that necessary precautions should be taken so that no misuse of the act could take place.<sup>142</sup> Tarit Mohan Das Gupta, Monoranjan Nath, Krishna Das Bhattacharjee, Sushil Rajan Saha, Radha Raman Nath and Mongchbai Mog addressed supporting the motion and after that the motion was put to voice vote and carried.

On 23rd March, 1976, a C. P. I. (M) member alleged, in course of discussion on the supplementary demands for Grants for 1975-76 that from the activities of the Government it appeared that the people of Tripura were then living in a police state and not in a democratic state. The manner in which the leaders and workers of political and democratic movements were being arrested, transferred to the jails of a far-away province and denied classification in jails proved fairly well that the party in power was determined to satiate its vengeance on the people who opposed its anti-people activities, he added. He complained further that though a good number of prisoners were members and workers of political parties and many others were supporters of democratic movements, the facilities of classification were not given to them. Contradicting the statement of the Chief Minister that the facilities of classification had been extended to all prisoners who belonged to recognised political parties, he mentioned the names of a good number of political prisoners who were

still to get the facility. He then cited the names of some leaders and workers of democratic and employees' movements who were deprived of the benefit of classification. Even if they were arrested under the MISA, they should have been given the facility as there was provision for extending the benefit of classification to the prisoners in that act also, he added. Even in British region, the political prisoner enjoyed the facilities, but the benefit was being denied to the prisoners of free India, he regretted.<sup>143</sup>

In course of discussion on the budget estimates, 1976-77, a C. P. I. (M) member stated that though the Finance Minister in his budget address claimed that development works in the State were going on in war footing, the common people alone realised through their experiences the state of affairs that continued. The Minister, in his address, stated that the democratic processes in the state were brought to a stand-still at the beginning of the year 1975 by prolonged strike of the employees and "a deliberate obstruction of the functioning of the Assembly" and that was why the Government had to take recourse to the provisions of the D. I. R. and MISA, but in actual practice, the Government was paralysing the democratic system taking the advantage of the emergency and was imposing its will on the people in an undemocratic manner, he alleged. The rights that were essential for the very survival of the common people - their individual liberty, the right of the workers and employees to place their demands and to strike for realisation of those demands - were all taken away, he added. Though the Government claimed that the administration of the state was running smoothly, the common people were being tortured and harassed at the

hands of the police and the agents of the ruling party, he complained. Crores of rupees were sought to be sanctioned in the budget in the name of development of the state, but the money would serve the interests of the big land-lords, money-lenders and rich businessmen only and the common people would not derive any benefit therefrom, he added.<sup>144</sup>

Taking part in the budget discussion, another C. P. I. (M) member pointed his finger to the vacant chairs in the visitors' Galleries and the Press Gallery of the Assembly and enquired of the speaker whether it was a normal meeting of the Assembly or a secret meeting. Pointing out the fact that the deliberations of the opposition members inside the Assembly were not being published due to strict censorship imposed on the Press by the Government, he commented that it was doubtful whether democracy had ever been attacked and subjugated in the like manner anywhere else in the world. The Ministers stated time and again that emergency was declared in order to put the 'Right' reactionary forces under control; but what occurred in practice in Tripura was that many leaders, members and supporters of the C. P. I. (M) and a good number of leaders and workers of the democratic and employees' movements were arrested and imprisoned utilising the provisions of the emergency as instruments, he complained. There was no specific charge against those prisoners, still they were not given the opportunity to go to court and in that manner attack on the democratic rights continued, he added.<sup>145</sup>

Chief Minister Shri Sengupta moved a motion on 8.9.1976 that the Tripura Prevention of Defacement of Property Bill, 1976 (Tripura bill No. 10 of 1976) be taken into consideration. Taking part in the discussion on the

motion, a C. P. I. (M) member stated that, from the statement made by the Minister on the objects of the bill, it appeared that the bill was brought in order to maintain the beauty of the walls and roads of the state, but it became clear from an in-depth analysis of the provisions of the bill that the bill had many complicacies. Hence, if the bill was passed into an act, it would be easy to penalise any person any time; any man would be able to satiate his personal grudge on his enemy by pasting any objectionable poster on the walls of his residence at dead of night, he added. He, therefore, opposed the bill as he thought that, when passed into an act, it would serve as another instrument in the hands of the party in power to harass the common people and to level attacks on their individual liberty.<sup>146</sup>

The C.P.I. member, in his speech, observed that some provisions should be made in the bill in order to give some protection to the political parties as the parties always enjoyed right to write posters on the walls, and postering had always been a part of their political campaigns. The Government might see to it that thenceforth posters were not written or pasted on the walls of the building of an individual against his will, but alternative provisions like pasting posters on bamboo fencings, or hanging posters on threads across roads or streets at reasonable heights, etc., should be there. The Government should also see to it that police did not create any trouble or harassment to the political parties taking the advantage of the bill.<sup>147</sup> From the treasury benches, Radha Raman Nath, Sailesh Chandra Shome and Naresh Chandra Roy then took part in the discussion, and then, the Chief Minister concluded the discussion on the motion. After that, the bill was put to voice vote and carried.

On November, 15, 1976, the Minister for Law moved a Government resolution that " This House ratifies the amendment to the Constitution of India falling within the purview of the proviso of the Clause (2) of the Article 368 thereof, proposed to be made by the Constitution (Forty fourth Amendment) Bill, 1976, as passed by the two Houses of Parliament ..... " Immediately after that, a C.P.I.(M) member told the Speaker that he had something to say about the resolution as was moved and the Speaker requested him to wait till the Minister completed his statement on the resolution. But he did not agree to wait that far and stated that since such an important matter as constitutional amendment was made without any discussion and without taking the views of the people, he and the other members of his party in the Assembly could not take part in such discussion and they had no alternative but to leave the House. At that stage, the C.P.I.(M) legislature party en bloc left the House. <sup>148</sup>

Taking part in the discussion on the resolution, Bulu Kuki stated that he was not opposed to the proposed amendment, rather he was in favour of such constitutional change as was consistent with the changing requirements of the masses. But the hasty process in which the present amendment proposal was placed before the House for ratification could not be supported, he added. Further, it must be ensured that the fundamental rights of the citizens would not be curtailed consequent on the ratification of the present amendment, he emphasised. The amendment sought to incorporate a list of fundamental duties for the citizens, but the right of lakhs of unemployed youths to get employment was being neglected, he regretted. He once again criticised the hasty process of

placing the proposal for ratification and took a neutral stand on the resolution. <sup>149</sup> From the treasury benches, Tarit Mohan Dasgupta, Maulana Abdul Latif, Radha Raman Nath, Birchitra Mohan Saha, Ajit Kumar Ghosh, Sushil Ranjan Saha, Chandra Sekhar Dutta, Basana Chakraborty, Naresh Chandra Roy, Madhu Sudhan Das and Chief Minister Sengupta took part in the discussion on the resolution, and after that, the resolution was put to vote and passed unanimously.

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that the opposition members, particularly those belonging to the CPI(M) did their utmost for the safe guard of socio-economic and political rights of the masses during the emergency period. The role of the independent member [previously CPI(M)] in this respect was also noteworthy, but the CPI MLA almost consistently played the role of an ally of the ruling party during the whole period of the emergency, and he did so in strict pursuance of the national policy of his party during the period. There is no denying the fact that the weak and divided Opposition could not exert much pressure on the party in power to review and revise the policy it was pursuing, but considering the rigid restrictions prevailing all around during the period, their performances cannot be regarded as insignificant.

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ISSUES AS DEALT

### BY THE OPPOSITION.

During the period under review, the legislative opposition in Tripura from time to time took active part in the discussions on some issues of national and international significance also. Thus, it participated in the discussion on

the issues of national importance like national integration, Indo-Pak war, 1965, election of Shri V.V. Giri as the President of India, and the U.S. move to set up military base in Diago Garcia; and international issues like Bangladesh and Vietnam. A short estimate of how the Opposition dealt with those issues is furnished below.

### **A. National Integration.**

The Opposition time and again voiced the imperative need of unity and integrity of the country in the face of the Chinese attack in 1962 and its aftermath and the Indo-Pak war in 1965. Thus, in March, 1964, an opposition member, in course of his budget speech, laid bare the deplorable state of India's national integration and regretted that in lieu of strengthening national integration, the forces of reaction and communalism were being given free hand to raise their ugly heads. Thousands of refugees were pouring into Tripura due to repressions in East Pakistan, and attempts were being made by interested circles for spreading the seeds of Pakistan's repression all over Tripura; but the ruling party was not at all alive to the danger, he alleged. On the other hand, it was busy in strengthening its own position in total disregard of the imperative need of strengthening national integration, he added. He emphasised that even the ruling party had to admit that the communist party always stood against the forces of reaction and communalism. Hence, if the Government could have utilised the strength of the communist party in the works of development and integrity of the country, national integrity would surely be strengthened, But far from doing that, the Government was taking political revenge on the Opposition by arresting and detaining the leaders and cadres of the communist

party, he alleged. If it were at all serious about national integration, it would have released the detenues and utilised their co-operation in the works of overall development of the state and in strengthening communal harmony. <sup>150</sup> But the Government did not pay any heed to the suggestions of the Opposition.

The question of national integration came to the forefront during the Indo-Pak war of 1965 again. In November, 1965, a resolution was moved by an opposition member emphasising that, if the country was to be strengthened, all the representatives of the people, elected or otherwise, who had been kept under detention, should be released forthwith and their services utilised for strengthening the defence of the country. In Delhi and Punjab, all party defence committees were formed, but in Tripura, no such initiative was taken till then, he regretted. He, therefore, appealed to the Government of Tripura to take initiative for forming such a committee and take its co-operation for the sake of the defence of the country. <sup>151</sup> Participating in the discussion on the resolution, another opposition member alleged that far from releasing the leaders and cadres of the communist parties already in prisons, the Government resorted to the policy of indiscriminately arresting more members of these parties under D.I. Rules and detaining them without trial. He further alleged that the ruling party was utilising national emergency for its own integration, and that was why the opposition parties were being denied the scope to work in the civil defence. He warned that if the ruling party persisted in its policy of keeping the members of all other parties aloof from the Citizens' Council, unity and integrity of Tripura would surely be weakened. Hence, he urged the party in power



to give up its 'partisan attitude' for the sake of national independence, integrity and sovereignty and to form an all-party defence committee immediately.<sup>152</sup> Some members from the treasury benches then spoke, opposing the resolution, and after that, the resolution was put to vote and lost. Thus, all the suggestions of the Opposition for strengthening national integrity and defence were turned down by the Government side.

### **B. Indo-Pak War, 1965**

On 12.11.1965, Chief Minister Shri Singh moved a Government resolution that "Whereas after sending hordes of armed infiltrators into Kashmir, Pakistan crossed the International boundary line and mounted a heavy attack in the Chhamb sector of Jammu on September 1, 1965, and continued the aggression making air-raids on civilian population not only in neighbouring areas but also in distant areas like Tripura, this Assembly takes the grim resolution of meeting the said naked aggression on the soil of India and calls upon all the inhabitants of the country to continue their fight forgetting all the differences and to preserve the integrity of the country ....."<sup>153</sup> Opposition members in the Assembly extended wholehearted support to the resolution and gave the assurance that they and their party-men would stand by the side of the Government with all their might at that moment of national danger.<sup>154</sup> On the same date, a resolution was moved by an opposition member that "In view of the partisan attitude of the British Government against India in the recent attack of Pakistan against India, this House is of opinion to request the Central Government that India should immediately quit common wealth as a self-respecting nation".<sup>155</sup> Bir Chandra Deb Barma and Atiqul Islam of the CPI and

Sudhanwa Deb Barma of the CPI(M) extended full support to the resolution, and congress members Monoranjan Nath, Gopesh Deb and Karunamay Nath Choudhury opposed it; and after that, the resolution was put to vote and lost.

### **C. Election of V. V. Giri as the President of India.**

On 23.9.1969, Education Minister Krishna Das Bhattacharjee moved a Government Resolution that "This House places on record its pleasure and satisfaction at the election of Sri. V. V. Giri to the highest and most exalted office of the President of India. victory of Shri Giri is a victory for the people of India and an advancement of the country towards our goal of democratic socialism. the members of the Assembly convey their heartiest felicitation on his success and wish him a long and active life to head the country to Unity and prosperity.<sup>156</sup> Taking part in the discussion on the resolution, an opposition member expressed his satisfaction and that of his party at the election of Shri Giri as the President of India, but he opined at the same time that the slogan of democratic socialism raised by the ruling party carried little weight. Thus, Pandit Nehru talked of socialism in 1961, and in the Congress Conference of 1962 again emphasis was laid on the establishment of socialism, but no effective step in that direction was taken till then. He, therefore, viewed that so long as the prevailing social structure and the then Government existed, it would not be possible to establish socialism in the country, no matter who became its President; and hence it could not be expected that any fundamental change would come about due to the election of Shri Giri to the Presidentship of India.<sup>157</sup> Extending support to the resolution, another opposition member

opined that from the raising of such resolution by the ruling party, it became clear that even those amongst the party who had so long been the supporters of monopoly capital were now bound to accept the reality that victory of Shri giri was victory for the people of India. He stated in that context that during the last 22 years of congress rule, the capital of the monopoly capitalists like the Tatas and the Birlas increased enormously, but there was no mentionable rise in the per capita income of the common people, and the condition of the working people deteriorated a lot and from that it was evident that economic development of the country was not possible under capitalist system. He, then, opined that the election of Sri Giri opened up the possibility of a break-up within the ruling party and formation of coalition Government both at the national and the state levels. Congratulating the election of Shri Giri to the Presidentship, he sharply criticised some members of the ruling party of Tripura for their "opportunist role" in that regard, as they would have congratulated congress candidate Shri Reddy also in the same manner if he would have been elected President.<sup>158</sup> some members of the treasury benches then addressed supporting the resolution and after that, it was put to vote and accepted unanimously.

#### **D. The U. S. Military base in Diago Garica.**

The opposition strongly opposed the U. S. move to build up military base in Diago Garcia and condemned the proposal of Moynehan, the then U. S. Ambassador in India, to alter the name of the Indian Ocean. It branded the U. S. move as dangerous to our national security and urged the Government of India to rise to the occasion to foil that "imperialist conspiracy."<sup>159</sup>

## **E. Situation in Bangladesh in 1971**

On March 25, 1971, a reign of terror and repression was unleashed on the people of the then East Pakistan by the West Pakistan troops. The Awami League party workers and sympathisers were brutally gunned down in Dacca streets. Brutal military force was used to kill unarmed people. Houses were demolished. Women were raped and killed and children were mercilessly butchered. On 29.3.1971, the Chief Minister of Tripura made a statement before the House on "The present situation in East Bengal". In his statement, Shri Singh said; "It is natural that our freedom-loving people will express great concern at the development in East Pakistan where the recent happenings have stood in the way of culmination of the process that were ushered in the General Election in Pakistan that was held in December last and the people have been undergoing a severe trial for the faith in democracy ... . Our heart goes out in sympathy for the people of East Pakistan at this hour of their trial ... . I may reiterate that we stand for democracy and socialism and we shall condemn any forces that stand in the way of these noble ideals in any part of the world."<sup>160</sup> The opposition enlisted its fullest support to the stand taken by the Government and expressed firm conviction that the struggle of the people of Bangladesh for peace and freedom would ultimately be crowned with success. At the same time, it urged the Government of India to raise the issue of the inhuman and barbaric atrocities perpetrated on the unarmed people of Bangladesh by the West Pakistani army in the U. N. O. and request it to take immediate steps to stop the genocide, and also to mobilise world opinion in favour of the struggle for democracy and freedom that continued then in

Bangladesh.<sup>161</sup>

On 31.3.1971 again, the Chief Minister moved a Government resolution that "In view of the grave situation arising out of denial of human rights of the people of East Bengal and atrocity committed by Yahya Khan and his fellows on the people of Bangladesh, this House extends its full support to the freedom-loving people of Bangladesh in the struggle for establishing democratic rights and requests the Government of India to recognise the newly-formed Government of Bangladesh headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; and extend all kinds of helps to the people of Bangladesh in their struggle for freedom ..." <sup>162</sup>. The opposition of Bangladesh stood solidly behind the resolution and requested the Government of Tripura to form an all-party committee so that all necessary help and co-operation could be given to thousands of refugees who were taking shelter in Tripura for fear of life following the genocide in Bangladesh. It also urged the Government of India to extend all sorts of help including arms and ammunition to the heroic youths of Bangladesh who were struggling tooth and nail for their right of self-determination and democracy. <sup>163</sup>

#### **F. Vietnam**

As regards the Vietnam issue, the Opposition alleged that the Government of India was not emphatic enough in condemning the barbarities which the United States was still continuing there. It also demanded that the Government of India should extend recognition to the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam without further delay.

It is thus clearly evident that the Opposition played its

role in a befitting manner so far as the contemporary national and international issues and problems were concerned. While it extended its support to the Government steps in some cases, in some others, it opposed the Government measures and requested it to rectify its 'loopholes', but not much attention was paid to its requests and suggestions.

Our discussion in the foregoing pages show it fairly well that the legislative opposition in Tripura succeeded in handling the important contemporary local, national and international political issues in an appreciable manner. We have seen that the vital political issues raised and fought by the Opposition in the Assembly were : Arrest of leaders and followers of the political and democratic movements, 'Attacks' on democratic movements, corruptions in administration, police budgets, safe-guard of political and democratic rights during the emergencies, separation of executive and judiciary, local self-government and some national and international issues. In course of discussions on those issues, the opposition alleged that the Government went on suppressing the democratic movements, arresting leaders and workers of political and democratic movements, allowing corruption in administration to go on unabated, fattening the police budgets in order to suppress mass movements, denying political rights and political justice to the masses, and denying budgetary and other powers to the local self-Government Institutions. At the same time, it pressurised the Government to release the leaders and workers of the political and democratic movements, to give due classification to the leaders and workers under detention, to abstain from using police against the masses, to take

steps for containing corruption in administration, to discontinue 'Attacks' on political rights and political justice of the masses and to transfer budgetary and other powers to the local self-Government institutions. Though most of the demands and suggestions were turned down on the floor of the House, a good number of them were accepted by the Government eventually, and therein lies the success of the Opposition.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### OPPOSITION AND THE SOCIAL ISSUES

The vital Social issues raised and fought by the Legislative Opposition in Tripura may be brought under two broad categories : (1) Demand for some Economic and Social safeguards to the tribesmen, the original inhabitants of Tripura and (2) Demand for extension of settlement and other social and economic benefits to the refugees and the weaker sections of the non-tribals.

#### Economic and Social Safeguards to the Tribals

This had been a major fighting issue to the legislative opposition in Tripura. The Opposition availed itself of every opportunity to spearhead the issue in the sessions of the Assembly. Strongly refuting the Government claim that remarkable progress was achieved in the sphere of tribal welfare, the Opposition pointed out with supporting data that the progress was rather slow and quite unsatisfactory. Besides making a searching criticism of the failures of the Government in this respect, the opposition members from time to time came forward with valuable suggestions for solution of the problems faced by the tribals and for providing protection to them. The issue was raised 86 times in the Assembly by the Opposition through legislative media like amendments on the motions of thanks to Administrator's, Lieutenant Governor's and Governor's addresses, budget discussions, cut motions against demands for grants and private member's resolutions and motions.

The Scheduled Tribe population of Tripura had been very backward both socially and economically during the



period under review and therefore adequate protective measures were urgently called for. The Government claimed that it had done a lot for improving the economic condition of the tribals, but the Opposition contradicted the claim and contended that the tribal economy reached the point of collapse due to the indifference of the Government. It, therefore, pressurised the Government to be up and doing for the economic uplift of the tribals, but not much heed was paid to the demand. In his budget address of 1963-1964, Chief Minister Shri Singh claimed that substantial amount of money was spent during the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Five years Plans "With a view to bringing the community (the tribals) socially and economically at par with the general population".<sup>1</sup> In course of his budget speech, an opposition member admitted that the Central Government had been spending lakhs of rupees for betterment of the lot of the Scheduled Tribes. At the same time, he alleged that the manner in which that money was spent signified sheer wastage of money. In this connection, he gave reference to the Report of the Dhebar Commission where the urgency of Tribal Welfare in Tripura was mentioned alongwith the Welfare of the tribes of other States. He expressed regret that the recommendations of the Dhebar Commission were not put to action till then. He alleged further that because of the forest policy of the Government, the economic conditions of the tribals of Tripura (80 percent of whom subsisted on shifting cultivation) reached the verge of complete collapse. The Jhumias were prohibited to render any land arable in the reserved forest area. But the Dhebar Commission recommended that so long as they were not economically rehabilitated, their present means of livelihood should not be disturbed. He did not deny that forests have to be

protected, but the problem was how the forests could be preserved after protecting vast masses of men. <sup>2</sup>

Taking part in the budget discussion, another member expressed concern that jhumia economy was on the verge of collapse. In competition with big businessmen, the jhumias were facing extinction. He, therefore, demanded that, in this predicament, proper measures should be taken for their protection. Those areas in which jhumias carried on transaction in sale and purchase should be declared reserved scheduled areas so that the people of different origin could not infiltrate there. Moreover, steps should have to be taken for marketing of yield from their land, viz, jute, cotton, sesamum, etc. He further demanded that the recommendations of the Dhebar Commission in that regard should be implemented. <sup>3</sup> But no step was taken in that respect.

The opposition also contradicted the claim of the Government that more than half of the landless tribals were rehabilitated in the settlement colonies. It focussed the defects of the jhumia settlement policy of the Government also and the corrupt practices that allegedly continued in settling the jhumias. Pointing out the various aspects of the jhumia settlement problems, it urged the Government to take remedial measures, but no heed was paid to its request.

In course of his budget speech of 1963-64, the Chief Minister claimed that out of 27,000 families who had been seeking rehabilitation, 15,488 families had been given settlement by the end of the Third Five Year Plan and settlement of the remaining families would be completed soon. Contradicting the claim of the Chief Minister that

more than fifteen thousand jhumia families had already been rehabilitated, an opposition member stated emphatically that only 4,000 jhumia families had been given opportunities of rehabilitation, 15,000 families had been trying to rehabilitate themselves by their own efforts and the remaining families were still to be rehabilitated.<sup>4</sup>

Another member of the Opposition pointed out that as the tribal jhumias were backward and simple, they often used to sell out land that had been given to them for the purpose of resettlement and go to other regions. Thus, though the settled jhumias had 2 acres of 'lunga' (plain) land each family formerly, ultimately they were dispossessed of that land. In view of the gravity of the problem, he requested the Government to implement the recommendation of the Dhebar Commission for declaring a scheduled area in Tripura. In view of the fact that there was no scheduled area in Tripura, the commission recommended that "the areas of Kanchanpur, Chamanu, Amarpur, Teliamura blocks and some other areas under Sadar b., and Sabroom Sub-Divisions which are contiguous to Amarpur and Teliamura Blocks and have a preponderance of Tribal population may be declared as scheduled areas." In these areas, the jhumias should be resettled and they must have title on the land on which they would be rehabilitated. The commission further suggested that jhuming (shifting cultivation) should be permitted, wherever possible, and jhum cultivation on scientific basis, be introduced, he added.<sup>5</sup>

In the budget session of 1964-65, the Opposition protested against the policy of rehabilitating some jhumia families in the reserved forest areas through 'taungiya'

system. Under this system, tribal jhumias were allotted some areas in the forest and an arrangement was made that they would get Rs. 45/- per acre from the forest department for the work they would do in raising forest crops in conjunction with their jhum crops following the same technique of dibbling seeds of forest species in 6 feet apart lines. It opposed "forest village" system also as the tribals did not enjoy ownership of land they cultivated in such villages. In place of right on land, few concessions were granted by the forest department to the inmates of such villages which were valid and were in force so long as the terms and conditions laid down between the settlers and the forest department were observed satisfactorily. Thus, under these systems also, the jhumias were denied title on land and they were encouraged to carry on jhuming in other name. The Opposition, therefore, opposed these systems and ban on jhuming until alternative arrangements for economic rehabilitation of the jhumias were made. <sup>6</sup> But the Government did not pay any heed to its protest.

The Opposition unhesitatingly accepted the Government claim that a good number of jhumia settlement colonies had been set up for rehabilitating the Jhumias and that upto the end of the third plan, by and large, plain land had been allotted to the Jhumias. But things began to be complicated after the third plan, it opined. Thus, in April, 1964, it pointed out that most of the Jhumias, who had been settled after the third plan, did not get any land to cultivate. Lands that were given to a few Jhumia families were mostly hilly lands and hence not cultivable. The settlement colony of Kathalcherra of Belonia and Bishramganj Model Colony were cases in point, it added.

Previously, the tribals could collect materials from forest for construction of their houses, but new forest law deprived them of this opportunity also, it alleged. No arrangement of irrigation facilities was there in the settlement colonies and hence production of crop was not satisfactory, it added. As a result of all this, a good number of Jhumias were deserting the colonies. In view of the mismanagement in the department of Tribal Welfare, it suggested that a powerful board should be formed with the elected members of the Assembly to look into the progress of the department in respect of rehabilitation, distribution of land etc., but the suggestion was rejected.<sup>7</sup>

In the subsequent sessions of the Territorial Assembly, the opposition raised the problems of Jhumia settlement several times and it requested the Government to take steps for their solution. The basic arguments of the opposition in this regard were similar to those as put forward by it in 1963 and 1964.

In April, 1972, the opposition demanded enquiry into the corrupt practices that allegedly continued in settling the Jhumias and the landless in the Settlement Colonies. It also demanded extension of additional grants to the inmates of the colonies, immediate rehabilitation of those jhumias and landless peasants who had been occupying the khas lands for long but evicted subsequently; and end of discrimination in the rate of rehabilitation grants and enhancement of those rates.<sup>8</sup> But no attention was paid to the demands.

During the budget sessions of the year, the Opposition pointed out that though it was mentioned in the budget that the rate of rehabilitation grant of the tribals was

raised to Rs. 1,910/- there was no specific mention as to how the government proposed to improve their lot. Though lakhs of rupees came from the Centre and expended during the last 25 years for tribal welfare, the condition of the tribals further deteriorated in stead of improving; yet no specific mention was made in the budget as to how the tribals could be saved from gradual deterioration, it added. It alleged that there was hardly any road, school and dispensary in the settlement colonies. Further, the lands and financial assistance that were given to the tribals for settlement was quite inadequate for the purpose ; in most cases, they got one or two instalments of the financial assistance and, as a result, no real rehabilitation was possible. Hence, there was every likelihood that the money earmarked in the budget for the purpose would be misused or remain unspent as were the cases in the previous years, in contended. <sup>9</sup>

The Opposition also observed that the policy of the government for rehabilitation of the landless among the scheduled tribes was defective. Giving reference to the statement of the minister-in-charge of Tribal Welfare that the tribals did not like to stay in the colonies and that was why the settlement schemes of the Government could not progress, it alleged that before coming to such a conclusion, the minister did not enquire into the circumstances under which the tribals had to leave the colonies. It, then, cited the examples of a good number of colonies in which the second instalment of the rehabilitation grant was disbursed to the inmates ten to twelve years after the disbursement of the first instalment. That was not the proper way of rehabilitation of the tribals and that was why the settlement colonies that were set up ten to twelve years

ago existed then on papers only, it added.

It concluded stating that if the party in power had any real intention to do something for the Welfare of the tribals, it should go to the spots and detect and punish those people, who stood in the way of their rehabilitation and development. <sup>10</sup> But no attention was paid to its suggestion.

In March, 1973 again, the Opposition alleged that the Jhumia settlement scheme of the Government failed miserably as it was full of defects. The Government employed agents for setting up settlement colonies and for disbursement of financial assistance to the inmates of the colonies, but those agents used to pocket the lion's share of the sanctioned money and that was why the problems of the settled jhumias further aggravated and a good number of them deserted the colonies, it alleged further. Thus, a sizeable section the Jhumias who were rehabilitated in the 'model' colonies of Bishramganj and Kamalpur and in the colonies of Simna, Barkathal, Jirania, Champaknagar, Kalyanpur, Chamanu and Khowai deserted their colonies as the agents pocketed the major portion of the settlement grants and hence the Jhumias did not derive any real benefit therefrom ; but no investigation was made into the corrupt practices, it added. It commented that Jhumia settlement scheme would never succeed if such a policy continued, and suggested that for a real solution of the problem, the real Jhumias should be identified taking the help of the representatives of the people of the localities concerned and assistance should be extended to those genuine people only. <sup>11</sup> But no heed was paid to the suggestion.

It was claimed in the Governor's Address, 1974 that some 30,118 Jhumia and 2,543 landless scheduled caste families had been settled in colonies during the last 26 years. Commenting on the Government claim, the Opposition stated that most of those families had become landless again as their lands passed to the hands of the Jotedars and moneylenders. It alleged in that context that no mention was made in the Address regarding the rehabilitation of 20 thousand landless tribal families, 2 thousand landless scheduled cast families and 57 thousand other landless families. <sup>12</sup>

In march 1976, the opposition members moved amendments on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address regretting that there was no mention in the Address regarding steps for real rehabilitation of the tribals. Giving reference to the statement of the Governor that about 32 thousand tribal families had been settled by then and about twenty thousand Jhumia and landless tribal families had been settled by then and landless tribal families were still to have rehabilitated, an opposition member queried while long 20 years were required to settle 32 thousand families, how many more years would be required to settle the remaining 20 thousand families. He, then, commented in that context that it was a mockery to say that about 32 thousand tribal families had been economically rehabilitated, and in support of his contention, he pointed out that large number of inmates of the settlement colonies had deserted the settlement colonies being faced with multifarious problems and insurmountable difficulties. <sup>13</sup> Moving an amendment on the Address, another opposition member queried whether the Government enquired if the so-called settled tribals



could carry on cultivation on the lands that were allotted to them. What happened in practice was that large number of Jhumia and landless tribals families were given settlement in uncultivable hilly lands and hence within a short time of their resettlement, they were confronted with various problems and hence many of them deserted the colonies in utter disgust and despair. <sup>14</sup>

The opposition members, therefore, requested the Government to look into different aspects of Jhumia settlement problems and to take appropriate measures for their solution, but the amendments were voted down.

The Opposition raised its voice time and again against the exploitation of the tribals by moneylenders and eviction of the tribals from their lands. It also demanded that steps must be taken to prevent eviction and migration of tribals and alienation of their lands and also that provisions of the 5th schedule of the Constitution should be applied to the tribal majority areas in order to safeguard the landed and other interests of the tribes of Tripura ; but the Government did not pay any heed to its demand. Thus, in view of the sufferings of the common tribals due to the exploitations of the mahajans (money-lenders), an opposition member moved a private members' resolution on Decemner 17, 1964 that, "As the present widely prevalent Dadan system of moneylending is ruining the poorer section in rural areas and the tribal people in particular economically, this Assembly requests the Government to adopt immediately such legal measures as to make dadan system of moneylending impermissible and punishable by law in Tripura'. 'Dadan' meant advance money for paddy crops. By advancing money against crops to be harvested, the moneylenders used to collect crops at

one-third of the price at harvesting time. This exposed the degree of exploitation of the tribals at the hands of the moneylenders. The mover of the resolution alleged that though the Bombay Moneylenders' Act was extended to the territory of Tripura, which prohibited dadan, the Government was not enforcing the specific provisions of the Act in Tripura only with the motive of protecting the interests of the moneylenders. He strongly demanded that legal measures should be taken to make this system of moneylending impermissible and punishable by law.<sup>15</sup>

Speaking in support of the resolution, the leader of the Opposition referred to the relevant recommendations of the Dhebar Commission and requested the Government to implement them. The recommendations of the Commission in that context were : "(i) Money-lenders are to be given notice to submit reports about their credits within a specified date ; (ii) The accounts of credit must be submitted to court supported by witnesses ; (iii) Rate of interest is to be fixed up ; (iv) No compound interest can be charged; and (v) The debtors must be given scope to repay the loan in easy instalments". But the Government was not up and doing to implement the recommendations, he regretted. He expressed deep concern that through the instrument of moneylending, land of the tribals was being transferred to the moneylenders in alarming proportions, thus rendering the tribals landless again. True it was that the Land Reforms Act, 1960 prohibited transfer of tribal land to non-tribals, but thousands of land disputes were cropping up despite that Act. And as a result of these disputes, thousands of settled jhumias and other tribals were being forcibly evicted from their land. In view of this, the Dhebar Commission observed that the land Reforms

Act, to the tribals, had been more harmful than good because of lacuna of law, ignorance of law and complicated legal procedure. In that context, he gave reference to the suggestions put forward by the Commission for implementation. The suggestions were : "(1) Amend the law drastically, (2) District Magistrate must have power to restore the possession of land to tribals within 12 years of eviction, (3) Tribals shall surrender land, if necessary, to the Government, and (4) Records of right should be maintained." But the Government did not implement the suggestions, he regretted.<sup>16</sup> The original resolution, after a heated debate, was put to vote and lost.

Another resolution was moved on 18.12.1964 on behalf of the Opposition, requesting the Government to "Set up a Committee, as early as possible, to go through each of the eviction cases, find out the causes of their evictions and to suggest measures for the protection of tribals' rights on land". The mover of the resolution regretted that as the recommendation of the Dhebar Commission for forming a tribal area in Tripura for safeguarding the basic interest of the tribals were not implemented, thousands of tribal families were being evicted from land by the moneylenders. He further alleged that the Government utterly failed to take any preventive measure to stop that eviction. Contradicting the Government claim that it implemented all the major recommendations of the Commission, he stated that the major Proposal of the Commission for forming a scheduled area in Tripura was not implemented till then. True, the Land Reforms Act, 1960 prohibited transfer of any tribal land to non-tribals, yet the alienation of tribal land continued. He therefore, demanded that step should be taken so that the provisions of the Act were

honoured to the letters, the recommendations of the Dhebar Commission were implemented and a Committee formed to investigate into the individual cases of eviction and to suggest remedial measures. <sup>17</sup> Some members from both sides then participated in the discussion on the resolution, and after a prolonged debate, the resolution was voted down.

Alienation of tribal land went on unabated as no positive step for stoppage of such alienation was taken by the Government. In view of the predicaments of the tribals caused by such transfer, an opposition member moved a private members' resolution on 22.3.1966 that - "This Assembly is of opinion that let the Union Government be requested to extend the 5th Schedule of the Constitution immediately to Tripura, and areas mentioned in the Dhebar Commission Report along with other areas, where there is a preponderance of tribal population be immediately declared as scheduled areas". In support of his resolution, the mover argued that the influx of the displaced persons from East Pakistan had been enormous and it had upset the local economy. It had gradually affected the tribals and had made the land problem acute. Section 187 of the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 prohibited transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals unless written permission from the District Magistrate and Collector was obtained or unless it was done by way of mortgage to cooperative societies. This might check alienation of land by tribals. But in many cases land changed hands without any deed or registration. Thus, the Act failed to safeguard rights of the tribals on land. In view of this, he argued that the only alternative to stop alienation of tribal land to non-tribals lay in

declaring a scheduled area in Tripura in pursuance of the Dhebar Commission Report and in protecting tribal right on land under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. Of course, the Commission also recommended that alternatively, the predominantly tribal areas " Should be brought under Tribal Development Block so that the bulk of tribal population is brought under intensive development programmes." In Tripura, Tribal Development Blocks were Constituted in lieu of scheduled area. But the experiments with those blocks clearly revealed that those could not be able to solve the land problems of the tribals. A good number of tribals deserted the blocks as those utterly failed to give any protection to them. In view of the above and also in view of the fact that in Amarpur and its contiguous areas, on an average more than 60 percent of the total population was tribal, he requested the Union Government to accept his request for declaring scheduled area in Trpura and to extend the provision of the 5th schedule of the Constitution to that area. <sup>18</sup>

Taking part in the discussion on the resolution, an opposition member contradicted the Government viewpoint that the 5th schedule of the constitution could not be applied in Tripura as it was a Union Territory. In support of his contention, he gave reference to page 64 of the Dhebar Commission Report which read : "The President has power under Constitution to apply any law in force in any state by a simple notification to any Union Territory and in part thereof. " In that connection, he also referred to the argument presented by the Commission that read : "We observed during our tour that the tribals of Tripura suffered from some handicaps similar to those as suffered by the tribals of the areas now declared as scheduled

areas. It should be, in our opinion, not in keeping with the spirit of the provision of the constitution relating to the protection and development of scheduled tribes to deny them the benefit and facilities accruing from the 5th schedule. We are, therefore, of the opinion that for the purpose of Scheduled areas, no distinction should be drawn between the states and the Union Territories". In view of the above, he expressed the hope that the Union Government would be sensible in accepting the demand to declare a scheduled area in Tripura and safeguard the interests of the tribals of the area.<sup>19</sup> Some members from the treasury benches then took part in the discussion on the resolution and after an acrimonious debate, the original resolution was lost.

In March, 1967 again, an opposition member moved an amendment on the motion of thanks to the Administrator's Address, 1967-68 regretting that there was no mention in the address regarding implementation of the Dhebar Commission's recommendations for declaring the tribal belt of Tripura as the scheduled area. The Commission recommended that the 5th Schedule of the constitution should be made effective in the predominantly tribal areas of Tripura in view of the fact that the tribals were backward in thought, consciousness and intellect compared to the other sections of the population; and hence the question of their existence became all the more important, he maintained. Throughout the length and breadth of Tripura, they were being evicted from their land in larger and larger numbers and huge number of them had to leave Tripura and take refuge in the Maina Forest area of East Pakistan and in different forest areas of Assam for their livelihood and survival, he continued. Keeping that in

view, there should have been a clear mention in the Address about formation of tribal scheduled area, but it was regrettable that no mention in that regard was there, he added. The Administrator stated, he continued, that his Government would bring about rapid development of the tribals through the Tribal Development Blocks, but the experience of the past showed that the tribals had been evicted in large numbers from the T.D. Block areas also. From that it followed that the T.D. Blocks would not solve the problems of the tribals and hence, in his opinion, the Government should come forward to implement the relevant recommendations of the Dhebar Commission for a real solution of the tribal problems. <sup>20</sup>

Amendment was moved by another opposition member in the demand for steps for putting a stop to continuous eviction of tribals from their lands. He regretted that not a single recommendation of the Dhebar Commission was implemented in the tribal majority areas of Tripura till then and the Administrator did not consider it necessary to mention whether the Government had any contemplation to implement those recommendations in near future. He, then, pointed out that, despite repeated Government assurance, alienation of tribal land to non-tribals continued unabated, the Land Reforms Act was evicting the landless jhumias from the Government lands they had been cultivating for long in stead of giving them settlement on those lands and the oppressive measures of the Forest Department were compelling the jhumias to leave their abodes in hills where they had been residing for generations. In view of the plight of the tribals, he requested the Government to take all necessary steps as recommended by the Dhebar Commission for their real

rehabilitation and socio-economic development.<sup>21</sup> But the amendments were voted down by the Government side.

Similarly, a resolution was tabled by an opposition member in December, 1967 demanding declaration of the predominantly tribal and adjacent areas, as scheduled area in pursuance of the 5th schedule and handing over of necessary powers to the 'Advisory Council' as provided for in the schedule. The Government was all along opposing the demand for the 5th schedule as, in its view, population of Tripura, by then, had changed its character and Tripura had turned into a mixed area. Contradicting the Government view point, the mover of the resolution assertively stated that in many places within the 'Tribal Reserve' tribal majority was still there and in support of his assertion, he mentioned, by way of example, that tribal population in North Debendranagar, Takarjala, Chamanu, Amarpur, Kulai Haor areas and Kanchanpur constituted, on an average, 68 percent of the total population. In this connection, he ruled out the apprehension expressed by the treasury benches that nontribals would have to leave Tripura if the 5th schedule was implemented. He pointed out by way of example that the 5th schedule had been implemented long ago in the tribal areas of Assam and Khasi Hills and the non-tribals in those areas faced no difficulty and they lived side by side with the tribals in peace and tranquillity. He then, expressed concern that the tribals of Tripura were suffering from frustration as they were cornered from all sides, and if that frustration was allowed to continue, that might lead to serious consequences in the long run. In view of the gravity of the situation, he and the two other members of the Opposition appealed to the Government to accept the proposal for



implementing the 5th schedule in the predominantly tribal areas of Tripura.<sup>22</sup> But the resolution was voted down after a vociferous debate.

Side by side with the pressure of the opposition inside the Assembly for implementation of the 5th schedule, a vigorous movement for realisation of the demand was continuing outside. Almost simultaneously, an extremist tribal organisation named 'Sankrak Tribal Union' raised its head and ever since its formation, it carried on disturbances in the areas from Chamanu to Kanchanpur of North Tripura. The Opposition raised the demand for appropriate steps for suppressing the Sangkrak in order to protect life and honour of the people of those areas and for preventing large-scale migration of the tribals from North Tripura to the hilly areas of Assam. Thus, in August, 1968 an opposition member moved a private members' resolution demanding that "the deterioration of law and order in protecting public life and honour as is evident from recent incidents be taken into consideration." He alleged in this connection that the ruling party was attempting to tarnish the image of the Communists by propagating that 'Sangkrak' was formed and guided by the Communist parties and the C.P.I.(M) in particular in order to drive out the non-tribals from Tripura. In order to prove the falsity of the propaganda, he cited a good number of incidents in Kanchanpur and Chamanu areas in which many reputed tribal families also were subjected to Sangkrak attacks and repression side by side with their non-tribal counter-parts. He pointed out further that during the campaign of the 3rd General Election, the then Tribal Development Minister made commitments to the reangs of Kanchanpur that if they voted him to power, he

would grant Rs.500/- and 5 kains (2 acres) of land to each of their families. But in lieu thereof, a sizeable portion of the reangs of that area were evicted from that area subsequently. This widespread eviction created a sense of anguish and frustration among those people and they organised themselves and formed the extremist organisation, he viewed. He, then, urged the Government to take immediately all necessary steps to protect life and honour of the people of those areas by suppressing the Sangkrak party.<sup>23</sup> One opposition member and a few members of the treasury benches then took part in the discussion and after a heated debate, the resolution was put to vote and lost.

As the steps taken by the Government could not effectively suppress the Sangkrak menace, a large number of tribals from Chamanu and Manikpur of the Manu Valley areas had to migrate to Assam. Similarly, many tribal families of Kanchanpur also left Tripura and took refuge in the Mikir Hills of North Cachar District of Assam. In view of this widespread migration of tribals, a private members' resolution was moved by an opposition member in March, 1969, requesting the Government to form a committee with the representatives of all political parties to investigate into the actual causes of this problem and to suggest remedial measures. He squarely held the ruling party responsible for that unfortunate development. He attacked the Government in strong language and alleged that though it could suppress the tribal extremists, it did not do that so that the common tribals were to leave Tripura in order to save their lives and honour.<sup>24</sup> The two other opposition members then spoke in support of the resolution and some members from the treasury benches

opposed it. After a prolonged and vociferous debate, the resolution for formation of committee to enquire into the causes of widespred migration of the tribals was voted down.

Thus, the Government turned down all the requests, suggestions and demands made by the opposition for solution of the problems faced by the tribals and the tribal problem further aggravated. In the meantime, the Parliamentary Administrative Reforms Committee (known as the Hanuman thaiya Committee) submitted its report to the Prime Minister of India regarding the tribal problems of North East India. It recommended that provision of the 6th schedule of the Constitution might be applied to NEFA and the hill areas of Manipur and Tripura. In view of this, the opposition went on urging the Government to implement the provisions of the sixth schedule in the tribal majority areas of Tripura and take steps for stoppage of transfer of tribal lands to non-tribals, but the Government did not pay any attention to its request. Thus, in February, 1970, an opposition member moved a private members' resolution in the Assembly urging upon the Central Government to implement immediately the recomandations of the Adminitrative Reforms Committee regarding the tribal problems of Tripura, keeping in view the serious plight of the tribals. He pointed out that the committee dealt at length with the problems of the tribes of Tripura and came to the conclusion that their problems much aggravated in the post-Independence period and as a result, a large number of them had to leave Tripura. In view of that and also in few of the fact that the problems of Tripura were similar to those of NEFA and Manipur, the Committee recommended

that provisions of the sixth schedule of the Constitution might be applied to NEFA, the hill areas of Manipur and the tribal belts of Tripura providing for autonomous districts and regional councils in all these regions. The Committee further recommended--" At the district level, implementation of policies, particularly developmental, may be left to the autonomous district and regional councils." He, therefore, urged upon the Government to implement the recommendation of the Committee for applying the sixth schedule to the tribal compact areas of Tripura and thus hand over the developmental activities of the areas to the tribals themselves. In that connection, he pointed out, the Government often claimed that it was eager for improving the lot of the tribals, but their development was to be brought about through their own culture, their customs and usages, and for that they required a compactness, a distinct area. He argued that if the Government were at all sincere, it would have enforced the safeguards of the Constitution for their protection. Far from doing that, it was trying to create disharmony and distrust between the two communities following the notorious 'Divide and Rule' policy of the British rulers, he alleged. He alleged further that the ruling party started propagating that the leftists were trying to create communal disturbances, to drive out the refugees back to East Pakistan, and to form a tribal state in Tripura. He, however, expressed satisfaction that in spite of such false propaganda, no communal disturbance took place and tribals and non-tribals co-existed here as friends as before and that brought to light the high level of democratic consciousness of the people of Tripura. Satisfaction was also expressed that the non-tribals were siding in increasing numbers with the struggle of tribals

for existence. The mover and the two other opposition members requested the ruling party to accept the resolution and to fulfil thereby the demand of the tribals for survival.<sup>25</sup> The treasury benchers opposed the resolution on the plea that since Tripura was a mixed area, it was very difficult to select compact areas, and as a result, it was not possible to apply the sixth schedule here.

In March, 1970 again, an opposition member moved an amendment on the motion of thanks to the Lieutenant Governor's Address of 1970 regretting the absence of any mention in the address about implementation of the Administrative Reforms Committee's recommendations regarding the tribals of Tripura.<sup>26</sup> Another member moved that the motion be amended as it did not include any assurance about restraining exploitation by money-lenders, setting up of Debt Settlement Board and return of land that passed to Mahajans through distress sales, stoppage of transfer of tribal land to non-tribals, safeguard for protection of rights and privileges of the schedule tribes and rehabilitation of the landless tribals and jhumias through release of Government land from reserved forests. The Lieutenant Governor, he continued, mentioned in his address that his Government would try its utmost to improve the lot of the weaker section of the population of Tripura ; but he did not make any specific mention about the steps that his Government decided to take for socio-economic development of the tribals who were the weakest section of the people being deprived of the facilities of education, employment and business. Those people were being mercilessly exploited by the money-lenders, but no preventive step was there, he regretted. The exploiters built up their fortune by carrying on super-exploitation on

the weak tribals and in the process they grabbed almost all the lands of those simple minded people. But there was no mention in the Address about giving exemplary punishment to the exploiters and about protecting the interest of the exploited tribals, he added. He urged the Government to set up a debt settlement board and arrange the return of all land from the moneylenders to the real owners, take steps to resist further alienation of tribal land to non-tribals, provide safeguards to the tribals in line with the recommendations of the Dhebar Commission and the Hanumanthaiya Committee and give settlement to the Jhumias and other landless tribals on Government lands.<sup>27</sup> But all the amendments were turned down.

In March, 1971, an opposition member moved an amendment on the motion of thanks to the Lieutenant Governor's Address, 1971-1972, regarding that there was no mention in the Address regretting implementation of the Administrative Reforms Committee's recommendations. He stated in that context that one of the objectives of the Dhebar Commission and the Administrative Reforms Committee was to study the problems of the tribes of Tripura and those of other states of North East India and they placed their reports in due course, but it was regrettable that the Government of Tripura did not pay any attention to their suggestions and recommendations. From that it appeared, he continued, that the Tripura Government felt as if it had no responsibility, legal or moral, to honour those recommendations, or to implement them.<sup>28</sup> Another opposition member moved an amendment on the motion, regretting the absence of any mention in the Address regarding large scale transfer of land from poor agriculturists to non-agriculturist mahajans,

particularly in tribal areas. He alleged that though hundreds of acres of land of the tribal areas were being alienated to the non-agriculturist moneylenders, no step was being taken by the Government to put a stop to that alienation process. As a result, poor tribals were being turned into destitute in larger and larger numbers, he added. He therefore, urged the Government to take immediate effective steps to stop the process of land alienation that continued in the tribal areas as that was, in his opinion, the first step towards solution of the problems of the poor tribals.<sup>29</sup> But both the amendments were voted down.

In April, 1972 again, an opposition member demanded that a recommendation should be made to the Central Government for forming a territorial committee in the tribal inhabited areas as per recommendation of the Administrative Reforms Committee. If such a committee was formed in Tripura in pursuance of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, the tasks of socio-economic development of the tribals could have been entrusted to that Committee, but the Government did not take any step in that direction though repeated demands to that effect were raised several times in the House in the past, he alleged. He, then, demanded that immediate preventive step should be taken for stopping transfer of tribal land to non-tribals. He suggested in that context that a committee should be formed to make article 187 of the Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 effective in order to stop further alienation of tribal lands to non-tribals. If such a committee was formed, it could engage itself in taking up the cases of illegally transferred lands and recommend appropriate measures to the Government

for restoring those to the real owners and that would help communal harmony to prevail and continue, he viewed.<sup>30</sup> But the Government did not pay any attention to his demands and suggestions.

In July, 1972, an opposition member alleged that the tribal development blocks which the Government of Tripura constituted were total failures and in support of this allegation, he quoted the specific observation of the Government of India on the performance of those blocks that read: "The T.D Blocks did not help in the socio-economic development of the scheduled tribes." He added that the opposition members all along told that T.D Block was a bluff and they demanded repeatedly for redemarcation of the tribal area and for awarding local self-government to the tribals of that area as per recommendation of the Administrative Reforms Committee and all troubles cropped up as no attention was paid to the demand. He, then, regretted that thousands of acres of tribal land were being alienated in spite of the Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, and in support of his allegation, he mentioned that all the lands of the inmates of the landless colonies within his constituency were transferred illegally to the moneylenders and jotedars. He, therefore, demanded that the Government should immediately implement the sixth schedule in the tribal area and take steps to stop further alienation of tribal land and eviction of the tribals from their lands, but no heed was paid to the demands.<sup>31</sup>

In March, 1973 again, an opposition member alleged that thousands of landless peasants who had been cultivating the lands under the Forest Department were being evicted in the name of expansion of the area of the reserved forest. Thus, thousands of families were evicted



from the areas within the Atharamura and Longtarai ranges, populated areas like Chamanu, Gandacherra, Khowai, Jumer Dhepa, Kadamcherra, Dhanpur, Kathalia and Boxanagar; a large area in between Gorji and Laogong; and many areas within Baramura, Debtamura, Chellagong, Bagafa and Ambassa as a result of expansion of the area of the forest reserve. He, therefore, requested the Government to immediately stop that eviction process and to redemarcate the reserved forest taking into consideration the deplorable condition of the landless peasants of those areas and to give ownership to them, but no attention was paid to his request.<sup>32</sup>

Another opposition member alleged that the jhumias and other landless peasants who had been in possession of the khas lands were evicted and those lands were given to the jotedars of villages and pleaders, contractors and other sections of the moneyed people of the towns. Besides, many lands within the 'tribal reserve' were occupied by non-tribal businessmen and moneylenders, he added. He pointed out further that the Minister for tribal welfare had informed in reply to a question in the Assembly that more than 50% of the inhabitants of the tribal development blocks were tribals and from that it clearly followed that there were predominantly tribal areas in Tripura. The opposition demanded time and again that those tribal areas should be declared reserved in pursuance of the recommendations of the Dhebar Commission and the Hanumanthaiya Committee and task of development of the tribal areas should be entrusted to the tribals themselves, but no heed was paid to the demand, he regretted.<sup>33</sup>

In April, 1974, a private members' resolution was

moved on behalf of the opposition that "This Assembly requests the Central Government to adopt necessary legislative and executive measures to declare the Tribal Compact Area of Tripura a Scheduled and Reserved Area for tribals, and to transfer all development and cultural works to an elected council in that reserved area." The mover of the resolution stated that five tribal development blocks had already been there and proposal for constituting five more blocks were sent to Delhi and those blocks covered most hilly regions from Dharmanagar to Sabroom and the Dhebar Commission coined the area as "tribal compact area". The commission recommended that experimentally scope might be given to the blocks to function, and in case they failed, the compact area was to be reserved for the tribals. Next, the Administrative Reforms Committee observed, after visiting the tribal blocks, that there was a tribal belt in Tripura and that was to be redemarcated after a mouza-based survey of the hilly areas (in order to find out the areas in which majority of the people were tribals). In view of the above, the mover requested the Government of India to take all necessary steps to declare the tribal compact area a scheduled and reserved area in accordance with the provisions of the sixth schedule of the Constitution. The sixth schedule provided that a district committee or an autonomous committee was to be formed in the reserved area and some powers to be transferred to it regarding allotment of land, regulation of jhuming, management of forest (not reserved forests), irrigation, village and town committees, primary schools and language, social customs, dispensary, habitation, market, roads, agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, social works, village police etc. It also provided that the committee would be empowered to regulate and

control moneylending and trading by non-tribals; the non-tribals would stay at the reserved area as before and carry on their business there, but they would not be allowed to do that in any manner they liked, he added.<sup>34</sup>

Taking part in the discussion on the resolution, the leader of the Opposition regretted that the treasury benchers all along opposed the demand of the Opposition for formation of a reserved area on the plea that there was no tribal compact area in Tripura. But both the Dhebar Commission and the Hanumanthaiya Committee categorically mentioned that there was an area or belt in Tripura in which majority of the population were tribals. The party in power also opposed the demand of the Opposition for implementation of the Sixth schedule in the tribal belt in Tripura arguing that it would lead to partition of Tripura. But the sixth Schedule only provided for transfer of some nominal powers to the tribal area so that development of the tribals could be brought about in social, economic and cultural fields, and hence it was too much to infer that the implementation of the Sixth schedule would jeopardise national integrity or unity of Tripura, he argued. Contradicting the allegation of the Ruling Party that the Opposition did not oppose refugee infiltration previously, but raised a hue and cry only subsequently, he firmly stated that it started opposing further refugee infiltration in early 'fifties and even the Government of India had to admit at that stage that saturation point had reached in Tripura and hence no more refugee should be allowed entry. The Opposition also demanded consistently for stoppage of alienation of tribal land and even the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in his report for 1956-57 commented

that "The tribal people are apprehensive of their land given to the refugees"; and recommended that"..... alienation of tribals' land inside and outside the Tribal Reserve must be stopped immediately."After that, lakhs of refugees entered into Tripura and thousands pf acres of tribal land were alienated to non-tribals and hence the tribals then stood on the verge of extinction, he added. He stated further that the party in power sometimes branded the Opposition "anti-Bengali" and sometimes branded it as " anti-tribal", but the events of the past would show that the Opposition never instigated one community against the other, rather it always fought for amity and harmony between the two communities. The Opposition knew it full well that ultimately all nationalities were to be developed by extending all socio-economic and political rights to them and for that, no quarrel was necessary , he added. He, then, urged the Government to give up its "anti tribal" attitude and to remove the obstacles in the way of development of the tribal nationalities by forming an autonomous district council. He urged the Central Government also to form an autonomous tribal district council in Tripura and to hand over to it such powers as were required for bringing about an allround development of the tribals.<sup>35</sup> Some members of the treasury benches including some Ministers then spoke opposing the resolution and requested all the members to support of his resolution and next the more spoke once again in support of his resolution and next the more spoke once again in support of his resolution and requested all the members to support it and then, the resolution was put to vote and rejected.

In March, 1975 again, the opposition members

demanded that steps should be taken immediately for formation of an autonomous tribal district council. They regretted that though the opposition parties and tribal organisations carried on movements for long for realisation of the demand for the Sixth Schedule, the Government was totally indifferent to the demand. The tribals of Tripura were faced with many problems like the problem of illegally transferred lands, the problem of their socio-economic development and the problem of development of their language and culture and hence constitutional guarantees as recommended by the Administrative Reforms Committee were immediately called for; and if the Government went on ignoring their demands for long, serious complications were likely to crop up.<sup>36</sup> They stated further that the tribesmen of Tripura aspired to develop themselves into a nation and that was why they raised the demand for the tribal district council and introduction of the sixth Schedule in that council area, but the Government continued to turn down those demands and the demand for restoration of their illegally transferred lands. That was why movement after movement erupted and that struggle would continue till the legitimate demands of the tribals were not fulfilled, they stated firmly. They, therefore, requested the Government to immediately implement the provisions of the Sixth Schedule in the tribal dominated areas of Tripura, but no heed was paid to the request.<sup>37</sup>

The demand for formation of an autonomous tribal district council was raised in March, 1976 again. Referring to the Government claim that it was keen on bringing about rapid development of the tribals in social and economic fields, the Opposition alleged that no step was

evident till then for entrusting the initiative of the proposed development to the tribals themselves. The tribals had been demanding and agitating for long for the formation of a tribal district council, and so long as such a council was not formed, the tribals would not be able to progress socially and economically, it viewed. It opined further that if the Government continued to suffer from indecision in that regard, the reactionary forces in society would take the advantage to baffle the developmental work in the tribal areas and thus the entire programme of tribal welfare would suffer. In view of the above, it urged the Government to form the long-awaited tribal district council without further delay and to hand over all the development works of the tribal areas to the council, but no attention was paid to the request.<sup>38</sup>

In support of its demand for the tribal district council, the Opposition also pointed out that the tribals of Tripura once constituted the majority of the population and they were outnumbered subsequently by the immigrants and it was only natural that they would now feel anxious about their future and would demand some safeguards for their protection and development. It was the question of self-development of a backward people, and not a question of communalism or tribalism, it added. It was unfortunate that some topranking leaders of the ruling party sought to misinterpret the demand and started to propagate that formation of tribal district council would lead to partition of Tripura, it regretted. Such propagations were made in order to incite communal feeling among the members of the majority community and to instigate one community against the other, it added. It concluded urging the Government to concede the demand for the district council

and thereby help a community that was backward socially, economically, educationally and culturally, to stand on its own feet and develop, and that alone would make possible the overall development of Tripura.<sup>39</sup> But the Government did not pay and heed to the demand.

The Opposition also raised its voice against the alienation of tribal land to non-tribals inside the 'Tribal Reserve' as constituted by the last king of Tripura in 1931 and it strongly demanded that steps must be taken for protection of the conditions of the 'Reserve'. Far from doing that, the Government repealed the 'Reserve' order itself through an ordinance in 1974. When it was placed in the Assembly in the bill form, the Opposition moved several amendments on the bill, but the amendments were voted down and the bill was accepted. After that, the Opposition pressurised the Government to reconstitute the Reserve, and the Government constituted some mouza based reserves, but as no institution was there in those reserves to take steps for socio-economic development of the tribals, those did not come of any real benefit to them.

In April, 1971, for instance, a private members' resolution was moved by an independent member (previously congress) that read: "This Assembly requests the Government of Tripura to protect the conditions of the Tribal Reserve of the late Maharaja and to immediately arrange for physical demarcation of 1760 square miles of its area." The mover of the resolution alleged that though under the order of the late Maharaja, no transfer of tribal land to non-tribals would be legal and none was authorised to permit any such transfer, yet thousands of acres of tribal land within the tribal reserve were being transferred to non-tribals by registered deed as also through allotment

by the administration and as a result the tribal reserve area continued to stay only on paper. In view of this and also in view of the fact that the tribals were thus being deprived of the last safe-guard also, the resolution requested the Government to stop further alienation of tribal land to non-tribals within the Reserve and also to immediately redemarcate the area of the reserve.<sup>40</sup> Taking part in the discussion on the resolution, the Opposition members vehemently criticised the Government for its failure to safeguard the interest of the tribals on land within the reserve. They also alleged that, to worsen the situation, the Government was hatching the conspiracy to repeal the Tribal Reserve Act itself, and as a part of that conspiracy, non-tribals were being encouraged to intrude into the tribal compact areas including the "Reserve" and thus corner the tribals socially, economically and culturally. The Government standpoint in this regard was that when there were some other schemes of jhumia settlement and also the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 made special provisions for the scheduled tribes, there was no need of any tribal reserve. Strongly opposing the view-point, the opposition members emphasised that it was incorrect to say that because of the Jhumia Settlement Scheme and Land Reforms Act, 1960, the tribal reserve became unnecessary because none of those succeeded in giving adequate safeguard to the tribals. Another argument of the treasury benchers was that keeping the tribals in isolation was not desirable, and in their own greater interest, they should have cultural contact with the non-tribals. Contradicting the argument, the opposition members viewed that a fruitful contact between two groups of people was possible only when both of them stood in a relation of equality to each other. But if



one group dominated or exploited the other when they came in contact, the talk of cultural exchange became a farce.<sup>41</sup> They, therefore, argued the Government to accept the resolution, redemarcate the area of the reserve and to take steps to develop the tribals socially by developing their language and culture. But the resolution was voted down after a prolonged debate.

On 4.3.1974, the Tribal Reserve Act was repealed through an ordinance. In course of discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the Governor's Address, 1974, the leader of the opposition severely criticised the Government action. He pointed out in that context that attempts for repealing the reserve was made Ex-Chief Minister S. L. Singh also ; and he had declared publicly that the tribal reserve order had become vague and meaningless with the passing of the Land Reforms Act, 1960. Pressed by the opposition, the Government of India then sought the opinion of the Supreme Court and the Court gave a note that "Tribal Reserve Order is not vague. It cannot die except on the intervention of Central Government by a legal exhort." He, then, alleged that the ordinance was promulgated with the 'diabolical' motive to create disharmony and distrust between the tribal peasants and the non-tribal peasants. The non-tribal farmers would now be given free hands to purchase as much of tribal lands as they liked, he added. True, order of district Magistrates was to be secured for the purpose, but D. Ms also had to act as per the recommendations of the Tribal Advisory Committee which had some non-tribal members also who very often advocated transfer of tribal land to non-tribals. He, then enquired of the Government whether there was a single tribal-dominated state in India other

than Tripura where provisions for tribal reserve or 5th or 6th or 7th schedule, or tribal area and territorial committee were not there. He alleged that far from implementing the recommendations of the Dhebar Commission and the Administrative Reforms Committee for forming a tribal district council, the Government of Tripura started a conspiracy to expose the tribals to unequal competition with the non-tribals by denying all safeguards to them.<sup>42</sup>

Taking part in the discussion on the motion, the CPI member stated, in spite of the fact that the tribal reserve had been there so long and hence some safeguards also had been there, the tribals of Tripura had been cornered socially, economically and culturally during the last 26 years. Now that the reserve was repealed, the tribal majority areas would soon be turned into mixed areas and all demands for implementing the provisions of the 6th schedule of the Constitution to the tribal areas would be denied on the plea that there was no predominantly tribal area in Tripura, he apprehended.<sup>43</sup>

On 15.3.1974, the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Second Amendment) Bill, 1974 was introduced in the Assembly and immediately after that, the CPI member observed that as a result of first bringing it in ordinance form, the members of the House were deprived of the right to discuss on it; and the tribal people of Tripura were seriously and adversely affected due to the repeal of the tribal reserve order; and after that, he staged walk out as a mark of protest against the introduction of the bill.

On 22.3.1974, a CPI (M) member moved an amendment on the bill that "Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Second Amendment) Bill, 1974 be circulated for eliciting

public opinion by January, 1975". He pointed out that after the passing of the Tripura Land Reforms Act in 1960 it was expected that the provisions of the act would protect the interests of all sections of farmers, but in vain. Though it was not unknown that the poor peasants would not get real benefits so long as the existing semi-capitalist and semi-feudal system persisted, yet it was also true that much relief could be given to the common people of rural Tripura within that system also if agricultural development could be brought about, he added. It was, therefore, to be admitted that the then Land Reforms Act should be amended; at the same time it was necessary to keep the present bill laying in the House till January, 1975 and in the mean time attempts should be made to elicit public opinion on the bill by circulating its provision, in details among the common people of Tripura, he demanded. <sup>44</sup> Speaking in support of the amendment, another CPI (M) member observed that as the Land Reforms Act, 1960 failed to protect the interests of the common people of Tripura and the tribals in particular (as it failed to stop illegal transfer of their land), an amendment on that act was undoubtedly necessary. But in the present bill, a provision was kept that only those tribal lands that had been illegally transferred after 1968 would be taken up for restoration, while the original act provided that all tribal lands that were illegally alienated with effect from 1960 would be restored ; and the present provision would give scope to the exploiting jotedars and moneylenders to legalise their possessions on the lands that they illegally occupied from 1960 to 1968, he added. That was why he supported the amendment for keeping the bill laying upto January, 1975 so that opinions of all sections of people on the bill could be had and after that, the provisions of the

proposed amendment could be so reformed that the real tillers of the soil could get land. <sup>45</sup>

The leader of the opposition then moved an amendment demanding that the bill should be referred to the Select Committee of the House, as, in his view, there were some objectionable provisions in the bill which should be modified in the interest of the poor farmers, both tribal and non-tribal. Thus a provision was there in the bill that "The rules under sub-section (1) and (2) for allotment of land shall provide for giving preference to the members of the cooperative farming societies formed by marginal farmers", while the allotment rules under the previous act gave preference to the members of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The present bill gave top priority to marginal farmers, but did not define them ; and as a result the big jotedars would now get land forming co-operative societies and identifying themselves as marginal farmer depriving the real landless peasants belonging to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities, he apprehended. He, then, gave reference to a letter of the Government of India to the Secretary, Revenue Department, Government of Tripura (Government of India No. 16/12/72-Judicial) in which it was clearly stated that if the reserve order of the late Maharaja was repealed and no alternative arrangement was made, then in the interim-period between the repeal of the order and rehabilitation of the tribals almost all tribal land would be alienated to the non-tribals and hence it would not be wise to repeal the order ; but it was a matter of deep regret that the Government of Tripura repealed the order disregarding the clear instruction on the plea that the Maharaja had constituted the reserve for 5 tribes only and it was repealed to extend

benefits to all the tribals, he commented. In stead thereof, the reserve order could have been so amended as to extend the benefits of the reserve to all the 19 tribes, he added. In view of the above, he demanded that the bill should be referred to the Select Committee for a thorough review of its provisions and for bringing about additions and alternations, where necessary. 46

Sri Chakraborty moved another amendment demanding that a provision should be kept in the bill for formation of a new tribal reserve area with the contiguous tribal dominated areas immediately after the old tribal reserve was repealed and all sections of tribals should be given scope to reside in the new reserve. He pointed out in that connection that when Tripura was a Chief Commissioner's province, some areas within the reserve were de-reserved and subsequently many tribal dominated areas were also broken down. Thus, the compact areas in Chailengta, Moharcherra, Jampuijala, Gandacherra, Champahaor, etc. were broken down and most of the lands in those areas were illegally transferred to non-tribals. He stated further that though the transfer of tribal land to non-tribals was prohibited by the reforms act of 1960, it was not a cognisable offence till then and hence the tribals transferred thousands of acres of land in the previously compact areas to the non-tribals taking permission of District Magistrates, and hence none but the Government was responsible for those transfers. True, many colonies were set up for settlement of the landless tribals, but sizeable sections of the inmates deserted the colonies as their lands were alienated to the moneylenders. Thus, though lands were allotted to the landless tribals, they lost their land soon after allotment. A large number of them went deep into the hills and in

course of time they were concentrated in those areas and many others left for Cachar, Jayantia and Mikir hills of Assam in search of livelihood.

In view of the predicament of the tribals, he demanded that the reserve of the Maharaja should be reconstituted after conducting a mouja-wise survey of the contiguous tribal areas from Dharmanagar to Sabroom. Though the Administrative Reforms Committee recommended that a Council should be formed in the tribal belt in Tripura and the responsibility of development works, development of language and culture etc. of that area should be entrusted to that council, yet no heed was paid to the suggestion, he regretted. Tribal areas were there in other states of Eastern India ; in Manipur a tribal reserve and development council was there, then why should the tribals of Tripura be deprived of that safeguard, he queried. The opposition did not demand that the non-tribals who had already settled in tribal areas should be evicted ; minorities must be allowed to reside and carry on their business there, but they should not be allowed to purchase tribal land any more. So, no common non-tribal would oppose the proposed reserve, only those exploiters who wanted to grab more and more tribal land would stand against it, he viewed.

The opposition was well aware of the fact that the ultimate safeguard of the tribals lay in ending up the existing capitalist system and not in the formation of the tribal reserve, he continued. The tribals of North East India were bursting into agitations against the injustice and discriminatory treatment meted out to them. The tribals of Tripura had been turned into day labourers and slaves and hence tribal unrest started in all vigour in

Tripura also and all the tribals belonging to the C.P.I., the C.P.I. (M) and Tripura Upajati Juba samity were united in their view that the present bill was brought to level attacks on them, to create disharmony amongst the tribals themselves, to safeguard the interests of the exploiters and moneylenders and to drive Tripura to the path of destruction ; and that was why they unitedly protested against the bill and the toiling sections of the non-tribals also raised their voice against the bill, he viewed. The Tripura bandh that was observed on 24th December, 1973 at the Call of the opposition parties incorporated in the charter of demands the demand for reconstitution of the tribal reserve for all the tribes in lieu of 5 tribes and the people of Tripura, both tribal and non-tribal, extended over-whelming support to the demand by making the bandh a grand success, he added. He, therefore, requested the Government to give due honour to the public opinion of Tripura by withdrawing the bill and accepting his demand for reconstitution of the tribal reserve. <sup>47</sup>

All the amendments to the bill were turned down by the Government side and as a mark of protest against that, the opposition block raised the slogan - 'kala kanun cholbe na' (Down with the black bill) and staged walk out and after that, the bill was put to voice vote and accepted.

In April, 1974 again, an opposition members regretted that in total disregard of the staunch opposition by the members of the opposition the Government repealed the tribal reserve order on the plea that tribal reserve had been meant for 5 tribals only. In that connection, he opined that nation and tribe were not permanent entities, rather these were relative entities of history. It might be that during the reign of the late Maharaja, all other tribes

(other than those 5 (five) tribes) had been treated as immigrants and that was why protective measures for the development of the original inhabitants of the land and for their transformation into nation were considered necessary. Now that all the nineteen tribes were recognised as permanent settlers of Tripura, the benefits of the reserve should have been extended to all of them, but the decision of the Government to repeal the reserve in lieu thereof created serious complications, he viewed. The Bengalees who came to Tripura did not come to do harm to the tribals, rather they had to come here under the pressure of a historic compulsion. He, then, demanded that until and unless each and every tribal community of Tripura was transformed into nation, their separate entity must be recognised and preserved by reconstituting the reserve and in pursuance of the provisions of the 5th and the 6th schedules of the constitution.<sup>48</sup> But no attention was paid to the demand.

It is thus evident that the repeated demand of the opposition for reconstitution of the tribal reserve was turned down by the government side. Some mouza-based tribal reserves were, however, formed subsequently, but those reserves did not come of any real benefit to the tribals as no institution was there to take steps for their socio-economic development.

Side by side with its demands for steps for stoppage of illegal alienation of tribal lands to non-tribals, the opposition also voiced the demand for restoration of the illegally transferred tribal lands from 1960 to the real owners. From the policy statement of the Governor for 1974, it was learnt that the Government had made provision for restoration of the land transferred illegally



on or after the 1st January, 1969, and made the transfer of land by a person belonging to a Scheduled Tribe by registered instrument compulsory.<sup>49</sup> But no real progress towards restoration took place. In March, 1975 again, the Governor stated in his Address that the demand of the tribal people for restoration of land, illegally transferred, in accordance with the Land Reforms (Second Amendment) Act, 1974 was reasonable and welcome, but it should be not only peaceful but should give the Governmental machinery reasonable opportunity to carry out the purposes of the law with care, equity and justice.<sup>50</sup>

In course of discussion on his amendment on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, the CPI member stated, though the Governor mentioned in his Address that the demand of the tribals for restoration of illegally transferred land in accordance with the land reforms act and its amendments was quite justified, yet not even a plot of such land was restored to the tribal owners till then.<sup>51</sup> A CPI(M) member then moved an amendment on the motion regretting that there was no mention in the Address regarding any step for restoration of illegally transferred tribal lands from 1960 to the real owners. He commented in that context that it was ironical that while the Dhebar commission commented in 1961 that the land problems of the tribes of Tripura and Kerala become acute due to illegal transfer of their lands, long after 14 years, the second amendment on the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act made provision for return of those tribal lands only which were transferred after 1969. Commenting on the statement of the governor that more time and "reasonable opportunity" was required for restoration of those lands, he stated that it was doubtful

whether those lands would be restored at all. He regretted that bereft of their lands, the tribals were turned into day labourers and destitutes and hence they stood on the verge of extinction, and so he requested the Government to take all necessary measures to restore the illegally transferred lands to them without any further delay.<sup>52</sup>

Another CPI(M) member moved an amendment on the motion demanding that all tribal lands that had been transferred to non-tribals after 1960 must be returned to the real owners. He regretted that though the Land Reform Act, 1960 strictly prohibited that no tribal land would thenceforth be transferred to non-tribals, thousands of acres of tribal land were transferred in between 1960 and 1974 and then it was prescribed that only those cases of land transfers that occurred after 1968 would be taken up for restoration. The only 'motive' behind the new decision was to protect the interests of the big landlords, businessmen and moneylenders who illegally grabbed vast areas of tribal land between 1960 and 1968, he alleged. He then, urged the Government to take urgent steps for restoration of all illegally transferred lands to the tribals.<sup>53</sup> But all the amendments were voted down.

In March, 1976 again, a CPI(M) member stated that encouraged by Government instruction, many tribals sent applications through the registration offices of their respective sub-divisions for restoration of their illegally transferred lands, but no concrete step was taken till then for giving land to them. He, therefore, requested the Government to form a committee with some members of the House to enquire into the cases of land alienation and to suggest steps for restoration of lands to the tribal owners, but to no effect.<sup>54</sup>

Similarly, in September, 1976, a CPI(M) member moved a private members' resolution that "This Assembly is of the opinion that Tahsil-based committees with local representatives be formed for the purpose of restoring the tribal lands that had been alienated to the non-tribals." He stated in that context that though the Government promised that restoration works would be completed within May of 1977, the progress upto August, 1976 was quite disappointing. Thus, out of 90 applications for restoration in the San Kumar Tehsil of the Sadar Division, only 2 applicants got back their land; in East Takarjala Tehasil, several hundred applications were made, but out of them, hearing of 50 cases were completed and only 4 applicants got land; and in Maharani Tehsil of Khowai, 300 applications were made and only 12 persons got land, he added. Besides, hundreds of applications for restoration were sent from other Tehsils also, but none of those was taken up for consideration till then. He therefore, urged the Government to dispose of the pending cases at an early date and to form tehsil based committees which might enquire into the individual cases of alienation and report to the tribunal constituted for the purpose. Some members from both sides then took part in the debate. The Revenue Minister, in his speech, stated that about 50 percent of the applications for restoration had already been finalised and that it would be possible to give possession to the applicants within a short time taking the help of the tribunal formed for the purpose and hence there was no need of formation of Tehsil-based committees. The resolution was then put to voice vote and lost.

From the statement of the Revenue Minister on matters of Land revenue, Land reforms and Agricultural Debtors'

Relief etc. on 12.11.1976, it was learnt that out of 13,897 applications for restoration of illegally transferred tribal lands, 7,566 were rejected in the Revenue Court. In 957 cases, orders for restoration were issued and out of those, possession was given in 444 cases; and 5275 cases were under consideration at various stages.<sup>55</sup> On being requested by an opposition member, the Minister gave the district-wise break-up of the beneficiaries in whose favour orders for restoration were issued and the break-up was : West Tripura 498 persons, North Triura - 167 persons and South Tripura - 292 persons.<sup>56</sup>

The legislative opposition fought for the safeguard of the tribals in respect of educational facilities also. It was alleged by the opposition that tribal students seeking higher education did not get seats in the boarding houses and were, therefore, compelled to return home disappointed. The structures meant to be used as school rooms of the tribal students were all in a dilapidated condition and no step was being taken to repair those rooms. Very often, there was paucity of teachers. Demands were, therefore, voiced by the opposition for immediate necessary steps in all these regards.<sup>57</sup> The opposition also demanded time and again for construction of tribal boarding houses in all sub-divisional towns of Tripura so that tribal students seeking higher education could get accommodation there. In this context, it was pointed out that there was only one tribal boarding house in Agartala till 1969 and hence tribal students who sought to take higher education from other sub-divisional towns could not do so for the lack of facilities of accommodation. In view of this, it was demanded by the opposition that at least one boarding house must be constructed in each sub-divisional

headquarters in order to enable the tribal students to prosecute their higher studies. But the demand was turned down. True, a few high higher secondary schools had their tribal hostels, but even in those hostels, there was no facility for proper accommodation. Those hostels had 15 seats each and there was no dining hall and sufficient number of utensils in the hostels. In view of this, it was demanded by the opposition that steps must be taken immediately to remove those difficulties, but no positive step was taken in those regards.<sup>58</sup> Demands were also raised for enhancement of the rate of boarding house stipends, distribution of dresses free of cost, grants-in-aid for purchase of books and for award of matric and post-matric stipends to the tribal students but little attention was paid to the demands.<sup>59</sup>

It was further demanded by the opposition that 'Tripuri' should be adopted as the medium of instructions for tribal students upto the primary stage of education. As regards recruitment of teachers in the primery schools in the tribal areas, reference was made to the recommendation of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes that read : "As far as possible attempts should be made to recruit teachers from amongst the tribal community themselves. Tribal women should be encouraged to work as teachers in tribal areas." In this context, the Commissioner further commented that "Education in primary stage becomes mockery where teachers have no knowledge of the language spoken by the pupils."<sup>60</sup> The opposition members demanded time and again that these recommendations of the commissioner should be made effective, but to no effect. True, a good number of teachers of the schools in the interior areas

were given training in Tripuri Language, but as they were not acquainted with the dialects of the tribals, they utterly failed to impart lessons correctly to their pupils. The opposition, therefore, suggested that if the Government was at all serious about imparting education to those tribal students through their mother tongue, it should appoint the educated unemployed tribal youths as teachers of these schools. But the suggestion was turned down.<sup>61</sup>

The demand for introduction of 'Tripuri' as the medium of instruction for tribal students was raised in the state Assembly also, but the Government turned down the demand on the plea that all the tribes of Tripura had their separate languages and they widely differed from one another. The opposition alleged in that context that the leaders of the ruling party even tried to create confusion in the mind of the Prime Minister also in that regard at the time of her visit to Tripura in 1973. Being influenced by them, she told the opposition leaders who met her in deputation that if Tripuri was introduced in the primary schools of tribal areas as the medium of education, other tribals also would demand that their languages should also be introduced as mediums of instructions. The opposition admitted that there was some minor differences among the dialects of the Tripura tribes, but such difference was there among the Bengali dialects of different areas also, and even after knowing it full well, the ruling party was carrying on anti-propagands against the Tripuri Language, it alleged.<sup>62</sup> The demand was voiced again and again and the Government then raised the new plea that since the tribal boys and girls started learning Bengali, it was useless to introduce Tripuri as the medium of

instruction, contradicting the viewpoint, the opposition argued that though many Bengalis in Assam learnt the Asamese language well, yet the demand for recognition of Bengali as one of the mediums of instruction was rightly raised by the Bengalis in Assam. It was observed in that context that the people who told that the tribals had no problems and that they had no need of any separate language had no right to tell anything about national integration.<sup>63</sup>

The opposition did not hesitate to accept the Government claim that remarkable expansion was achieved at all levels of education during the period. At the same time, it was pointed out that in many areas, the tribal students could not avail themselves of the opportunity as most of them hailed from very poor families. In consideration of this, the Dhebar commission recommended, "... We would like to stress the need for midday meals, clothing, free books and stipends to all tribal children in areas where education has not made sufficient headway." The opposition members requested the Government to implement this and other relevant recommendations of the commission so that the tribal students could prosecute their studies without difficulty, but no heed was paid to the request.<sup>64</sup> The report of the Pilot Project Scheme undertaken in Kamalpur by the Government was referred to by the opposition in order to highlight the causes for which the tribal students could not go on with their studies. The most important causes for this, according to the report were poverty, service utilised in earning, engagement in home work, physical handicaps and sickness, unsuitable communication, long distance from school and other reasons. Regarding the serious condition of wastage and

stagnation, the report commented, "present volume of wastage and stagnation causes a problem of development of education in the primary stage. Studies may show that less than 50% of the students enrolling class - I reach Class - V of primary stage." the opposition requested the Government to take steps to check this wastage, but to little effect.<sup>65</sup>

The opposition also alleged that the crafts that were being taught to the students of tribal areas were not consistent with their way of life. In support of its allegation, it made reference to the relevant recommendations of the commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes that read : "A large number of schools are run in tribal areas of basic types, and crafts which are taught in those schools are such that they will not be fitting with the economy of those areas. It is, therefore, suggested that care should be taken to ensure that the crafts taught in the schools are related to the daily life of the tribal people and to the economy of that area". The opposition, therefore, demanded that those valuable suggestions of the Commissioner should be put into effect immediately, but the demand was voted down by the government side.<sup>66</sup>

The opposition alleged further that no step was being taken by the government for protecting the ancient culture and heritage of the tribals of Tripura. In other states, languages of the tribals had been given a constitutional status and steps had been taken to improve those languages. 'Tripuri', the language of the tribes of Tripura was also recognised by the constitution, but no step was taken to improve that language, it alleged. It therefore, demanded that steps should be taken immediately for development of the dialects of the major tribes. But no



heed was paid to the demand.<sup>67</sup> it was pointed out subsequently in this context that in NEFA and Assam, the dialects of the tribes were developed and transformed into languages taking the help of the philologists and many books had already been published in those languages. It was demanded by the opposition that such attempts for engaging philologists for the development of the dialects of the Tripura tribes and for publishing books and dictionaries on them must be made immediately. But the government viewpoint was that since the tribals of Tripura had many dialects, any attempt to transform them into a language was bound to be futile. The opposition contradicted the view-point and contended that the dialects of the 'Tripuri', Jamatia, Noatia, Reang, Koloj and Rupini tribes, who constituted 80 percent of the total tribal population, were almost similar to one another and hence these dialects should be developed immediately and that would ultimately lead to the development of the Tripuri language. The demand was, however, voted down.<sup>68</sup>

In the state Assembly, the opposition raised the demand that the status of second state language should be given to 'Kak Barak' (Tripuri). But it alleged that the Government rejected the demand on the plea that the language was not sufficiently developed. The Government claimed that attempts were being made for the development of the Language and a committee was formed for the purpose, but the committee was constituted with such members who had no knowledge of the language, it added. It alleged further that it had been done deliberately in order to spoil all prospects of development of the tribal language.<sup>69</sup>

A government statement revealed that 'Kak barak' had been introduced as the medium of instruction in 50 schools

in tribal areas and that it would be introduced in 50 more schools within 1975, but there was no mention in the statement about any plan for composition of text books and dictionary in the language, it added. It was only mentioned in the statement that the Government were "making a systematic study of the issue of prescribing phonetics for the tribal dialect, within the existing script, to enable the tribal dialect to grow according to its own genius."<sup>70</sup> But no mention was made about steps for development of the tribal language and about the script through which the text books for tribal students would be composed. Again, due to the indifference and inaction of the Government in that regard, Kak Barak schools were being set up in larger and larger numbers in the tribal areas by the christian missionarie and education was being imparted in those schools in Kak Barak through the medium of the Roman scripts, it alleged; and expressed the apprehension that if that process was allowed to continue, all the Government schools in the tribal areas of Tripura would be washed out ultimately.<sup>71</sup>

It was learnt from another Government statement that the number of primary and junior basic schools imparting education in Tripuri language had been raised from 50 to 118 and that it would further go up to 268. The Tribal Language Cell had taken up the work of preparation of text books, guide books and source books in Tripuri language besides conducting evaluation of progress, in service training and seminars of teachers and supervisors, it added. Further, steps had been taken to ensure stipends, supply of free books, slate and pencils, midday meals, school dress and free boarding facilities for meritorious tribal students and attendance stipends to tribal girls.<sup>72</sup>

But the opposition viewed that it might be safely concluded from the past experience that the decisions of the Government would not be implemented and that those would remain on paper only.<sup>73</sup>

The opposition also demanded that steps must be taken for the employment of the tribal youths after the completion of their education in schools and colleges. It demanded further that due reservation must be maintained for them in the sphere of service. It was alleged in this context that though a good number of appointments were being given every year in different Government departments, 'Quota' of the scheduled tribes was not being maintained and as a result, a good number of educated tribal youths still remained unemployed. In view of this, demands were raised for filling up of the 'Quota' at the time of giving appointments. It was further demanded that some medium and small-scale industries should be set up in order to provide those educated unemployed youths with employment opportunities together with their non-tribal counterparts.<sup>74</sup> The opposition also alleged that separate seniority lists were not being preserved in the Government offices. Hence it demanded strongly that separate seniority lists of tribal employees must be preserved in each department and attention must be paid that those employees were not deprived in respect of promotion.<sup>75</sup> But no heed was paid to the demand.

From the discussion in the fore-going pages, it is clearly evident that the opposition consistently pressurised the Government to take adequate protective measures for the safeguard and development of the tribals in social, economic, educational and cultural fields. Though most of the demands and suggestions of the opposition for providing

some safeguards to the tribals were voted down several times in the Assembly, the Government accepted and implemented some suggestions subsequently. Thus, though the Government turned down many a time the demand of the opposition for early settlement of the jhumias and landless scheduled tribes who were still to be rehabilitated, it, in fact, admitted the imperative need of settlement of those people and this fact is evident from a Government statement that read : "Our efforts to bring about 'Green Revolution' in agriculture will have little meaning to them unless they were given arable land and the required financial support to cultivate the land."<sup>76</sup> The demand of the opposition for reconstituting the reserved forest in view of the plight of the tribals was also turned down time and again, but the Government almost accepted the demand eventually when the House unanimously passed the resolution moved by congress member Mansur Ali that read : " In view of the fact that the population of Tripura has greatly increased and many thickly populated localities have cropped up in the areas adjacent to the Reserved Forest and the people of these areas are facing much difficulties in tending their cattle and tilling their soil, this Assembly requests the Government to form a committee with Government and non-Government persons to enquire into the difficulties faced by those people and to recommend the steps for reconstitution of the reserve forest."<sup>77</sup> Again, the demand of the opposition for rehabilitation of the jhumias and landless scheduled tribes was fulfilled to some extent by starting some Tribal Development Blocks and a number of Jhumia Settlement Colonies.

The major demand of the opposition for implementing

the provisions of the Fifth and the Sixth schedules of the Indian Constitution for the tribal majority areas of Tripura was also rejected time and again, but the Government accepted some suggestions of the opposition for bringing about the development of the scheduled tribes in social, economic and educational spheres and it is evident from some Government statements in the Assembly. Thus, the demand of the opposition for stoppage of illegal transfer of tribal land and restoration of illegally alienated lands to the tribal owners was fulfilled on principle when the Government took the decision for "making transfer of land by a person belonging to a Scheduled Tribe by registered instrument compulsory, and for making provision for restoration of the land transferred illegally as or after the 1st January, 1969."<sup>78</sup> It was also mentioned in this context that the applications received from the tribals for the restoration of such lands were being attended to with a sense of urgency. Inquiries had been completed in a large number of cases and it was expected that land would be restored in a significant number of cases within March, 1977, it was added.<sup>79</sup>

Further, in response to the demand of the opposition that steps must be taken for economic rehabilitation of the jhumias, the Government stated that it had made and would continue to make "sincere efforts to settle the jhumias by allotting khas land and giving financial assistance to them". The settlement of jhumias and landless Scheduled Tribes had been proposed to be made through "Planned settlement Projects", it added.<sup>80</sup>

It was stated further that in order to improve the economic condition of the tribals, the Agriculture Department had certain schemes of raising fruit crops on

Government Lands in the project sites and the tribal colonies with the ultimate object of handing over such orchards to the tribals of that locality when they would come into fruit bearing stage. Further, the Forest Department through its "Forest village" scheme, went on settling the jhumias within the reserved forest area in a phased manner and encouraging the villagers to raise their own orchards to be owned by the community. Poultry and piggery were also encouraged from the veterinary side too, Similar attempts were being made to encourage the tribals to take up poultry farming, pig farming and goat farming, it was added.<sup>81</sup>

From a subsequent statement, it is learnt that the Government had drawn up a sub-plan with the objective of accelerating the social and economic development of the tribals. The Government of India would allocate a little more than Rs. 3 crores for the implementation of the sub-plan, but once the sub-plan got going with the momentum and efficiency it deserved, funds would not be an obstacle in view of the highest degree of concern felt both at the national and state levels for the amelioration of the tribals, it added. The Government had also constituted a high powered cabinet sub-committee to watch over the implementation of the schemes for scheduled tribes and scheduled castes and to make recommendations to remove policy and procedural bottle-necks, it revealed further.<sup>82</sup>

It is crystal clear from the documents as cited above that the Government accepted some of the demands of the opposition for the uplift of the socio-economic condition of the tribals though not instantly, but eventually and this very fact proved that the opposition attained some success in this respect also.

### **Extension of settlement and other socio-economic benefits to the refugees and other poor non-tribals.**

The legislative opposition raised the problems of refugee rehabilitation time and again during the period under review and pressurised the Government to take steps for solution of those problems. Side by side, it repeatedly raised the problems faced by the weaker sections among the non-tribals and exerted constant pressures on the Government to find proper solution for the problems. The issue was raised 65 times in the Assembly through motions of thanks to Administrator's and Governor's Addresses, budget speeches, cut motions against demands for grants and a private members' resolution, and the opposition handled the issue efficiently, though with limited success.

In the budget-session of 1963-64, Chief Minister Shri Singh claimed that all the refugee families who migrated to Tripura upto the middle of 1963 got their settlement in the territory. He informed the House that upto that time, 70,392 families of displaced persons had been settled in Tripura under different schemes. The only anxiety of his Government was with the new migrants who began to pour into Tripura from the last part of 1963 consequent on the Great Communal Riot in Khulna, Jessore and other districts of East Pakistan, he added. He informed further that his Government was unable to rehabilitate any more refugees on land as the quantity of cultivable land was very limited in Tripura and it had still some landless tribals and jhumias to settle, and hence it placed a request to the Government of India for settling the new refugees in Dandakaranya to which the Union government

responded favourably. If the influx of refugees continued, the Government of India would be moved for taking more families for settling them elsewhere, he added.<sup>83</sup>

Contradicting the Government claim that the old refugees had already been rehabilitated, an opposition member contended that in large majority of cases they were not economically rehabilitated. Considered from that point of view, it should not be said that there was no economic problem of those refugees to find solution for, he added.<sup>84</sup> On a subsequent occasion, another opposition member raised the demand for extending relief and rehabilitation benefits to the new migrants. He alleged that the Government failed to formulate any policy regarding the refugees who had migrated to Tripura after the communal riots in East Pakistan in January, 1964 and, as a result, they had to lead subhuman lives in the refugee camps. In view of this, he urged the Government to extend all possible facilities to them and to find out ways and means for their permanent and economic rehabilitation.<sup>85</sup>

The opposition did not deny the fact that a good number of refugee colonies were set up to rehabilitate the old immigrants. But it pointed out at the same time that the life of the refugees in those colonies was deplorable. Thus, in April, 1964, an opposition member alleged that the lands that were allotted to old refugees were mostly uncultivable. The Government had declared earlier that each of the refugee families would get 5 kanis (2 acres) of land, but in large majority of cases, they got at the rate of 1 to 2 kanis of land only, he added. To worsen the situation, the Government became up and doing for realising the agricultural loan that was given to those refugees, he alleged further. He concluded requesting the government



to write off the loans of the displaced persons in consideration of the fact that they were not yet economically rehabilitated.<sup>86</sup> But the request was turned down by the Government side.

In view of the serious plight of the refugees as also of the problems of continued influx of the refugees, the leader of the opposition moved a matter of public importance in the House in December, 1964. He pointed out that though the Central Government made commitments to give land to the refugees by acquiring and purchasing land, yet thousands of refugees did not get even the minimum land that was committed. The refugee families, who got land, did not get irrigation and other facilities, and hence they could not be economically rehabilitated. The refugee families who came afterwards were sent to different states for rehabilitation, but out of those, 5,000 families were compelled to come back, and the Government of Tripura had taken the responsibility of their settlement. Shri Chakraborty hailed the decision, but demanded at the same time that appropriate steps must be taken so that they might be economically rehabilitated. He also pointed out the difficulties faced by the refugee families who came to Tripura on exchange of property with the Indian muslims. He demanded that steps must be taken so that all records of rights were made in their names immediately and mutation and attestation were completed soon. Arrangement should be so made that they could complete all those formalities free of cost as most of them had to come almost penniless. Seed and agriculture loan should be given to them and, in so doing, emphasis must not be laid on their credit-worthiness in consideration of their financial stringency. He further demanded that educational

facilities like book grants, stipends, etc. should be made available to the refugee students. Steps must also be taken to relax the formalities for acquisition of citizenship rights in cases of the refugees so that they could easily acquire Indian citizenship and play their worthy role in activating the village panchayats. He further demanded that for real economic rehabilitation of the refugees, all necessary measures for industrialisation and for that, expansion of railways must be taken. All the demands and suggestions were, however, voted down.<sup>87</sup>

The inflow of the displaced persons to Tripura continued unabated. According to Government sources, most of the immigrants from 1963 upto March, 1965 entered Tripura through unauthorised routes and without travel documents. Government of India, Ministry of Rehabilitation ordered not to entertain any migrant coming without travel document with effect from 1st April, 1965.<sup>88</sup> In spite of that, inflow of refugees continued. In April, 1966, an opposition member placed the demand for relief and rehabilitation of those new migrant families. He had no hesitation to admit that it would take time to settle them socially and economically, but, for that, they must not lead a life of uncertainty at the present moment. True, some land was reclaimed and allotted to some of these families, but mere reclamation and allotment of land was not enough. They must be given financial assistance for purchase of seeds, ploughs and bullocks and for maintenance of their families for the time being. He expressed firm conviction that if those refugees were given the assistance as suggested, they would be able to increase the amount of food production of the territory.<sup>89</sup> But the suggestions were turned down on the plea that all necessary

measures were being taken for the welfare of the refugees.

In March, 1967, an opposition member regretted that there was no mention in the policy statement of the Administrator for 1967-68 regarding any specific plan for the real rehabilitation of the refugees from East Pakistan. He stated in that context that the population of Tripura rose from five lakh and a half to sixteen lakhs within the last nineteen years and the influx of the refugees continued till then. According to a Government estimate, on an average 25/30 families had been taking refuge in the reception camps every day; and many more families had been entering into the territory and settling themselves unofficially, he added. But, he regretted, there was no mention in the statement whether the Government would take the responsibility to provide those people and the old refugees with food, land, service or other means of livelihood; nor did the Government exert adequate pressure on the Government of India to undertake the responsibility for their economic rehabilitation. He then, expressed concern that if the present policy of indecision regarding the continuous inflow of the refugees persisted, it would jeopardise the economic foundation of the territory. In view of this, he raised the demand for taking a concrete decision on the issue, but the Government did not pay any heed to the demand.<sup>90</sup>

The influx of the refugees continued in a faster pace subsequently in the absence of any specific policy of the Government in that regard. In view of the gravity of the situation, an opposition member stated with concern and regret in March, 1969 that though the number of Tripura's population rose to about seventeen lakhs mainly due to the unending flow of the displaced persons, no step was

being taken by the Government to solve the problem of infiltration. The Government itself, he added, stated that the population of the tiny territory had already surpassed the saturation point, but no specific plan and programme was there to solve the problem effectively. He therefore, requested the Government to devise and employ effective steps to solve the gigantic problem before it was too late, but the request was turned down.<sup>91</sup> Another opposition member pointed out with alarm that if the unending flow of immigrants was allowed to continue, the economy of Tripura would face serious disruption. He pointed out in that context that according to an official estimate itself, capacity of Tripura to rehabilitate any more refugees by setting up of colonies was already exhausted. He, therefore, suggested that the Government should try its best so that these refugee families could be economically rehabilitated in the vacant regions in different states of India. He requested the Government to be conscious of the seriousness of the problem and take concrete policy and decision in that respect, failing which the entire responsibility of economic disruption of Tripura would squarely fall upon it.<sup>92</sup> But the suggestions and requests of the opposition in this regard were turned down.

In view of the acuteness of the problem arising out of the continuous immigration, the opposition came forward with specific proposals for registering the names of the new immigrants and for sending them to different provinces of India for rehabilitation. But the Government was not up and doing in that regard, it alleged. It severely criticised that attitude and demanded that the Government should move different state governments for their co-operation for the rehabilitation of the new immigrants. But the

demand was rejected.<sup>93</sup> The Government did not take steps to rehabilitate these refugees itself either. The extent of success of the rehabilitation programme of the Government for the new immigrants could be known from its own estimates. According to government estimates, during the period from January, 1964 to March, 1971, 32,380 families of new migrants entered into the territory out of which 4,394 families were admitted into camps and 7,065 families were sent to other states for rehabilitation from the Reception Centre and the camps.<sup>94</sup> Thus the official source itself revealed that more than twenty thousand families were still to be rehabilitated. According to non-official sources, the number of refugee families awaiting rehabilitation till then would definitely be much higher.

The opposition also raised the problem faced by the landless agricultural labourers among the immigrants and other non-tribals and placed demands for appropriate steps for their settlement. Thus, in April, 1966, an opposition member pointed out with regret that the landless agricultural labourers were being deprived of resettlement benefits for long. He severely criticised the Government policy of granting at the rate of Rs. 300/- only to those families and demanded that more money should be granted to them. He further demanded that they must be given settlement on Government land, and that basic agricultural implements must be supplied to them free of cost. This step, he was confident, would go a long way in leading the 'Grow More Food Campaign' of the government towards success. He also suggested that a list of landless agricultural labourers of all the ten sub-divisions of the territory should be framed and programme should be chalked out

for giving them settlement on land within a target period of 2 to 3 years. But the demands and suggestions were rejected.

In April, 1967 again, a resolution was moved by an opposition member demanding allotment of khas lands to the landless agricultural labourers, grant of Rupees three thousand to each family as rehabilitation grant and declaration of a target date to complete the works of their rehabilitation. He stated that the serious food crisis of Tripura would further aggravate unless the landless agricultural labourers were rehabilitated on land and thereby engaged in agricultural production. According to a Government estimate itself, a few lakh acres of khas land were still there. He demanded that the landless families should be settled on that land immediately. The demand for raising the rate of rehabilitation grant to Rs. 3000/- was raised by him on the ground that with a lesser amount those families would not be able to purchase bullocks, seeds, manures and meet the expenses for reclaiming the tilla lands. The other opposition members then spoke in support of the resolution and some members of the treasury benches opposed it and after a prolonged debate, it was put vote and rejected.<sup>95</sup>

Likewise, in March, 1969, an opposition member complained that the Government had been depriving the landless labourers and share croppers of all the promised benefits year after year. He suggested that an intensive survey about the particulars of the people should be made and land should be given to those who were real farmers. He alleged that thousands of applications for allotment of land were being submitted by the landless people to the sub-divisional officers year after year, but no step was

taken so far for their settlement. As the Government had no definite policy or decision in that respect, the landless labourers were facing harassment in lieu of getting land, he added. He complained further that due to increased pressure on land because of continuous influx of refugees, land disputes were cropping up and cases instituted were being kept pending for years leading to harassment of the people concerned. He, therefore, suggested that the khas land immediately be distributed among the landless labourers. But the demands and suggestions were turned down.<sup>96</sup>

In March, 1970 again, an opposition member suggested that the surplus land within the areas of the tea-gardens should be acquired and the landless agricultural labourers should be given settlement on that land. He pointed out in that context that a large number of landless families had been in possession of khas land within the tea-gardens for long. He therefore, requested the Government to allot that land to those families so that they might carry on cultivation there and maintain themselves.<sup>97</sup> But the government took steps to allot that land to the owners of the teagardens. In April, 1971, an opposition member raised the demand that the Government should acquire surplus land from those who possessed land above the ceiling limit and distribute the same to the landless families. He expressed the conviction that if that measure was taken, it would go a long way in ameliorating the condition of the landless families and in raising the productivity of the land. He also raised the demand that cultivatable lands within the Reserve Forest areas should be de-reserved and the landless families should be given settlement on those lands. But all the demands and suggestions were turned down by the

Government side.<sup>98</sup>

In March, 1972, an opposition member alleged that, though section 184 of the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 provided that no person, either by himself or together with any member of his family, would hold in any capacity any land in excess of 25 standard acres in aggregate and that the excess land above that ceiling limit was to be seized and distributed among the landless peasants, no step was taken till then in that direction. He, therefore, requested the Government to take action for speedy and affective implementation of the provision of the act and to distribute excess land among the landless peasants.<sup>99</sup> Another opposition member alleged that though the Land Reforms Act, 1960 was passed in order to bring about some land reforms in the prevailing land system, experience of last 10 years proved that the aim of the act was totally baffled. Even after fixation of the ceiling limit of holdings, no surplus land was seized and no landless got any land, he added. Experience showed, he stated further, that the Government was reluctant to give land to the landless by implementing the relevant provisions of the land reforms act; on the other hand, it was eager to ensure that the landless peasants did not get surplus land of the non-cultivating section of the land owners.<sup>100</sup>

In July, 1972, an opposition member regretted that far from reducing the ceiling limit that existed then, the Government did not even take steps for seizing the excess lands above the ceiling limit of 25 standard acres as provided for in the Land Reforms Act, 1960. He also regretted that though the Government of India declared through radio and news papers that steps would be taken



in right earnest to reduce the ceiling limit of land holdings, no step for reducing the ceiling limit was evident till then in Tripura. He, therefore, raised the demand of distributing excess land of the jotedars to the landless and for reducing the ceiling limit of holdings for the purpose.<sup>101</sup> But no heed was paid to the demands and suggestions of the opposition members.

It was learnt from the policy statement of the Governor for 1974-75 that in the field of land reforms and land revenue, the Government had proposed the year before to lower the ceiling on land holdings to 18 standard acres. An ordinance had already been promulgated, and the Government proposed to introduce a bill on the subject in that session of the Assembly. It was also claimed that the Government had settled some 2,543 landless scheduled caste families upto January, 1974.<sup>102</sup> Participating in the discussion on the motion of thanks to the statement, an opposition member alleged that though the Government propagated for the last nineteen years that landlordism had been abolished and the land would go to the tillers, very few among the landless actually got land possession. The ceiling limit had been fixed by the Land Reforms Act, 1960, but no excess land was seized and distributed among the landless, he added. He state further that the amendment that was brought through ordinance was not meant for giving land to the poor and the downtrodden, but for protecting the vested interest of the landlords, the Jotedars and the hoarders.<sup>103</sup>

In April, 1974 again, an opposition member alleged that the problem of rehabilitation of the landless agricultural labourers was persisting and aggravating as the Government was not serious about scizure of all excess

lands of the big jotedars above the ceiling limit. Further, the landless peasants who had reclaimed the khas lands and were cultivating there urged the Government repeatedly to allot those lands to them, but no step was being taken in that direction, he added. He, therefore, viewed that so long as all cultivable lands within the reserved forests were not de-reserved and the benami lands above the ceiling limits were not recovered, rehabilitation of the landless would not be possible.<sup>104</sup>

In March, 1975, an opposition member alleged that though the Government had been propagating for long that lands above ceiling limit would be sized in pursuance of the provisions of the Land Reforms Act, not even a single acre of land was recovered till then. In some cases, the Government gave allotment of homesteaded land to some landless families at the rate of 20 decimals per family out of 5 to 6 kanis (2 acres) of khas land which they had reclaimed and made cultivable, but no financial assistance was given to them for construction of their houses and for their economic rehabilitation, he added. The refugees, who had come from erstwhile East Pakistan and depended on the Government for their resettlement, had been given settlement on hilly and uncultivable lands in large majority of cases and as a result, they had to leave those places and became landless again. The immigrant families who had been rehabilitated on plain and cultivable lands were also being compelled to transfer their lands to moneylenders due to dire poverty and thus they also were being turned into destitutes once again, but the government was not taking any appropriate step for their economic rehabilitation, he complained.<sup>105</sup>

A Government statement of 1976-77 revealed that the

Government had put the maximum emphasis on the carrying out of the provisions of the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act as amended from time to time in the light of requirements. Out of an estimated number of 45,214 landless agricultural labourer families, land had been allotted to 36,373 families till then, he added. Further, out of an estimated 42,650 landless workers' families, allotment of house sites had been made in favour of 20,665 families. In both those respects, his Government would take steps to complete the process in the course of that year, it added.<sup>106</sup> But the opposition alleged that only the khas lands under the possession of the so-called 'unauthorised occupants' were seized and distributed among some landless pasants, but the lands of the big jotedars and the 'khas' land occupied by big landlords and teagarden owners remained untouched.<sup>107</sup>

The opposition also protested strongly against the alienation of lands of the marginal and poor peasants to the moneylenders and jotedars and eviction of the share-croppers and other landless peasants from the lands of the non-cultivating rich peasants and the Government lands, and it pressurised the Government to take steps to stop transfer of lands of the poor peasants and eviction of the share-croppers and other landless peasants, but to little effect. Thus, in July, 1972, an opposition member complained that despite repeated Government assurances, alienation of land of the poor and marginal farmers to the moneylanders and rich farmers did not stop; rather it went on in an increasing pace. The prices of the cash-crops of the peasants were increasing only nominally, but the prices of the daily necessities were rising by leaps and bounds; and as a result, the lands of the poor peasants

continued to pass on to the hands of moneylenders, he added. the Census Report of 1961 revealed that 7.5 percent of the peasants of Tripura had been agricultural workers, but it was learnt from the Census Report of 1971 that their number had enormously risen to constitute 19.7 percent of the total number of peasants; and that showed clearly that the rate of land transfer in Tripura was alarming, he concluded.<sup>108</sup>

Another opposition member alleged that though agricultural problem was the basic problem of Tripura, the Government was not up and doing to solve the problem. About 80 percent of the total population was engaged in agriculture, but the lands of the poor peasants continued to pass to the hands of the moneylenders, he added. In support of his contention, the member gave reference to the information furnished before the House by the Revenue Minister some time back that 34,560 acres of land passed from the poor farmers within the previous financial year alone. It was thus clear that the Government did not take steps to stop the sale or transfer of land of the poor peasants and to stop the process of eviction of peasants from their land, he added. He, then, urged the Government to take appropriate and necessary steps to safeguard the interest of these weaker sections of the people, but no heed was paid to the request.<sup>109</sup>

Similarly, in March, 1973, an opposition member stated that in absence of any effective land reform measure, the number of unemployed in rural areas was mounting, the poor peasants were losing their lands, productivity of the land was decreasing, and famine situation was stepping in in the rural areas of Tripura. The report of the new census revealed that the marginal farmers who owned 2 to 5

kanis of land lost their land and were turned into landless day labourers within the last 10 years, but it appeared that the Government was not ready to give due importance to the problem and it was evident from the Governor's Address of the year that the land reforms bill "that had been under consideration of the Government for introduction in the Legislative Assembly during the previous year was still under consideration of the Government", he commented.<sup>110</sup> During the Budget session of the year, an opposition member alleged that the Government was not up and doing for solving the problem of fifty seven thousand landless families who had no land, no homestead, and no means of livelihood other than physical labour. To worsen the situation, the moneylenders, blackmarketeers and other sections of the moneyed people had been trying to evict those people from the khas lands they reclaimed and cultivated for long, he added. In support of his allegation, the member cited the instances of the landless peasants of Jashumura, Bainkhora and Paishala who were subjected to police torture and repression as they stood against the 'conspiracy' of the moneylenders and jotedars to evict them from their possessions. The downtrodden and the weaker sections of the rural people thus realised through experience that the government would not solve any of their problems and its 'Socialism' was meant for the exploiting classes and not meant for them, he added.<sup>111</sup> Another opposition member stated that though the land reforms act, 1960 clearly provided that the sharecroppers would have heritable rights to cultivate the lands they tilled and that in case the jotedars intended to sell those lands, the sharecroppers would get the preference, but thousands of sharecroppers were evicted from the lands they tilled in clear

contravention of the provision of the act. The jotedars imposed one-sided terms on the sharecroppers that they would bear all expenses connected with the cultivation of land and would get sixty-percent of the produce only, and thus such an agricultural economy was built up in Tripura that compared well with the serfdom of the middle ages, he remarked. Again, though it was clearly stated in the Bombay Moneylenders Act as extended to Tripura that the mahajans who carried on moneylending business would have to get their names registered, only a few persons secured required licences and a large number carried on illegal business, he added. As the Government had no control over those people, abominable practices like charging interest at the rate of rupees ten per hundred rupees per month and 5 maunds of paddy as interest of per hundred rupees for every six months continued, and as a result, lands of thousands of poor peasants continued to pass on to the hands of the 'hated' moneylenders, he alleged.<sup>112</sup>

Likewise, in March, 1974, the leader of the opposition stated that though according to the provision of the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms act, 1960 the jotedars were to go to court in case they intended to bring their lands under their direct cultivation, in practice thousands of sharecroppers were evicted at the whims and caprices of the jotedars and no legal step was taken by the government against them. He, therefore, alleged that the provisions of that act were there to remain on paper only, and as the Government was the Government of the jotedars and other sections of the moneyed people, it was always eager to protect the interest of those exploiters, and the weaker sections of the people had nothing to expect from

The opposition also raised the demand for remission of arrear rents of the peasants, for immediate implementation of the proposal accepted by the Tripura Assembly that upto  $7\frac{1}{2}$  kanis (3 acres) of land would be made rent-free, for introduction of agricultural income tax in cancellation of the prevailing revenue taxes, and for remission of agriculture loan of the poor peasants. Thus in April, 1972, an opposition member regretted that in total disregard of the long-standing demand of the farmers for remission of all arrear rents, the government decided to remit their land revenue for 2 years only. As no step was taken for flood protection or for bringing more cultivable lands under irrigation, total food production of the lands remained almost static, but the rate of land revenue was raised four to five times in the last few years, he added. The prices of agricultural produces rose only marginally, but the prices of daily necessities of peasants increased abnormally; that was why the rents of the poor peasants fell in arrears. The poor peasants of Tripura were still dependent on nature for cultivation of their lands and hence they found it almost impossible to maintain themselves and their families with the meagre output they got from their tiny plots of land. In view of that and under the pressure of the opposition, a resolution was passed in the previous Assembly that rent of upto  $7\frac{1}{2}$  kanis of land would be remitted, but the resolution was not implemented despite repeated request of the opposition on the plea that if it was done, the total revenue of the state would fall. But if the agricultural income tax was introduced at progressive rates in lieu of the existing revenue taxes, the fear of a fall in the revenue would no longer be there, he viewed. He,

therefore, urged the Government to take urgent steps in all these regards, but no heed was paid to the demand.<sup>114</sup>

Similarly, in March, 1974, an opposition member stated that the Governor informed the House in course of his policy statement for the year that while his Government had still been struggling with the problems created by an unprecedented drought, Tripura had experienced a sudden and unexpected flood; but he did not utter a word about remission of rents of poor peasants who were worst affected by the drought and the flood. He, therefore, urged the Government to remit the arrear rents of the poor peasants who were worst affected by the drought and the flood. He, also urged the Government to remit the arrear rents of the poor peasants in consideration of their serious plight, but to no effect.<sup>115</sup> In the budget session of that year again, an opposition member stated that though article 21 of the Land Reforms Act provided that if the crops of farmers were destroyed by drought, flood or other natural calamities, their land revenue would be remitted in full, and the Government itself admitted that the farmers of Tripura had been worst hit by flood and drought in the two previous years; yet steps were being taken for collection of arrear rents from the peasants. About 30 to 40 percent of the products of 70 percent of farmers, who owned less than 2 acres of land had been destroyed, still the pressure of land revenue was continuing, he alleged. Again, though a resolution was unanimously adopted in the Tripura Assembly in 1969 that revenue upto 3 acres of land would be remitted, no step in that direction was taken till then, he added. In lieu thereof, rate of land revenue was raised, but in so doing, article 25 of the Land Reforms Act that provided that rate of land revenue was to be fixed on the



basis of agricultural profit was not taken into consideration. A Government statement revealed that the total land revenue to be collected for the year amounted to Rs. 51,85,000/- whereas the expenditure to be incurred for collection of revenue would amount to Rs. 51,38,000/-, and in view of that, he demanded that all arrear land revenues should be remitted and land upto 3 acres should be made rent-free. But no attention was paid to the demand.<sup>116</sup>

Likewise, in March, 1976, a member of the opposition stated that though the Tripura Agricultural Debtors' Relief Act provided that debts due from marginal, submarginal and landless labourers whose annual income did not exceed Rs. 2,000/- would be totally discharged, yet that did not mean that agriculture loans taken by those sections of people from the Government would be remitted. On the contrary, notice were being served on them for immediate repayment of the loan money together with interests and the ill-fated people who had been hard hit by natural calamities like drought and flood were then left with no option but to take loans from the moneylenders in order to repay the Government loan, and hence the Debtors' Relief Act virtually did not come of any relief to the poor farmers, he added. He, therefore, requested the Government to remit the agricultural loans of the poor peasants, but no heed was paid to his request.<sup>117</sup> Another opposition member regretted, in course of his budget speech, that at a time when serious food crisis and price-rise gripped the interior areas of Tripura, notices were being issued to the poor farmers for payment of arrear rents and land revenues and for repayment of Government loans, and he requested the Government to postpone the move for the time being keeping in view the serious plight

of those people, but to little effect.<sup>118</sup>

The opposition also raised the demand for agriculture and dadan loans and gratuitous relief to the poor and landless peasants during the drought and flood situations. It also alleged that the 'defective' agriculture and food policies of the Government were responsible for the serious economic crisis in Tripura and suggested some remedial measures, but little attention was paid to its suggestions. A Government statement of 1973 revealed that in 1972 a drought of unprecedented intensity gripped Tripura. It effected all the main crops seriously and created specially in South and West Districts water scarcity unknown in human memory. The failure of crops brought about serious difficulties to a large number of marginal and submarginal farmers of the State. There were problems of unemployment, non-availability of foodgrains in inaccessible areas, providing drinking water and threat of epidemic all over. The Statement claimed that the Government diverted all its energies and geared the entire administrative machinery to combat that situation. A task force was created to meet the emergency situation in a war footing and gratuitous relief was distributed liberally. Extensive test relief measures were undertaken and Agriculture and Dadan loans were distributed extensively, it added.<sup>119</sup>

Taking part in the discussion on the statement, an opposition member regretted that there was no mention in it regarding any specific step for combating the serious drought situation. He alleged that though the Government claimed that extensive test relief measures had been undertaken and gratuitous relief was distributed liberally, thousands of people had been roaming about near the

Government offices and staging 'gheraoes' and 'dharnas' for gratuitous relief and Dadan loans, but to little effect. Contradicting the claim of the Government that agriculture loans were distributed extensively, he stated that actually a few peasants got the loans and for that they had to go through a complicated procedure and to pay a portion of the loan-money to the agents as bribe. The opposition members demanded repeatedly that the procedure of loan giving should be simplified, but, in stead of that, it was made more complicated and, as a result, harassment of the poor peasants continued, he added.<sup>120</sup>

Another member of the opposition stated that though brisk rainfall started in some areas, most of the farmers could not start cultivation as they had no bullocks and no seeds. In some areas, thousands of farmers sent applications to the Government through the blocks for agriculture and dadan loans, but they did not get any favourable response, he added. The condition of the peasants became so much deplorable that they started staging dharnas in thousands in Agartala and Sub-Divisional head-quarters in order to draw the attention of the Government to their predicaments and sufferings. He stated further that it was almost a common experience that peasants, who could not please the agents of the party in power and the employees concerned, did not get any loan. Thus, only 5 to 6 percent of the total applicants got loans by giving bribes to the agents and that was how the process of loangiving continued, he stated.<sup>121</sup>

In the budget session of the year, an opposition member alleged that though thousands of peasants applied for agriculture loan that year, only a few amongst them got loan, but the money granted was too meagre to purchase

necessary inputs for cultivation; and for realisation of that meagre amount also, the peasants had to pay at the rate of fifty to sixty rupees to the agents of the ruling party and the office clerks as bribes. Further, thousands of poor farmers were staging dharnas in each S. D. O., B. D. O. and other Government offices for gratuitous relief and dadan loan, but only 2 to 3 percent of them got the benefits in spite of the fact that lakhs of rupees were given through banks for the purpose, and the major portion of the money went to the pockets of the agents, the big landlords, blackmarketers and businessmen, he added.<sup>122</sup>

In March, 1974, a member of the opposition criticised the agriculture policy of the Government stating that though Government claimed that it had succeeded in catching the imagination of the farmers by distributing high-yielding varieties of paddy and wheat seeds for improved and intensive methods of cultivation, but the supply of manures and extension of irrigation facilities that were urgently required for improved agricultural practices were quite insufficient. The Government stated that a total plan expenditure of Rs. 30 lakhs would be incurred during that year for minor irrigation, but it did not mention the percentage of the total cultivable land that had already been brought under irrigation and the percentage that still remained to be brought under irrigation, he added. He, then, regretted that there was no mention in the Government statement regarding taking over of the wholesale trade in rice by the Government though a decision in that regard was taken in the previous year. The poor peasants of Tripura never got the just price of paddy, jute and other agricultural products; the price of paddy usually fell in harvesting seasons and when the

price began to rise, 60 percent of the farmers were to appear in the markets as buyers. In order to put a stop to the injustice, take over of the wholesale trade in rice and supply of essential commodities at fair prices were urgently required, but the Government was indifferent to such a serious problem and as a result, the predicaments of the poorer sections of the people multiplied, he added.<sup>123</sup>

Another opposition member stated that though the Government claimed that it did a lot for the development of agriculture and as a result, the total production had risen remarkably, but the poor and the weaker sections of the people did not get those products at low price, and thus, the policy that aimed at more production for more profit helped the moneyed section of the people only. Again, as the Government cordoned the villages in the harvesting seasons and forcibly collected paddy and rice from the small and marginal farmers and lifted the cordons when the price began to rise, the jotedars, hoarders and black-marketeers got free hands to squeeze the poor and weaker sections of the people, he alleged. He alleged further that as the government was not serious about bringing more and more areas under irrigation, the farmers continued to suffer for scarcity of water. He, therefore, suggested that a master plan for bringing the total cultivable land under irrigation should be undertaken immediately and that would solve the problem of water scarcity and the problem of rural unemployment by engaging lakhs of unemployed youths of the rural areas in the works of irrigation. But no attention was paid to the suggestion.<sup>124</sup>

In March, 1975 again, an opposition member regretted that there was no mention in the policy statement of the

Government for the year regarding any specific and appropriate step for tiding over the serious economic crisis that engulfed the lives of the common people of Tripura. The Governor claimed that the rise of prices had been curbed and there had even been a fall, but in practice economic crisis in the public life of Tripura seriously aggravated during the last three years of the Sengupta Government, he alleged. While 70 percent of the people who lived below poverty line were leading subhuman lives, a class of exploiters was making millions by hoarding, blackmarketing and manipulations in foodgrains and other essential commodities and the party in power was taking the side of the exploiters in its own class interest, he added. The Governor claimed in his address, he continued, that in spite of the price-rise and shortage of essential commodities, his government had been able to maintain a steady supply of foodgrains and other essential commodities and maintain the priceline at a reasonable level by bufferstock operations whenever necessary, and from that it was evident that he under-rated and neglected the serious crisis in the public life of Tripura, for during the previous year, crisis had so much intensified that several starvation deaths occurred in different parts of Tripura.<sup>125</sup>

In May, 1975, a member of the opposition alleged that the 'defective' food policy of the Government was fully responsible for the serious economic crisis that gripped Tripura in the wake of the serious drought of April, 1975. The members of the opposition repeatedly demanded that the marketable surplus should be procured from the rich peasants, but the Government did not pay any heed to the demand, he added. The Government planned to procure

35 thousand tons of rice and paddy, but could not achieve the target as it laid greater emphasis on procuring paddy from the depressed peasants. In lieu thereof, it should have procured paddy from the rich peasants imposing levy on them at graded rates exempting the farmers who owned upto 4 acres of land, he opined. Agains, though the opposition had been pressing the demand for taking over of the wholesale trade in rice by the Government, no attention was being paid to the demand. Further, as Tripura was a deficit state, a large amount of foodgrains had to be drawn from the Central Stores every year; but as sufficient amount of foodgrains was not available that year from the Centre's stores, the rationing system in the towns and the drought-affected areas stood on the verge of collapse and as a result, the crisis further aggravated. He therefore, requested the Government to sincerely devise ways and means to tide over the serious crisis.<sup>126</sup> In March, 1976 again, the same member demanded that stability should be brought about and maintained in the food-front and for that, steps must be taken against those who earned superprofit by carrying on manipulations in foodgrains and other essential commodities. Besides, sufficient quantities of foodgrains must be procured by the government and for that, levy should be imposed on the rich peasants at graded rates.<sup>127</sup> Another member alleged that turning deaf ears to the repeated resistance of the opposition members, the government took away the major portions of the paddy and rice from the marginal, submarginal and poor peasants as levy during the harvesting seasons. But when the price of rice was raised fantastically by the manipulators subsequently and the price went beyond the purchasing capacity of those people, no appropriate step was taken by the Government to

ensure regular supply of rice at controlled rates through ration and fair price shops. As a result, the sufferings of the poor and weaker sections of the masses beggarred description. He, therefore, requested the Government to take early steps for regular supply of ration to those distressed people.<sup>128</sup> But not much attention was paid to the suggestions of the opposition.

On a subsequent occasion, again, the opposition members, to the acute food crisis that prevailed in Tripura at that time and demanded once again that the government must take over the wholesale trade in foodgrains without further delay, as that alone would be able to frustrate the machinations of the hoarders and blackmarketeers to create artificial food crisis. They congratulated the Government for enacting the Agricultural Credit Operations Bill as it would help the poor peasants to get loans from the banks and might go a long way to liberate them from the clutches of the moneylenders. At the same time, they requested the Government to gradually make the provisions of the act easier and easier so that the marginal, submarginal and poor peasants could easily get loan from banks and they could be saved from Mahajani exploitation once for all.<sup>129</sup>

They further commented that due to the failure of the Government to solve the basic problems of agriculture, chronic food shortage persisted for long and hence the sufferings of the poor and weaker sections of the people continued. Sharply criticising the food procurement policy of the Government, they alleged that in utter violation of its own declaration that foodgrains would be procured from 'voluntary contribution' of peasants, rice and paddy was mainly procured from the poor peasants by application



of force. In support of their allegation, they cited a good number of instances of police excesses during the procurement drive.<sup>130</sup> The policy of the Government was so much unscrupulous that within three months of the harvesting season, the poor farmers all over Tripura had to approach their local authorities for issue of ration cards, though with little success, they added. In view of the above, they urged the Government to make immediate necessary arrangements so that the poorer sections of the masses might be saved from the serious crisis that threatened to engulf them.<sup>131</sup> But little attention was paid to their suggestion.

The opposition raised its voice against imposition of new taxes also and it requested the Government to take steps so that the poor and weaker sections of people were not effected. Thus, in March, 1976, an opposition member demanded that attention must be paid so that the burden of development of the state did not devolve on the middle class and poor people and, for that, caution must be taken that no tax was imposed on those groups of people. The Governor in his Address of 1976-77 stated that the nation had "Set its foot firmly in the direction of economic progress leavened by social justice in a new found dynamism" and in order to ensure social justice, sizeable portions of the properties of those people who earned wealth by illegal and dishonest means should be confiscated and utilised in development works and the poor and weaker sections of the people should be exempted from all financial pressures, he added.<sup>132</sup> But to heed was paid no his demand.

The Chief Minister of Tripura, in his budget address of 1976-77 stated that with a view to financing the various development programmes and projects and due to limited

scope of additional resources mobilisation, the Government had to move and pass two bills in that session of the Assembly namely "The Tripura Professions, Trades, Callings and Employments Taxation Bill, 1976" and "The Tripura Sales tax Bill, 1976", but in so doing, due attention was paid that the burden of the taxes fell mainly on the moneyed section of the people and the poor and weaker sections remained unaffected.<sup>133</sup> But an opposition member alleged, in course of his budget speech, that the slabs of the Professional Tax were defective, and that the tax hurt the middle class and lower middle class people as their real income already eroded to a great extent due to continuous price rise. He suggested that the capital that was required for development schemes should have been collected from big capitalists and landlords by imposing taxes on them at progressive rates and the weaker sections of the people should have been exempted from the burden. He criticised the Sales Tax Act also as he apprehended that the tax would hurt the poor and weaker sections of the people as it touched all the essential consumers' goods and requested the Government to make those commodities tax-free.<sup>134</sup> But no attention was paid to his suggestions.

The opposition also alleged that as the Government was reluctant to implement the labour laws in force in Tripura, the workers of the mills, factories and tea-gardens suffered a lot. It, therefore, urged the Government to immediately implement those laws and concede the basic demands of those toiling masses, but little attention was paid to its suggestion. Thus, in June, 1973, an opposition member alleged that even the safeguards of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1946 were not extended to the workers of Tripura till then. The act provided that no worker would be made to

labour for more than 8 hours a day, but the workers of Tripura had to work for 12 to 14 hours a day, he added. Again, though Shops and Establishments Act was there, the employees and workers of the shops and establishments were not getting the benefits of the act, he alleged. The plantation Labour Act was there, but the workers of the tea-gardens of the state were being deprived of the benefits provided for in the act. Those workers were being subjected to boundless exploitation and deprivation and when they protested against that, the 'strange' argument was put forward that as they were not registered employees, the benefits of the act could not be extended to them, he added. He, then, commented sarcastically that it would be better to term the Labour Department as Employers' Department as the employers alone got help from it. Even in the labour laws of the British regime, some specific rules were there for termination of employees from their services like issuing of notice well ahead of termination and payment of compensations, etc., but the workers of Tripura were deprived of the provisions of those laws, he alleged. He, therefore, requested the Government to implement the provisions of those acts to safeguard the interests of the working people.<sup>135</sup> But no heed was paid to his request.

In July, 1972 again, a member of the opposition alleged that though the Government of India had a Contract Labour Act, the Government of Tripura did not frame rules for the act for its implementation in Tripura and, as a result, thousands of labourers who had been working under the contractors were being deprived of the safeguards of the act. Likewise, no step was being taken for implementing the Plantation Labour Act and the Motor Works Act and hence no security of services was there for

the workers. The Provident Fund rules were framed, but as no regional office was there, there was none to compel the employers to deposit their shares to the Provident Fund accounts of the workers together with arrears. Again, as no separate labour court was there and the task of trying all cases relating to labour disputes was entrusted to one officer only, the cases continued for 4 to 5 years and even more. In view of the above, the member urged the Government to take immediate necessary steps to safeguard the interests of those weaker sections of the people, though with little success.<sup>136</sup>

Similarly, in March, 1974, an opposition member alleged that, though 12 tea-gardens of the state were closed down and about 20 gardens were running uneconomic, and as a result, the workers had been leading subhuman lives; the Government was totally indifferent to their problems. Again, many small scale industries like aluminium factories and weaving centres had been closed due to lack of raw materials and thousands of workers engaged in those industries had been out of employment, but the Government was not up and doing to solve the problems of the unemployed workers. In that manner, the problems of poor and weaker sections of the people had been mounting, but no remedial measure was being taken, he added.<sup>137</sup>

Likewise, in April, 1976, the same member alleged that though Tripura attained statehood about 3 years back, no law was enacted till then for safeguarding the interests of the workers. The major portion of the workers of the state were tea-garden labourers, yet the benefits extendable under tea-garden rules to provide them with ration, drinking water facilities, medical cares, etc. were not extended to the workers regularly; the rules guiding the

service conditions, remuneration, leave, supply of leave-books, supply of due receipts for the money deposited by the workers to their provident fund accounts, etc., were also not honoured, he added. The Minimum Wages Act. of the Central Government had been extended in states like West Bengal and Maharashtra to protect the interests of the workers of mills and factories of those states, and the Government of Tripura also could extend the same to safeguard the interests of the hotel and restaurants, presses, weaving mills, bakeries, cinema halls, soap and candle factories, and of the forest-based industries, but it was not up and doing in that regard. True, some provisions of the act were extended for the agricultural labourers, tea-garden labourers and motor transport workers, yet no step was being taken for periodic review for revision of their wages, and as a result, the workers were being deprived of the benefits extendable according to the provisions of the act. Again, though a Motor Transport Workers Act had been introduced in Tripura, no attention was being paid to ensure that the motor owners obeyed the provisions of the act. The member, therefore, demanded that the motor owners should be made to abide by the rules guiding the overtime, minimum wage, leave, service conditions, recruitment and service security of the workers, but no attention was paid to the demand<sup>138</sup>.

From the above discussion, it becomes clearly evident that the legislative opposition tried its utmost to bring to the limelight the problems faced by the poor and weaker sections of the non-tribal people of Tripura also during the period under review and to compel the Government to take appropriate measures for solution of those problems. True, the demand of the opposition for extension of some

social and economic benefits to those under privileged sections of people was turned down time and again, but the government, in effect, accepted some of the opposition's demands on principle. Thus, though the demand of the opposition in the Territorial Assembly for taking steps to give land to the landless, prevent eviction of the poor peasants and to remit their arrear rents were turned down, the Government in effect accepted the demands when it declared that necessary amendments to the Land Laws to give protection to under-raiyats (sub-tenants) from eviction, to redefine the family so as to prevent any abuse of the ceiling's clause and to distribute excess lands of the landlords to the landless people received its attention and that the remission of some portions of arrears of land revenue was under its active consideration.<sup>139</sup> the demand for remission of arrear land revenue of the poor peasants, who were worst hit by consecutive droughts and floods, was raised repeatedly in the state Assembly also. Though the Government rejected the demand every time it was raised, it appears that it accepted the demand partially when it took the decision to remit land revenue of such peasants for 2 years.<sup>140</sup>

Again, the demand and suggestion of the opposition for taking steps for improving the lot of the weaker sections among the non-tribals was also repeatedly voted down, but the Government ultimately accepted the demand partially by declaring that it would lay emphasis on increasing development efforts on forestry, agriculture, power, industry, etc., in order to remove poverty, attain self-reliance, and raise the standard of living of the backward and under-privileged classes of people.<sup>141</sup> Likewise, though the demand of the opposition for giving

settlement to the landless and homeless families was voted down time and again, the Government, in effect, accepted the demand. This is noticeable in a Government Statement of 1976 that out of an estimated number of 45,214 agricultural labourer families, land had been allotted to 36,373 families till then. Further, of an estimated 42,656 landless workers' families, allotment of house sites had been made in favour of 20,665 families, the statement added. It was also stated in that context that all necessary steps would be taken to complete the process within the year 1977.<sup>142</sup>

Similarly, though the demand of the opposition for postponing the collection of all Government dues from the poor peasants in view of their serious predicaments was voted down repeatedly, the Government subsequently fulfilled the demand to some extent by issuing an order to go slow with collection of Government dues such as land revenue, dadan loans and loans given to the agricultural labourers rehabilitated on land.<sup>143</sup> Again, though the demand of the opposition for lowering the ceiling on land possession of the landlord, and distribution of their excess lands to the landless was rejected several times, the Government accepted the demand on principle when it announced its decision to introduce a bill in the House to lower the ceiling on land holding from 25 to 18 standard acres.<sup>144</sup>

From the foregoing discussion, it becomes clear that the legislative opposition in Tripura handled the social issues also in a befitting manner. It sharply and consistently criticised the Government for its failure to provide adequate protective measure to the tribals; and to extend the basic social and economic requirements to the weaker sections

among the non-tribals. Side by side, it raised the demand for adequate measures for safeguard and development of the tribals in socio-economic and cultural fields, and solution of the problems faced by the weaker sections among the non-tribals. Almost all the demands and suggestions of the opposition were turned down on the floor of the House, but the Government accepted some of its demands and suggestions; and this very fact proves that the level of success of the opposition in tackling the social issues was also pretty high.

1. T. L. A. P., 7.10.1963, p. 8.

2. T. L. A. P., 10.10.1963, p-7 (Budget speech by Aghore Deb Barma).

3. Ibid., 11.10.1963, p. 14 (Budget speech by Hlura Aung Mog).

4. Ibid., 11.10.1963 pp. 14-15 (Budget speech by Dinesh Deb Barma).

5. Ibid., 21.10.1963, p. 6. (discussion on the Appropriation Bill, 1963 by Aghore Deb Barma).

6. Ibid., 3.4.1964, p. 49 (cut motion by Aghore Deb Barma).

7. Ibid., 1.4.1964, pp. 11-12 (Cut motion against demand for grants on Tribal Welfare by Hlura Aung Mong).

8. Ibid., 3.4.1972, pp. 57-58 (Amendments on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, 1972 by Purnamohan Tripura).

9. Ibid., 26.6.1972, pp. 37-38 (Budget speech by Purnamohan Tripura).

10. Ibid., 30.6.1972, pp. 31-32 (cut motion against demand for grants on miscellaneous by Sudhanwa Deb Barma).

11. Ibid., 14.3.1973, pp. 58-59 (Amendment on the motion of



thanks to the governor's Address by Bhadramani Deb Barma).

12. Ibid., 13.3.1974, pp. 23-25 (Discussion on the motion of thanks to the governor's Address by Bajuban Reang).

13. Ibid., 9.3.1976, p. 15 (Amendment by Sudhanwa Deb Barma).

14. Ibid., pp. 21-22 (Amendment by Gunapada Jamatia).

15. T. L. A. P. 9-3-1976, pp. 25-26 (Resolution by Hlura Aung Mog).

16. Ibid., pp. 37-38 (Supporting speech by Nripen Chakraborty).

17. Ibid., 18-12.1964, pp. 28-29 (private members' resolution by Dinesh Deb Barma).

18. Ibid., 22.3.1966, pp. 30-34 (Resolution by Sudhanwa Deb Barma).

19. Ibid., pp. 38-40 (Supporting speech by Birchandra Deb Barma).

20. Ibid., 15.3.1967, pp. 27-28 (Amendment by Aghore Deb Barma).

21. Ibid., 15.3.1967, pp. 33-34 (Amendment by Bidyachandra Deb Barma).

22. Ibid., 15.12.1967, pp. 28-33 (Private members' resolution by Aghore Deb Barma and supporting speech by Abhiram Deb Barma and Bidya Chandra Deb Barma).

23. Ibid., 19.8.1968, pp. 22-25 (Resolution by Aghore Deb Barma and supporting speech by Abhiram Deb Barma).

24. Ibid., 27.3.1969, pp. 76-78 (Resolution by Bidya Chandra Deb Barma).

25. Ibid., 1.2.1970, pp. 41-48 (Resolution by Aghore Deb Barma).

26. Ibid., 20.3.1970, p. 44 (Amendment by Aghore Deb Barma).

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32. Ibid., 16.3.1973, pp. 24-28 (Private members' resolution by Samar Chaudhury).

33. Ibid., 28.3.1973, pp. 18-19 (Budget speech of 1973-74 by Nripen Chakraborty).

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43. Ibid., pp. 37-38 (Amendment by Jitendra Lal Das).

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46. Ibid., 22.3.1974, pp. 34-35 (Amendment moved by Nripen Chakraborty).

47. Ibid., 25.3.1974, pp. 29-41 (Amendment moved by Nripen Chakraborty).

48. Ibid., 11.4.1974, pp. 53-55 (Supporting speech to the private members' resolution of Abhiram Deb Barma dated 10.4.1974 by Jitendra Lal Das).

49. Ibid., 11.3.1974, p. 10.

50. Ibid., 7.3.1975, p. 3.

51. Ibid., 10.3.1975, p. 36.

52. Ibid., pp. 40-41 (Amendment by Sudhanwa Deb Barma).

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54. Ibid., 25.3.1976, pp. 29-30 (Budget speech, 1976-77 by Manindra Deb Barma)

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56. Ibid., p. 10

57. Ibid., 10.10.1963, p. 12.

58. Ibid., 28.3.1969, pp. 69-71.

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62. Ibid., 14.3.1973, p. 40.

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65. Ibid., 29.3.1964, p. 65.
66. Ibid., 29.3.1965, p. 25
67. Ibid., 10.10.1963, pp. 12-15; 23.3.1967, pp. 22-23.
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83. Ibid., 7.10.1963, p. 2.
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103. Ibid., 12.3.1974, p.26 (Discussion by Nripen Chakranorty).
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132. Ibid., 9.3.1976, p. 10 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, 1976-77 by Jitendra Lal Das).
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## CHAPTER FIVE

### OPPOSITION AND THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

The economic problems and issues raised and fought by the opposition mainly featured during the budget discussions. The opposition members utilised the other opportunities also to bring into focus the economic problems of the period under discussion. The main economic issues and problem dealt with by the opposition were : Food problems and price rise, Employees' and workers' demands for raising emoluments, problems of urban and rural unemployment, and demand for industrialisation.

#### A. Problems of food deficit and Price-rise.

Both the treasury benchers and the members of the opposition were fully aware of the fact that Tripura had been a perennial deficit area in food-grains and that the scarcity of foodstuffs had caused the prices to go up, and for a solution of the problem, a break through in agriculture was a must. The issue was raised 65 times in the Assembly in the forms of motions of thanks to Administrator's, Lieutenant Governor's and Governor's Address budget discussions, cut motions against demands for grants, and private members' resolutions and the opposition sharply criticised the failure of the Government to solve the problems and suggested some remedial measures, but little attention was paid to its suggestions.

In his budget address of 1963-64, Chief Minister Sri Singh informed the House that the measures taken by his Government for solving the problem of food shortage were to reclaim new areas, introduce double crops in existing

single crop lands, provide more facilities for irrigation and lay stress on increased local manuring resources. He informed further that efforts were also being made for distribution of improved seeds, fertilisers, agricultural implements and plant protection chemicals. <sup>1</sup> Taking part in the budget discussion, an opposition member strongly criticised the government for its failure to implement its own schemes. He opined that steps should be taken to introduce better irrigation facilities in order to make Tripura self-sufficient in the matter of foodgrain. He pointed out in that context that if steps were taken to erect embankments in various areas for storing rain water, that would have facilitated irrigation during dry seasons and led to increase of food production thereby. <sup>2</sup>

The price of rice and other essential commodities began to show upward trend from the latter half of the year 1964. In view of this, a resolution was moved in September, 1964 on behalf of the opposition that "This Assembly is of opinion that in view of the soaring prices of essential commodities, the Government should fix up the prices of essential commodities and should take the responsibility of distribution." The opposition members expressed concern that the soaring prices of the essential commodities were fast going beyond the purchasing power of the masses. As a result, popular discontent was on the increase and movements erupted protesting against price-rise and demanding introduction of the system of fair distribution through the implementation of state trading in rice and other essential commodities. They expressed regret that far from conceding their demands, the Government resorted to the policy of arresting the leaders and followers of the movements. In fine, they requested the Government

to give up that 'anti-people' policy and to check price-rise by fixing up the prices of major commodities. But the resolution was voted down after a prolonged debate. <sup>3</sup>

In December, 1964 again a motion to discuss on matters of urgent public importance was tabled by an opposition member in order to throw light on the intolerable hardship that the people of Tripura increasingly met because of continued rise in the prices of essential commodities. The opposition members, in their speeches, held the Government squarely responsible for all this, as the Government had allegedly failed to take steps against the blackmarketeers, hoarders and profiteers. An opposition member pointed out in this context that while the State Government put forward the 'Demand Supply Theory' to explain the cause of the price rise, none else than the then Union Finance Minister himself was of the view that it was the work of the blackmoney. It was, therefore, demanded that in order to put a stop to the misdeeds of the blackmoney, adequate control over the wholesale trade must be imposed. <sup>4</sup> But the demand was turned down after a heated debate.

In March, 1965, the leader of the opposition, in course of his budget speech, alleged that only a small amount of paddy and rice were procured during the harvesting season of the year and the traders, blackmarketeers and rich peasants were given free hands to hoard large amount of rice and paddy. Rice that was given through ration and fair price shops was quite inadequate and hence most of the people of the urban areas had to buy rice from the blackmarket. The solution of the problem of price rise, according to him, lay in introduction of cordoning and full rationing in the town areas which would check price rise

in rural areas also. He, then, suggested that the blackmarketeers playing havoc with the essential commodities should be arrested immediately, applying the provisions of the Essential Commodities Act. The D.I.R. also should be applied to check manipulation in the essential commodities by the anti-social elements. <sup>5</sup> But the Government did not pay heed to the suggestion.

During the rainy season of 1965, the price of rice began to go up fantastically. The government fixed up the price at Rs. 35/- per maund and the result was that most of the rice went underground. The Government arrested some small traders, but that yielded no result. Reduction in the rice quota had to be enforced to the ration card holders. The situation further aggravated as rice became scarce in the open markets in Agartala and Sub-Divisional headquarters. In view of the gravity of the situation, a private members' resolution was moved by an opposition member that whereas an abnormal situation had arisen due to non-availability of rice in the open markets, the Government should take all necessary steps to introduce state trading in rice and paddy immediately. He demanded that the Government should take the policy of purchasing paddy and rice from the market in the harvesting seasons and distributing the same through ration and fair price shops when the price showed upward trend. Members from both sides took part in the discussion on the resolution and after a prolonged and heated debate, the resolution was put to vote and lost. <sup>6</sup>

In his budget address of 1966-67, the Finance Minister himself admitted that "the food position continues to be difficult, rather it may go worse". He, however, assured that "Strenuous efforts are being made to raise agricultural

production to make it (Tripura) self-sufficient". Among the efforts proposed to be made by the Government, the important ones were : procurement drive, introduction of scientific method of cultivation, chemical manuring of paddy lands and setting up of demonstration farms. <sup>7</sup> Participating in the budget discussion, an opposition member, on behalf of the opposition, extended support to the procurement policy of the Government for requisitioning paddy from those land-holders who owned 10 acres of land in the minimum. At the same time, he alleged that the Government had failed to fully implement its own procurement policy and the blackmarketeers, hoarders and profiteers took the advantage of the situation and hence the food crisis. He, then, requested the Government to carry on procurement of rice and paddy in strict pursuance of its own procurement policy, to pressurise the Central Government to meet up the deficit of food-grains, and start production agricultural farms in lieu of demonstration farms, applying scientific method of cultivation and chemical manuring in order to tide over the acute food crisis. <sup>8</sup> But no step in that direction was taken.

A private members' resolution was moved on behalf of the opposition on 25.3.1966 that in order to make Tripura Self-sufficient in food, the Government should take agrarian reforms with a view to give land to the tillers of the soil, take steps for introducing moratorium on debts of peasants and provide to them adequate loans, improved seeds, fertilisers and adequate irrigation facilities in time. The mover of the resolution alleged that though the main objective of the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 was to acquire the excess lands of the landlords

and distribute those to the tillers of the soil, the Government was not up and doing to attain the objective. He, then, demanded that the present Act should be replaced by a new one, incorporating adequate provision for giving land to the landless peasants and that alone would solve the food problem that persisted. He demanded further that the farmers should be free from mahajani exploitation and for that moratoriums on debts taken by them was a must. The peasants should be given scope to repay the debts on easy instalments and the Government must come forward to give them loans in times of need. Despite Government claim that it supplied a large amount of fertilisers, pesticides and improved seeds to the farmers, total production of foodcrops rose only marginally, he added. He, therefore, suggested that the peasants should be given practical training for properly utilising the improved seeds, fertilisers and pesticides.<sup>9</sup> Members from both sides then took part in the discussion and after a prolonged debate, the resolution was put to vote and lost.

In march, 1967 again, the opposition criticised the Government for its failure to solve the acute food problem. It alleged that though the food crisis was noticeable from the beginning of the year, no step was taken for ensuring regular supply of rice and wheat from the ration shops. This, according to it, contributed to aggravate the situation further. It could not accept the Government view-point that 'intensive procurement of foodgrains' alone would solve the problem. Pointing to the fact that locally produced foodgrains of Tripura could never meet the total requirement of the people, it demanded that stress should be laid on the release of adequate amount of foodgrains from the Centre's Stores, particularly in view of sharp fall

in food production that year.<sup>10</sup> The opposition also alleged that the procurement policy of the Government was not based on sound footing. The Government took the decision of procurement at a very late hour as a result of which the target of procurement could not be attained. It also criticised the Government decision to draw only 16 thousand tons of rice and wheat from the Centre's stores, whereas the deficit of food-grains according to its own estimates amounted to the tune of fifty thousand tons. It suggested that for a solution of the food problems, steps like giving land to the landless peasants, remission of arrear rents, grant of loan to the farmers and adequate flood protection measures were urgently required.<sup>11</sup> But little attention was paid to the demands and suggestions of the opposition.

In his budget speech of 1968-69, the Finance Minister admitted that the food problem was getting more and more complicated with the progress of time. Continuous influx of refugees from East Pakistan made the problem more acute, he stated. He added that manipulation by anti-social elements was responsible for non-availability of foodgrains in the open markets. He accused the opposition also for their alleged opposition to the food procurement drive of the Government.<sup>12</sup> Taking part in the discussion, an opposition member severely criticised the Government for its failure to take appropriate steps for stopping manipulation by the anti-social elements. Sharply criticising the food procurement drive of the food department, he alleged that, in gross violation of the procurement policy of the Government, the department resorted to the policy of procuring paddy from those peasants also who owned less than 5 acres of land. In this connection, he pointed out that though the Government

was spending lakhs of rupees in taking steps for resisting price rise of essential commodities, yet the prices were rising fast due to machinations of the hoarders and black-marketeers. But the Government was not up and doing in giving punishment to those anti-social elements, he alleged. Pointing to the failure of the minor irrigation programmes of the Government, he suggested that by suitably bunding the innumerable streamlets spread all over the territory, thousands of acres of fallow lands could have been irrigated and used for food production. But no attention was paid to the suggestion.<sup>13</sup>

In March, 1969, an opposition member alleged that despite all 'tall talks', it was an undeniable fact that food crisis in the territory was deepening. He regretted that there was no mention of any definite policy in that year's statement of the Administrator as to how the Government would solve the problem.<sup>14</sup> Another opposition member pointed to the mismanagement and malpractices that were allegedly going on in procuring rice and paddy. Strongly criticising the food procurement drive of the Government, he alleged that in utter violation of its own declared policy, the Government started procuring food-grains from small farmers also. This led to many unhappy occurrences including police firing, causing death and injuries to some peasants. He, therefore, urged the Government to give up that 'anti-people' path and to procure rice and paddy in the harvesting seasons in strict compliance of its own declared procurement policy. He, then, pointed to the mismanagement and malpractices that allegedly continued in procuring other essential commodities and building up buffer stock. He pointed out various lapses in the matter of disposal and physical



verification of buffer-stock as a result of which Government had to sustain heavy losses. He also pointed out the malpractices in respect of carrying cost, stock and distribution. Though the object of the scheme was to prevent the big business from raising the prices of essential commodities, yet the wholesale dealerships for distribution of the buffer-stock goods were being entrusted to the same big businessmen. As a result, the real purpose of the scheme was defeated, he alleged. He, therefore, requested the Government to take appropriate remedial measures. But no heed was paid to his request.<sup>15</sup>

In his policy statement of 1970-71, the Lieutenant Governor of Tripura stated that the food situation in the 'Current' year had been comfortable. He informed the House that there was adequate stock of food grains which would be further supplemented to meet the needs of the vulnerable groups during the lean season. He informed further that instructions had been issued to extend the public distribution system by opening more ration shops, specially in tribal and inaccessible areas. In order to achieve the goal of self-sufficiency in food, a crash programme for agricultural development would be launched, he added.<sup>16</sup> Moving amendments on the motion of thanks to the Address, the opposition members alleged that the statement did not include such vital issues as measures for distribution of benami lands among the landless farmers, steps for flood control, facilities for minor irrigation, measures for protection of share-croppers from eviction, cancellation of arrear revenue and Government agricultural loans, restriction of exploitation by moneylenders, setting up of Debt Settlement Board and return of all land that passed to moneylenders through distress

sale.<sup>17</sup> All the amendments were, however, voted down.

The finance Minister, in his budget address of 1970-71, informed the House that during that financial year schemes for maximum utilisation of land resources, the distribution of chemical fertilisers, improved seeds and pesticides, the extension of the area under horticultural crops and proper land management would be assigned high priority. He also added that in order to make the crash programme for agricultural development a success, special stress would be laid on the construction of a variety of minor irrigation works such as diversion and reclamation schemes, lift irrigation schemes, electric pumping sets and a few exploratory deep tubewells. He expressed the hope that the measures would considerably increase the total food production of the land and would thereby solve the food problem to a great extent.<sup>18</sup>

Taking part in the budget discussion, an opposition member sharply criticised the agriculture policy of the Government and commented that for gross defects in the policy, the food problem in Tripura took such a serious turn. He pointed out with concern that according to a Government estimate itself, number of landless agricultural labourers, landless jhumia families, and small farmers possessing less than 2 acres of land were 32,912, 32,725 and 2,30,452 respectively. He opined that necessary amendments to the existing land laws to protect the sharecroppers from eviction, distribution of surplus and Government land to the landless and the protection of the interests of the tribals on land were necessary preconditions for any agricultural break-through in the territory. Side by side fulfilling these preconditions, proper arrangements for irrigation, seeds, manures, fertilisers

and agricultural loan must be made, he viewed. He, then, pointed out that there was enormous scope for increasing the area under irrigation by the implementation of a number of minor irrigation schemes. He added that seasonal bunds could have been constructed over 'cherras' (Streamlets) all over the territory and that could have brought thousands of acres of fallow lands under cultivation, but the Government was not up and doing, he alleged.<sup>19</sup>

In the Lieutenant Governor's Address of 1971-72 also, satisfaction was expressed that the food situation had become comfortable during the previous year. It was claimed that the quantum of ration throughout the Territory was increased during the lean season. Further, adequate food reserves had been built to deal with any emergency that might arise. It was also claimed that the measures taken or proposed to be taken would go a long way in bringing about the success of the agricultural production programme of the Government and solve the food problem thereby.<sup>20</sup> Moving an amendment on the motion of thanks to the Address, an opposition member alleged that no mention was made in the Address about the deteriorating food situation in Tripura. Sharply criticising the Government statement that food situation was comfortable, he pointed out with supporting data that the price of rice in the open market was rising fast all over Tripura. He, then, alleged that the party in power was quite blind to the untold sufferings of the poor and starving people who were demanding food at controlled rates. He alleged further that the picture as painted in the statement was perhaps made on the basis of the luxurious lives being led by a small fraction of the population. He, then moved

another amendment in order to point out the absence in the statement of appropriate measures for checking rise in prices of essential commodities. it was a matter of great concern that alongside the rise in price of rice, prices of all other essential commodities were also rising fast, he added. To worsen the situation, prices of all saleable produce of the farmers were falling sharply, he continued. He, therefore, urged the Government to appreciate the serious predicaments the poor farmers were facing being placed in such a peculiar and contradictory situation and to take immediate remedial measures. Both the amendments were, however, voted down.<sup>21</sup>

During the budget session of the year again, an opposition member expressed concern to note that 65.72 per cent of the agriculture budget was earmarked for office, establishments, etc., and the rest 34.28 per cent only was meant for investment, that is, for giving seeds, manures and fertilisers to the peasants. He criticised that this policy was defective and suggested that if the government was at all serious for the development of agriculture, it should supply the necessary agricultural inputs to the peasants in time. He admitted that a good number of sub-banks had been opened for the purpose but those would not come of any use to the farmers if the existing rules for giving loans were not radically amended.<sup>22</sup> Another member, in his speech, expressed concern that despite Government claim that the food situation in the year was comfortable, price of rice was rising fast. Referring to the Government claim that rice was being distributed through the ration shops throughout the year, he observed that it was true in case of some ration shops in the town areas only. Commenting on the Government claim that

adequate quantity of rice, cereals and edible oil were being distributed in order to check price-rise, he remarked that only a small fraction of the population could avail themselves of the opportunity. A large portion of those commodities used to go to the hands of the blackmarketeers through backdoors, he added. In fine, he remarked that in order to make Tripura self-reliant in the matter of food, land-problems of her peasants to be solved in the first were instance. But he was anxious to note that there was no mention in the budget address of the Finance Minister as to how the land-problem would be solved and how the landless peasants would get land.<sup>23</sup>

In April, 1972, an opposition member pointed out with concern that the problem of food deficit of the state had further intensified as a result of the unprecedented refugee influx to the state on the eve of the liberation struggle of Bangladesh, and regretted that the Government was not up and doing to secure sufficient amount of food-grains from the Central Government. Besides, the black-marketeters and hoarders had been carrying on manipulations in the foodgrains and creating artificial crisis in the market, but the Government would not take over the wholesale trade in foodgrains despite repeated demands of the opposition to that effect, he added. He alleged further that, in spite of acute food shortage and rising prices of essential commodities, the Government did not take steps for regular supply of those commodities through ration shops.<sup>24</sup> Another member of the opposition pointed out that the prices of all essential commodities had been rising abnormally in Tripura due to acute food shortage, high transport cost, and continued imposition of sales taxes on essential commodities ; and regretted that

there was no step to contain the price line by granting adequate subsidy. Again, though there had been a Price Fixation Committee in Tripura, none of its rules and regulations had ever been applied and as a result, the dishonest merchants and blackmarketeers had been driving the common people to intolerable hardship by raising the prices of essential commodities with the help of the bureaucrats and no one knew where was the end of the deplorable state of affairs, he added. <sup>25</sup>

During the discussion on the budget estimate of the year again, an opposition member stated that the Government talked a lot about bringing about self-sufficiency in food production, but it was not serious about extending adequate facilities to the farmers. The farmers sincerely wanted to steadily increase the production of their lands, but they did not get proper assistance from the Government, he alleged. Thus, they felt the need of good seeds, manures, irrigation facilities and plant protection chemicals and agricultural loan, but did not get those in time of need, he added. Moreover, the actual tillers of the lands did not get lands despite Land Reforms act and its amendments, and as a result, the quantity of foodgrains production did not rise as expected. The farmers did not get the just price of their rice and paddy at the harvesting time, but the Government did not deem it necessary to give protection to the poor peasants at that time ; and when crisis started blackmarketeers and dishonest traders, who had hoarded foodgrains previously, started selling them to the peasants at high prices. Left with no alternative, the small peasants were to take loans from the moneylenders at high rates of interests and ultimately their lands passed on to the hands of the

money-lenders. Hence, so long as the Government did not come forward to break that vicious circle of jotedar - hoarder - black-marketeer - moneylender - dishonest trader combine, food crisis, and for that matter, galloping rise in the prices of foodgrains would continue, he remarked.<sup>26</sup>

In March, 1973, the opposition stated that though the Government admitted that rising prices of essential commodities posed a big problem to the people, it did not make any mention about the steps for arresting the price rise. The Government stated that the scarcity of foodgrains caused the prices to go up, but did not come forward to take steps against the hoarders and blackmarketeers who carried on manipulations in foodgrains and created artificial crisis, it added. It then, alleged that though the Government claimed that the entire population except a little more than 2 lakhs had been brought under various system of rationing, the actual picture was that almost all the Government godowns of the state had become empty and as a result, thousands of ration card holders were being denied ration for long. The Government stated that various test relief measures had been taken in order to give relief to the poor peasants, but due emphasis was not laid on steady development of agriculture which alone could solve the problem of food deficit and price rise, it added. It, therefore, urged the Government to take steps for arresting price rise and warned it at the same time that if appropriate steps were not taken in that direction, popular discontent would mount further and it would put an end to the regime. But no heed was paid to its demand and request.<sup>27</sup>

During the budget session of the year again, the

opposition stated that 75 percent of the people of Tripura was engaged in 22 percent of the land that were brought under cultivation till then, but the Government did not come forward to bring more and more areas under cultivation and that was the main reason of the chronic food deficit of the state. From an information furnished by the Revenue Department, it was learnt that about 70 percent of the peasants of Tripura owned 2 acres of land in average, but there was no indication in the budget speech of the Finance Minister that more land would be allotted to those small farmers and some lands would be given to the landless, it added.<sup>28</sup> It stated further that no such land reform measure was taken till then that would resist alienation of land of the poor peasants to the moneylenders and rich peasants. The Minister told in his speech that amendment would be brought on the land reforms act, but he told nothing about steps for stoppage of land transfer so long as the amendment was not passed. The Minister claimed that the Government went on supplying improved seeds, manures and agricultural implements, but the total food production did not commensurate with the moderanisation, it alleged. The Government talked a lot, but its failure to combat drought, flood and famine was unrefutable. Placed in great hardship, thousands of peasants applied for agriculture loan, but only a few got the loan. It, therefore, suggested that the Government should take immediate steps to lower the ceiling limit of land possession, distribute excess and khas lands to the poor and landless peasants, and sanction agricultural loan to the real tillers of the soil on liberal terms if it really wanted to overcome the acute food problem and the problem of price rise, but no attention was paid to the suggestions.<sup>29</sup>



In march, 1974, the opposition alleged that though the Government went on supplying seeds of high-yielding varieties of paddy and wheat to the peasants, no step was there, for supply of adequate quantity of manures to be applied on land. Much had been said about bringing more and more areas under irrigation, but only 4 per cent of the total cultivable land was brought under irrigation till then, and progress in that respect was very slow and unsatisfactory, it added. The Government promised year after year that it would take over the wholesale trade in food grains, but no concrete step was taken in that regard till then, it regretted. It, therefore, demanded that immediate necessary steps must be taken for the take-over of the wholesale trade in foodgrains, supply of essential commodities at fair prices, and ensuring just price for agricultural produce, but not much attention was paid to its demand.<sup>30</sup>

In course of discussion on the budget estimates of the year, an opposition member contradicted the Government view-point that increase in price was a world phenomenon and stated that at a time when economic crisis had been deepening in the capitalist world, total production in the socialist world had been increasing steadily and the prices of all consumers' goods remained static for years. He then, viewed that economic crisis in India, and, for that, in Tripura had been sharpening due to the persuasion of the capitalist path that built up the reign of the handful of exploiters at the expense of the bulk of the population. The Finance Minister claimed that the Government had done a lot for the welfare of the peasants and for development of agriculture as a result of which total production of foodgrains increased remarkably, but no step was taken to

make those products available to the poorer sections of the masses at low prices, he alleged. Solution of the food problem was sought to be brought about by the bureaucrats and employees of the Food Department who imposed cordons in the rural areas in the harvesting seasons in order to purchase foodgrains at low prices and lifted the cordons when prices began to rise in order to enable the hoarders and blackmarketeers to build up their fortune.

Another opposition member stated, in course of his speech, that the budget provision for the development of agriculture was not sufficient considering the urgent need of bringing more and more areas under irrigation and of supplying necessary agricultural inputs to the peasants. Sharply criticising the food procurement policy of the Government, he stated that in stead of imposing levy on the marketable surplus of the rich peasants and landlords, the Government made the marginal and sub-marginal farmers its main targets of procurement, and as a result, the hoarders and profiteers got free hands to carry on their unfair trade through blackmarketing and speculation. He, therefore, requested the Government to take over the wholesale trade in foodgrains without further delay in order to put under check the phenomenal rise in prices of rice and other essential commodities, but to no effect.<sup>31</sup>

A Government statement of 1975 claimed that the rise in prices had been curbed and that there had even been a fall. Contradicting the claim, the opposition viewed that, on the contrary price-rise continued unabated and as a result, the common people fell in great troubles and hardship. It, therefore, urged the Government to take up specific plans and programmes to combat the chronic

problem of price rise in view of the serious plight of the masses.<sup>32</sup> Referring to the claim made by the Government that it had maintained a steady supply of foodgrains and other essential commodities to combat the price rise, the opposition observed that it was evident from this that the Government attached no importance to the incidents of several starvation deaths that occurred in the previous year. It then, sharply criticised the food procurement drive of the food department of the Government as it allegedly collected foodgrains from the distressed sections of peasants in lieu of compulsorily collecting levy from the big jotedars and rich peasant families and viewed that, that policy alone enable the hoarders and blackmarketers to carry on machination in food-grains and create artificial crisis which led to price-rise.<sup>33</sup>

During the budget session of the year again, the opposition pointed to the abnormal rise in the prices of foodgrains and alleged that the food policy of the Government was solely responsible for that. The Government formulated a plan to procure 35 thousand tons of food-grains, but could not attain the target as it depended mainly on the distressed classes of peasants to make its plan a success, it added. In lieu thereof, the Government should have collected foodgrains from the rich peasants imposing levy on them at graded rates, and take over the wholesale trade in foodgrains without further delay, it viewed. Again, due to the failure of the Government to collect sufficient amount of foodgrains from the Central Government the rationing system of the state reached the point of collapse and, as a result, prices of foodgrains rose further and the crisis further aggravated, it added. The Government talked a lot about development of agriculture,

but how could that development be materialised without giving land to the real tillers of the soil, it wondered, and regretted that despite the land reforms act and its amendments, no effective step was taken that far to give land to the poor and landless peasants.<sup>34</sup>

In March, 1976, the opposition stated that though price rise was cheked for the time being due to the arrest of some blackmarketeers and smugglers, some steps towards basic change were to be taken in order to maintain that stability in the priceline. Thus, in order to baffle the conspiracy of the hoarders and blackmarketeers to create artificial crisis, the Government must stock adequate amounts of foodgrains in its godowns and for that levy must be imposed on the rich peasants at graded rates. Again, in order to maintain stability of prices in the foodgrains market, a concrete programme must be formulated and that would be possible if the wholesale trade of foodgrains was taken over by the Government at its earliest convenience, it viewed.<sup>35</sup> The opposition also demanded that the quota of weekly ration of the cardholders should be enhanced in view of the fact that the poorer sections of the people of rural Tripura were unable to purchase required amounts of foodgrains from the open market. In that context, it alleged that though the Government seized almost the whole of the paddy of the poor peasants during the harvesting season with the assurance that foodgrains would be supplied to them through ration and fair price shops in time of need, no adequate step was taken in that direction till then. The price of rice in the rural areas had risen alarmingly from Re. 1.25 to Rs. 2.50 per k.g. within a short time, but no step was there for supply of rice to all the poor people of the rural areas through ration and fair

price shops. Even in areas where supply of foodgrains through rationshops started and continued, the quota of ration payable per week was quite insufficient. It, therefore, requested the Government to arrange supply of foodgrains through ration and fair-price shops in all the areas of Tripura and increase the quota in view of the fact that the prices of foodgrains were rising very fast and it already went beyond the purchasing power of the common people. But little attention was paid to the demands and suggestions of the opposition.<sup>36</sup>

During the budget session of the year again, the opposition demanded that strong vigilance should be maintained so that the manipulators could not create artificial crisis and cause price rise. Again, steps should be taken to bring more areas under irrigation and more agricultural inputs and loans should be made available to tillers of the soil for the sake of increased production of foodgrains.<sup>37</sup> It also stated that due to the 'defective' procurement policy of the Government, the target of procurement could not be achieved and the prices of foodgrains were showing upward trends. The Sales Taxes as imposed by the Government on essential commodities also contributed to further rise of prices, it added. Strongly criticising the agriculture policy of the Government, it stated that due to the failure of the policy, the real tillers of the soil were not getting lands and as a result, the shortage of foodgrains persisted.<sup>38</sup> Contradicting the claim of the Government that the total product of foodgrains was on the increase, it pointed out with supporting data that the claim was exaggerated and observed that with the agriculture policy of the Government remaining unchanged, the problems of food shortage and price rise

would continue and aggravate.<sup>39</sup>

It is evident from the above discussion that the problems of food deficit and rising prices of essential commodities were major topics of discussion in the Assembly during the period under review. The opposition members more often than not cornered the Government side by their searching criticisms for its 'failure' to solve the crying problems. At the same time, they came forward with some constructive suggestions for solution of the problems, but the Government side voted down all the suggestions. The Government, however, accepted and implemented a few of its demands and suggestions eventually and it is evident from some Government statements. Thus, though the Government turned down almost all the suggestions of the opposition for solution of the problems of food shortage and price rise, it, in fact, admitted the gravity of the problem when it stated that it was a problem which had to be faced squarely by the Government and the people alike and that it implies the extensive and intensive cultivation of all cultivable lands, the investment of heavy inputs of fertilisers, pesticides and improved seeds, etc. The Government almost accepted some of the proposals of the opposition for solution of the problem when it declared that it would procure foodgrains from select surplus pockets, undertake a judicious and rational distribution of all foodgrains resources, take precaution against wastages, purchase rice and wheat from surplus provinces to meet the deficit, and raise the bufferstock of essential commodities as an offset against the artificial rise of prices in the local market.<sup>40</sup> Some suggestions of the opposition for solving the problem were accepted to some extent subsequently when the Government introduced and

continued the schemes of distribution of seeds of high-yielding varieties of paddy and wheat to the peasants, and those of minor irrigation, soil conservation, land reclamation, etc.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, though all the suggestions of the opposition for taking steps for arresting the phenomenal rise of prices of rice and other essential commodities were voted down repeatedly, the Government at least partially conceded some demands by covering a large number of population under various systems of rationing, and by opening more than four hundred fair price shops in the urban and sub-urban and departmental distribution centres in the remote tribal areas. Further, the public distribution system was reorganised in order to meet the growing demands for essential commodities and to maintain an effective control over the prices.<sup>42</sup>

From the above analysis, it is evident that the level of success attained by the opposition in dealing with the problems of food shortage and price rise was also quite high.

### **B. Employees' and Workers' demand for increasing of emoluments.**

The rising prices of the essential commodities during the period under review quite naturally led to the demands for a wage-rise by the Government and non-Government employees of Tripura. The opposition members raised this demand of the employees 46 times on the floor of the Assembly through motions of thanks to Lieutenant Governor's and Governor's Addresses, discussions on budget estimates, cut motions against demands for grants, and private members' resolutions and it requested the Government to concede the demand in view of the rising

prices of all necessaries of life, but the Government did not pay much attention to its request.

In March, 1965, for instance, a resolution was moved on behalf of the opposition that "This Assembly is of the opinion that in view of the fact that the cost of living index in Tripura continues to rise steeply, the pay of the employees of all categories should be revised forthwith and dearness allowance fixed up immediately on the principles enunciated in the recent report of the Das Commission as set up by the Central Government in 1964". The mover of the resolution pointed out that in response to the persistent demand of the employees, the Government set up a pay committee to look into the anomalies in the pay scales, but no step was taken till then to remove those anomalies. He added that the Das Commission as set up by the Central Government had recommended that "those employed under the Tripura and Manipur Administration should continue to be remunerated at the West Bengal and Assam rates respectively", but the Government extended the West Bengal Scale to its top officials only and the bulk of the employees was deprived of the benefit. As a result, serious complicity and disorder cropped up in the pay structure. To worsen the situation, the pay scales of many employees were not revised at all. Thus, no revision was effected in the pay scales of the non-matric, matric-trained and untrained graduate teachers who constituted above 75 per cent of the employees of the Education Department. Likewise, the accountants, readers and radio operators of the police department, and the technical staff of the P. W. D. like the tracers, overseers, sub-overseers, draftsmen, etc. did not get the benefits of the pay revision. He sharply criticised "The policy of double standard" of extending the



benefit of pay revision to a section of employees and depriving the others of the benefit. He expressed regret that though the Government assured time and again that all necessary steps would be taken to remove the injustice, no step in that regard was taken till then. Although the commission recommended that special compensatory allowance as was being enjoyed by the employees should continue in view of the fact that "in Tripura both the scale of pay and dearness allowance are very low", the Government took the decision to discontinue the same. In view of the abnormal price rise, the Commission recommended some principles for fixing up the dearness allowances of the employees of all categories taking 1949 as the base year, but no step for implementation of the same was taken till then. He, therefore, requested the Government to take immediate necessary steps for the revision of the pay of all categories of employees and for refixing their dearness allowances in pursuance of the recommendation of the Das Commission. Some members from both sides then took part in the discussion on the resolution and after a prolonged and heated debate, the resolution was put to vote and lost.

In absence of any step for removing the pay anomalies and revision of pay scales for long, the discontent of the employees began to mount and from time to time they ventilated their grievances through deputations, representations, token strikes etc., but precious little was done in that direction. As late as in March, 1969, the Finance Minister informed the House, in course of his budget speech, that the government was fully aware of the gravity of the problem and was eager to reach an appropriate decision in that regard. In explaining the

nature of the problem, he observed that anomalies were noticed in the pay scales of some employees at the time of the pay revision in 1959. Even after the pay revision in 1961, these anomalies persisted and that created further complicacies in those pay scales. While he admitted that those longstanding anomalies should be removed without further delay, he viewed at the same time that it would not be wise to do anything in haste in that regard in the very interest of the employees concerned and for the sake of avoiding any complicacy in future. In fine, he informed that the Government was trying its best so that the compensatory allowance as enjoyed by the employees continued for a further period of five years and that it was awaiting the latest decision of the Government of India in that regard.<sup>43</sup>

The compensatory allowance was re-introduced, but no step was taken for removing the anomalies in the scales. The longstanding grievances created a feeling of unrest in the ranks of the employees and they took recourse to agitational means in order to realise their demands. In view of this, the Lieutenant Governor, in his policy statement of 1970-71, stated that it was unfortunate that the employees "were misled to adopt agitational means for the redress of their grievances." He appealed to the employees "in their own interest and that of the community to have patience and understanding". He added, "My Government assures its employees that no effort is being spared for a speedy redress of their legitimate grievances and it is expected that some of their longstanding problems will shortly be resolved."<sup>44</sup>

Moving an amendment on the motion of thanks to the Address, an opposition member pointed out that no mention

was made in the statement regarding any Government action towards the removal of the anomalies in the pay scales of the employees. He contended that as the Government was not sympathetic towards the longstanding grievances of the employees, they were left with no option but to take recourse to agitational means like pen down strikes, hunger strikes, etc. in support of their demands. He alleged further that due to the indifference of the Government, pay anomalies among the employees having the same qualification and doing the same jobs continued for long, and thus the ruling party alone was responsible for discontent among the employees and their agitations. It was surprising that the party in power was trying to shift the entire responsibility of the strike and their consequences on to the shoulders of the employees, he added. He also criticised the Government decision to extend the pay scales of the Delhi Administration to the employees of Tripura from March 1970 in total disregard of the employees' demand for extending West Bengal scales. He concluded urging the Government to form a committee and send a representation in the Central Government for extension of West Bengal scales and for removal of existing pay anomalies. But the amendment was voted down.<sup>45</sup>

In April, 1970 again, the same member moved a motion to draw the attention of the Government to the urgency of fulfilling the longstanding demands for which the employees had to launch a strike. He expressed regret that far from paying attention to devising ways and means for removing the grievances of the employees, the Government followed a highhanded policy to suppress their movement. The Government warned the employees

to desist from the proposed movement by issuing a circular which read : "Rule 7 (II) of Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964 provided that no Government Servant shall resort to or in any way abet any form of strike in connection with any matter pertaining to his service or the services of any other Government employee etc.". He opined that, by issuing the circular, the Government levelled a severe attack on the fundamental civic right of the employees to place and realise their demands peacefully and democratically through their unions and associations. He was further of the view that the attitude of the Government to suppress the proposed movement turning deaf ears to the demands of the employees including removal of anomalies in the pay scales further aggravated the situation. He, therefore, urged the Government to give up its 'highhanded' policy and to fulfil the longstanding and justified demands of the employees without any further delay. The motion, after a heated debate, was voted down.<sup>46</sup>

A few days later, a resolution was moved on behalf of the opposition that "This Assembly requests the Government to remove all anomalies in the pay scales of the Government employees and to introduce West Bengal Pay Scale in Tripura". The mover of the resolution pointed out that many representations were given to the Chief Minister on behalf of the employees. The opposition members also highlighted the problem many a time on the floor of the Assembly and requested the Government to take appropriate steps in that regard, he added. The Government assured time and again that a committee would be formed to look into the problem and to suggest remedial measures, but no step was taken in practice and

the pay anomalies still persisted. This dillydally tactics of the Government alone was responsible for aggravating the problem, he alleged. He, therefore, requested the Government to be up and doing in taking steps for removal of anomalies in the pay scales of the employees.

Sharply criticising the 'One sided decision' of the Central Government to introduce the scale of the Delhi Administration in Tripura, he alleged that the decision was taken in order to deprive the employees of the benefits of West Bengal scales. He proposed that the Government of India should be persuaded to extend West Bengal scale to Tripura keeping in view the fact that the cost of living in Tripura was very high and the prices of all essential commodities in Tripur were much higher compared to those in Delhi.<sup>47</sup> Some members from both sides then took part in the discussion and after a vociferous debate, the resolution was voted down. The strike as launched by the employees was withdrawn at the assurance of the Chief Minister that necessary steps would be taken to redress their grievances.

From the policy statement of the Lieutenant Governor for 1971-72, it was learnt that ".... some of the pay anomalies have already been rectified under the powers which were earlier delegated to the administration. However, the recent ban on pay revision imposed by the Government of India had held up this process of rectification. Government is shortly referring to the Government of India the remaining cases of pay anomalies with a strong recommendation that these should be rectified by relaxing the ban on pay revision suitably. On the recommendation of the Third Pay Commission, interim relief to the employees of this Government has been extended from 1st March, 1970 .....

The Third Pay Commission will be examining the structure of Pay and allowances of the employees of this Territory as well.<sup>48</sup>

Moving an amendment on the address, an opposition member demanded that immediate steps should be taken to meet the demands of the employees and to introduce the new West Bengal scale. He expressed regret that despite repeated requests, demands and agitations of the employees and assurances by the Government, the longstanding demand of the employees for removing pay anomalies still persisted. The assurances given in the policy statement was, no doubt, relieving, but the threat given in the last line of the statement that "Government will not hesitate to take immediate action against any act of indiscipline or insubordination" was unfortunate, he added. He regretted further that no mention was made in the statement regarding steps for introducing new West Bengal scale in Tripura in spite of the fact that the employees had been demanding the same for long. While one after another act and rule as prevalent in West Bengal was being introduced in Tripura, it quite logically followed that the benefits of the new West Bengal pay scale also would be extended to the employees of Tripura, he opined. But the Government took the policy of hanging the issue in the balance in the name of third pay commission, he alleged. In view of the above, he demanded that steps for removing pay anomalies and for introducing New West Bengal pay scales in Tripura must be taken up at an early date, but the demand was rejected.<sup>49</sup>

During the budget session of the year again, an opposition member stated that the grievances and discontent among the employees were bursting out into

movements as the Government was all along showing an indifferant attitude towards their problems. He alleged that at a time when the prices of all essential commodities were rising fast, pay scales of the employees remained unrevised and anomalies in their pay scales remained unremoved and hence the discontent of the employees was mounting. To add to their discontent, most of the employees were being kept in temporary vacancies for years and in absence of any transfer rules, they were being transferred from one place of service to another at the whims and caprices of the higher officers. After repeated demands and agitations, pay anomalies had been removed in some cases, but in large majority of cases, the injustice persisted, he alleged. Though the Government yielded to the employees' demand for extending the New West Bengal scale in Tripura, no step worth the name was taken till them for their implementation. In view of the above, he demanded that the longstanding demands of the employees including the demand for extension of West Bengal pay scales should be fulfilled without further delay, but no heed was paid to the demand.<sup>50</sup>

Another member, in course of his speech, brought serious allegation against the Government that in the name of removing pay anomalies, the Government in some cases deliberately created further anomalies which led to serious discontent among the employees. He requested the Government to give up that 'dangerous' policy and to sincerely try to remove the anomalies in the interest of the employees and of the community as a whole. He, then, referred to the demands made by the All Tripura Teachers' Association for extending Central scale of pay to the teachers of Tripura as they would get more benefit

under the Central scale. In that connection, he gave reference to the assurance given by the Finance Minister that if a particular section of employees derived more benefit in case the central scale of pay was introduced, the government would have no objection in implementing that scale in their cases. He wondered that despite that assurance, the Central scale of pay was not extended in case of teachers. He, therefore, requested the Government to honour its own commitment and extend Central scale of pay to the teachers of Tripura, but no attention was paid to the request.<sup>51</sup>

In March, 1973, the opposition stated that while article 43 of the Constitution of India provided that living wage was to be given to the workers and employees all over India, not even the need-based minimum wages were extended to them till then. The workers and employees of Tripura had been demanding the central scale of pay that was far below the need-based minimum wage, but the Government was not willing to concede that minimum demand also. To worsen the situation, the Government resorted to naked and fascist means to suppress the demands and agitations of the employees, it added.<sup>52</sup>

A Government statement of March, 1974 informed that a Pay Commission had been set up to enquire into and make recommendations on the principles which should govern the structure of emoluments and conditions of service of the various categories of employees, and on certain other allied matters. To meet the price rise, Government had ordered the sanction of an interim relief, it added.<sup>53</sup>

But the opposition opined that the anomalies in the pay



scales of the employees should have been removed before setting up the Pay Commission. It added that the demand of the employees for introduction of the Central rate of dearness allowances was only justified and as it had already been introduced in many States of India, the Government of Tripura also should take all necessary steps for immediate introduction of the same as the meagre amount of interim relief would, in no way, solve the problems of the employees that arose out of continuous price-rise.<sup>55</sup> It, then, sharply criticised the policy of fixing up the rate of the interim relief on the basis of Tripura plantation workers' price index in lieu of the all India working class consumers price index which had so long been accepted in Tripura for calculation of dearness allowances of workers and employees.<sup>56</sup>

The employees and workers organised massive rallies all over Tripura on 15th March, 1974 in the demand of central rates of dearness allowance and the need based minimum wage. The opposition observed that the Government should realise from the growing movement that the 'interim relief' was no answer to the discontent of the employees and that was why they were getting prepared to observe one day's token strike on 9th April as a part of the movement of the employees all over India. It, therefore, warned that if the Government thought that it would be able to misguide the employees with the 'bluff' of the so-called interim relief or pay commission and to suppress their movement applying the D.I.R., it would commit a big blunder. So, it requested the Government either to supply essential commodities to the employees at cheap rates or to increase their pay and allowances in a manner that they could cope with the rising prices.<sup>57</sup>

The opposition also alleged that though the West Bengal pay scales of 1959 were introduced in Tripura as a result of constant pressure and movement of the employees, about 5 thousand employees were still deprived of the benefit of those pay scales. In 1970, the Government accepted the demand in principle and implemented the scale from then, but not with retrospective effect. Subsequently, the Central Government sent specific instruction to the Government of Tripura that in case it decided not to pay arrears to the employees concerned, it was to fix up their pay notionally and pay their arrears with effect from January, 1971. But the Government implemented the formula in the cases of the U.D. Assistants of the Secretariat only and the L. D. assistants were still deprived of the benefit. Of late, an order was ready for extending the benefit to the L. D. assistants also, but the Chief Minister sat on the file, it alleged. A similar order was ready for the stenographers also, but no final decision was taken till then in that regard. Besides, the arrears of pay were not being given to those employees also whose pay anomalies had been removed as per instruction of the Central Government, it added. It, therefore, strongly demanded that the pay of all those employees must be notionally fixed and arrears accruable therefrom must be paid without further delay, but no heed was paid to its demand.<sup>58</sup>

In course of discussion on the budget estimates of the year, the opposition opined that the real income of the working sections of the people could be safeguarded from erosion only when effective steps were taken for checking price rise, but the capitalist path of development that the Government pursued stood for guaranteeing super profits

for the 'money bags' and hence price-rise would go on unabated under the system and real income of the workers and employees would continue to go downwards. But the workers and the employees were not prepared to tolerate the injustice and hence they had given notice of a continuous strike and had already started taking out processions, holding meetings and observing bandhs in support of their demands for wage rise. It, then, alleged that emergency was kept alive not for the enemies of the country or the people, rather it was meant for suppressing the movement of the employees and workers and that was why the police-budget went on increasing year after year, but no amount of police budget would save the ruling party from the popular discontent and anger that had been mounting, it warned.<sup>59</sup> It also regretted that though our Constitution categorically stated that 'living wage' should be given to the workers and employees, the Government and the owners of mills and factories of Tripura were unwilling even to pay the minimum wage to their workers and employees. In support of its contention, it pointed out that the total monthly emoluments of a Class IV employee of Tripura was rupees one hundred seventy only whereas as per provision of the Constitution his monthly emolument should have been rupees Seven to eight hundred and his minimum wage should have been about four hundred rupees. A muster-roll worker got rupees one hundred twenty a month and a homeguard drew rupees ninety, and the daily wage of a tea garden worker was one rupee and fifty paise, it added, and commented that all those injustice went on in clear violation of the provision of the Constitution and the Principles of minimum wage. That was why, the workers and employees of Tripura as also those of the rest of India carried on strikes and other forms of movements

and they were confident that through those movements alone they would be able to compel the Government and the owners of mills and factories to concede their just demands.<sup>60</sup>

In March, 1975, the opposition alleged that the pay and allowances of the employees of Tripura decreased to a large extent as a result of discontinuance of the central rates of dearness allowance with effect from January, 1973. Thus, while a Class-IV employee of Tripura got seven to eight rupees less than his counterpart in the central service in December, 1972, the difference between the two stood at rupees one hundred and forty in March, 1973. Similarly, a lower division clerk of Tripura received Rs. 15.50 more than his counterpart in 1972, but he drew Rs. 165.00 less in 1975. Likewise, an upper division clerk got Rs. 94.00 more than his counterpart in 1972, but he drew Rs. 186.00 less in 1975. Again, a primary school teacher of Tripura got Rs. 72.00 more than his counterpart in the central service, but he received Rs. 256.00 less in 1975, and a headmaster of a primary school got 15.00 rupees more than his counterpart in 1972, but he got Rs. 355.00 less in 1975. It, then, alleged that though the employees repeatedly approached the Government to reintroduce the central rates of d. a., the Government did not pay any heed to their request and, left with no option, they had given notice to the Government that they would go in for continuous strike from the midnight of 18th march, 1975 for realisation of their longstanding demands including the demand for the central d. a. It appealed to the Government to start dialogue with employees to find out ways and means to fulfil their demands, and if it agreed, the proposed strike would not take place. At the

same time, it warned that no act of suspension, transfer or dismissal of employee leaders would be able to suppress the movement as all the opposition parties and student organisations had decided to stand behind the movement with all their might, and hence all terror tactics were bound to fail. <sup>61</sup>

On the day before the continuous strike started, an opposition member contended that though the employees tried several times to draw the attention of the Government to their grievances, the Government did not come forward to mitigate them. In support of his allegation, he stated that on 19.12.1972, 14.7.1972, 9.9.1972, 11.5.1973, 25.5.1973 and 26.6.1973, the employees tried to give mass deputations to the ministers, but they did not entertain any of those deputations. On 19.9.1973, the employees assembled before the Assembly and sought a deputation, but it also was not accepted. On 22.12.1973 again, they went to give a mass deputation and the Finance Minister accepted it but the discussion was not fruitful. On 15.3.1974, they gave notice that they would launch a strike, but the Government did not come forward to discuss with them on their demands. On 16.7.1974, they sent a letter to the government to sit for discussion, but the Government did not agree, and hence they observed token strike on 9th september and it attained grand success, but Government retaliated by suspending some employee leaders, ordering break in service and mass transfer, stopping promotion and giving promotions to its "agents" violating the seniority lists. On 9.10.1974, the employees gathered before the Assembly to give mass deputation, but the Government did not accept it. On 27.10.1974 again, they went in for another deputation but it also was not entertained. To

worsen the situation, the Government started hatching a "conspiracy" to break the unity of the employees and to take away their right to form unions and associations by taking disciplinary actions against them, he alleged. The discontent of the employees further mounted as the Government set up a pay commission before removing their pay anomalies, and proceeded to implement the recommendations of the Commission which seriously and adversely affected their interests, he added. He, then, alleged that in order to frustrate the proposed strike of the employees that would start from the following day (18.3.1975), Police and C.R.P. started patrolling the main roads and streets of Agartala with riot-fighting nets and arms from the early morning of that day, the Chief Minister and some other Ministers held several meetings in last 3/4 days with the notorious hooligans and anti-social elements of the town in order to use them for breaking the proposed strike. The opposition leaders went to all the ministers on the previous day and requested them to settle the dispute with the employees, but the ministers did not pay any heed to their request. On the contrary, the Government was getting prepared for a massive attack on the employees, he added.<sup>62</sup>

Another opposition member demanded that the Government should fulfil the just demand of the employees for raising their pay and allowances so that they might cope with the rising prices of daily necessities of life. Further, the Government should concede the demand of the employees for need - based minimum wage and for extension of central rates of dearness allowances, and thus avert the proposed strike, he added. It should not take an adamant attitude to the proposed strike and take

it as a prestige issue, rather it should try to honourably settle the dispute with the employees and thus bring back normalcy in administration in the greater interest of the people of Tripura, he suggested, but no heed was paid to his suggestion.<sup>63</sup>

Some leaders and workers of the movement were arrested on the eve of the movement but the movement started and continued. On 19th, 20th and 21st March, the opposition members repeatedly obstructed the business of the House by their persistent demand for allowing them to raise discussion on their adjournment motion regarding the strike and the arrest of some leaders of the movement and the House had to be adjourned upto 28th March. On 29th March, an opposition member in course of his short speech, regretted that though 11 days of the employees' strike had already been over, the House was still in the dark regarding the steps taken by the Government to overcome the impasse. He could not proceed further due to the obstruction created by the members of the treasury benches.<sup>64</sup>

After a while, the Speaker adjourned the House sine die. The strike was withdrawn unconditionally on 1.4.1975 at the assurance given by 9 Congress M.L.As that they would persuade the Government to fulfil their just demands, but to little effect. 10 employee leaders were arrested during the strike and 65 employees were terminated from service during and after the strike. Despite repeated appeals of some members from both sides, the orders of termination against the victimised employees were not withdrawn till the last day of the regime.

In May, 1975, an opposition member demanded that the longstanding demand of the employees of the state for

wage rise should be fulfilled without further delay in view of the fact that the prices of all daily necessities were increasing fast. He, then, requested the Government to see to it that the salary of the striking employees for the period of the continuous strike was not deducted, because they had every right to resort to strike for realisation of their just demands. The Government could never think of running the administration effectively and smoothly without the co-operation of the employees and hence it should take immediate necessary steps for removing the genuine grievances of the employees, he added. He stated further that if the Government was really serious about engaging them in the task of gearing up the administrative machinery, it should not go on with the view that the relation between the Government and the employees was exactly one between employer and employee, as that outlook would not be helpful for the advancement of the state, and hence he urged the Government to concede the demands of the employees and thus win them over for the greater interest of the state and its people, but little attention was paid to his request.<sup>65</sup>

In March, 1976 again, the opposition requested the Government to see to it that the sentiments of the employees were not wounded by any Government action. No such step should be taken that could create grievances among the employees, because employees' grievances would ultimately affect the interest of seventeen lakh people of the state.<sup>66</sup> It also viewed that the employees did not do any wrong by launching the prolonged movement. It, therefore, requested the Government to see to it that no employee got any punishment for taking part in the strike. As the employees hailed mainly from the middle class



section of the population and as the co-operation and support of that section of population was necessary for making the 20 point programme of the Prime Minister a success, no such treatment should be meted out to the employees that might arouse their discontent, it added. It concluded urging the Government to withdraw all the show-cause notices as were served on a section of the striking employees, but no heed was paid to its request.<sup>67</sup>

From the above discussion, it clearly follows that the members of the Opposition did their utmost to bring to the lime-light the demands of the employees for wage rise in view of the soaring prices of daily necessities of life and to exert constant pressures on the Government to fulfil the longstanding demands of the employees for removing the pay anomalies and extending central rates of d. a. But the Government turned down all their demands and suggestions on the floor of the House. The Government, however, accepted some of their demands ultimately and it is evident from some government statements. Thus, though the demands of the Opposition in the Territorial Assembly for removing the pay anomalies of the employees were turned down several times, the Government informed subsequently that some of the pay anomalies were rectified and the remaining cases of pay anomalies were referred to the Government of India with recommendation to rectify them by relaxing the ban on pay revision suitably.<sup>68</sup>

A government statement in the state assembly also revealed that some more anomalies in the pay scales of the employees were removed ultimately. In addition, in response to the oft-repeated demand of the employees for revision of pay scales, the Government extended an ad hoc interim relief to them pending final decision regarding

revision of their scales of pay, it added.<sup>69</sup> Another statement revealed that a Commission was set up and scales of pay higher than those as recommended by the Pay Commission were given to the employees. Again, a fixed monthly medical allowance was sanctioned to them and highest ceiling limits of house-rent allowance were raised. Moreover, the rates of the dearness allowances of the employees rose indirectly with the merging of the old dearness allowances and interim reliefs with the new pay scales.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, the opposition members and the employees' movements attained some success in their struggle for wage-rise, but the price the employees had to pay for that was much too heavy as some of their leaders and workers were arrested and detained in jails for long nineteen months, some were suspended and some others terminated from their service.

### **C. Unemployment Problem**

The acuteness of the problem of unemployment began to be felt in Tripura from the beginning of the period under review and the problem began to deteriorate from year to year. The issue was raised 53 times in the Assembly in the forms of motions of thanks to the Administrator's, Lieutenant Governor's and governor's Addresses, budget discussions, cut motions against demands for grants, discussions on Matters of Urgent Public Importance and private members' resolutions and motions; and the opposition fully utilised the opportunities to bring the issue to the lime-light and to pressurise the Government to take remedial measures, but not much attention was paid to its demands and suggestions.

A Government statement of 1964-65 informed the House that in order to tackle the growing unemployment problem, the Labour Department of the Government had run an Employment Exchange the main activities of which were "expansion of the coverage of the Employment Service, collection of employment market information and vocational guidance and employment counselling".<sup>71</sup> But the opposition viewed that the measures being taken by the Labour Department might at best solve the problems of the educated unemployed to a very limited extent, but these would not solve the problems of agricultural unemployment. In view of this, it suggested that new farm technology like provision of irrigation, fertilisers and measures for pest control should be made available to the farmers in order to increase the employment potential of agriculture. Further, steps should be taken so that small and cottage industries like pottery, carpentry and weaving centres grew up and their products got marketing facilities. Again, in order to divert surplus population from agriculture, industries like paper mills and jute mills should be started soon.<sup>72</sup> But no attention was paid to the suggestions.

In December, 1964, a motion was moved by an opposition member that "whereas the problem of unemployment in Tripura both in the rural and the urban areas is becoming acute every day, this Assembly desires that the Government of Tripura adopts immediate measures for more provision for employment and for providing dole to the distressed unemployed." In order to highlight the acuteness of the problem of unemployment in Tripura, he quoted from the Census Report of 1961 according to which only 38.29 per cent of the people of Tripura was working and the rest

61.71 per cent non-working. He alleged that though the party in power had been directly linked with the governance of the Territory from the inception of the democratic set-up here, no step worth the name was taken in the past for starting large, medium and small scale industries. This indifference and inaction of the ruling party was responsible for growing unemployment in urban and rural areas of Tripura, he added. He, then, requested the Government to take all necessary measures for starting jute, paper and sugar mills in order to make provision for more employment and to grant gratuitous relief to the distressed unemployed. Members from both sides then took part in the discussion on the motion and after a heated debate, it was voted down.<sup>73</sup>

In March, 1965 again, the opposition regretted that though the number of registered unemployed (in the Employment Exchange) almost doubled by then to six thousand from three thousand five hundred in 1960, no step for starting small or medium scale industries was being taken. To worsen the situation, small industries like Bidi and Match factories were collapsing as a result of an unequal competition with the outside industries, but no arrangement for their protection was there. It, then, alleged that though industrial loan was given to 200 applicants, 101 out of them did not start any industry. But no step was taken against the defaulters as all of them belonged to the ruling party, it added. An Enquiry Committee was set up to investigate and make report on the defaulting co-operative societies, but the Government was not willing to publish its report as its "own men" were responsible for defalcations of those societies. It, therefore, demanded that immediate steps should be taken for

realising the loan money from the defaulting persons and societies at an early date. At the same time, it requested the Government to start small and medium scale industries in order to solve the acute unemployment problem.<sup>74</sup> But the Government did not pay any heed to the demand and suggestion.

In absence of any step for industrialisation, the unemployment problem became more acute. In view of that, a discussion on Matters of Urgent Public Importance for short duration was tabled by an opposition member on "Utter failure of the Government to solve the growing unemployment problem in Tripura and to provide for employment of the unemployed youth." He clearly stated that the piecemeal steps of the Government to give employment to a small fraction of the unemployed youths as officers, school teachers, clerks, peons, etc. would not be able to solve the unemployment problem. The solution of the problem lay in setting up of industries, he viewed. He, then, alleged that though the Government assured year after year that a Sugar Mill and a Paper Mill would be set up, no concrete step in that regard was taken till then. Again, though the extension of railines was an essential pre-condition for the setting up of large and medium scale industries, yet the Government was not up and doing in taking steps in that direction also, he added. He opined that in order to relieve or mitigate the acute unemployment, the Government should have provided special assistance to individuals or small groups for setting up cottage and small scale industries, but very little was done in that regard. In fine, he appealed to the Government to take early steps for setting up industries in order to provide the unemployed youths with job facilities. Some members

from both sides then took part in the discussion and after a prolonged debate, the resolution was voted down.<sup>75</sup>

The Government itself admitted in March, 1968 that the unemployment problem was becoming more and more acute day by day. It, however, informed that for a solution of the problem, it had taken up plans like collection of data for analysing the employment trend, proper implementation of compulsory advertisement of the Vacancies Rule, running of the employment assistance bureau in the blocks, vocational guidance, continuation of the employment advisory units, etc.<sup>76</sup> Pointing to the fact that the number of unemployed youths, according to the employment exchange register, almost doubled in two years from eight thousand and a half in 1966 to sixteen thousand in 1968, an opposition member commented that it was a paradox that plans and schemes were taken up one after another and the number of the unemployed went on increasing. He expressed regret that the Government was totally indifferent to such an acute problem and demanded that immediate necessary steps must be taken in order to mitigate the problems being faced by the youths in the urban and rural areas of Tripura.<sup>77</sup>

The acuteness of the problem of the educated unemployed was revealed from a Government statement of 1969 which read : "..... Education has made long and significant strides in Tripura during the past years as a result of which we have a large number of educated youngmen and women who are in search of jobs. Their numbers in the live register of Tripura Employment Exchange at the close of 1968 exceeds 18,500". The statement, however, admitted that there was little scope for providing jobs in Government departments in Tripura

and special avenues for providing employment would have to be found through the development of agriculture and industry.<sup>78</sup> Taking part in the discussion on the statement, an opposition member alleged that though the unemployment problem was worsening day by day, the Government had all along been showing indifference to the problem. Although the opposition members demanded repeatedly for starting medium and small-scale industries in order to mitigate the problem, the Government did not take any initiative in that direction and that was why the problem was aggravating, he added. He, therefore, demanded that proper initiative in that direction should be taken soon, but no heed was paid to the demand.<sup>79</sup>

In a government statement of March, 1970 also, it was frankly admitted that "unemployment is the most serious problem facing Tripura today". The statement revealed in this connection that about 22,000 people were in the live register of the Employment Exchange, Tripura for employment assistance out of whom about 50 per cent were either educated or technically qualified. With a view to solve the problem effectively, various development programmes for 1970-71 would have employment bias; the Nationalised Banks would also make advances for small scale industries, for purchase of agricultural implements, for land development and for owning small transports, etc., it added.<sup>80</sup> The opposition, in its turn, simply wondered how the Government could rely on some piecemeal measures for solution of such a gigantic problem. It then severely criticised the Government for its failure to devise ways and means for agricultural and industrial development which alone could bring about a solution to the problem. It was quite aware of the fact that it would

not be possible to provide employment to all the unemployed youths overnight. At the same time it warned that it might be dangerous if some immediate relief was not given to the unemployed. In this connection, it pointed out that though some state governments of India were seriously considering for giving financial assistance to the unemployed of their respective states in the form of unemployment allowance, no mention was made about that in the statement. No mention about any effective measure for solution of the acute unemployment problem was made either, it alleged. It, therefore, requested the Government to extend allowance to the unemployed youths and continue the same till they were provided with job facilities, but no attention was paid to the request.<sup>81</sup>

A government statement of 1971 revealed that the number of unemployed, by then, rose to about 27,000 out of whom about 13,000 were either educated or technically qualified. For a solution of the problem of unemployment, the Government had been trying to induce educated youngmen to pursue schemes for self-employment in the field of agriculture, small scale industry and various other enterprises, but the response had not been encouraging, it added. Again, the crash programme for rural employment as sanctioned by the Government of India would provide employment to the rural people as well as educated unemployed in the developmental projects. It mentioned further that the Government had also been urging on the Central Government to take an early decision on the question of the construction of a railway-link from Dharmanagar to Agartala and also to establish a Jute Mill.<sup>82</sup> Participating in the discussion on the statement, an opposition member observed that from the statement



itself it was evident that the problem of unemployment in Tripura had been assuming serious proportions with the progress of time. He opined that the measures that the Government proposed to adopt could at best touch the problem but would not solve it. He then alleged that the Government was not at all serious about a real solution of the problem. Again, from the contemporary activities of the Government, it appeared that it wanted to solve the unemployment problem by applying security and Preventive Detention Acts on the agitating unemployed youths, he added. He concluded urging the Government to take all necessary steps to bring about a real solution to the problem, but to no effect.<sup>83</sup>

In April, 1971, a resolution was moved by an aggrieved Congress member\* requesting the Government "to provide allowances to the unemployed person, who had no earning member in his family and no other source of sustenance, within 1971." Taking part in the discussion on the resolution, an Opposition member pointed out that even the Lieutenant Governor and the Finance Minister in their addresses before the House admitted that the number of unemployed persons in Tripura was increasing fast day by day. They, however, were of the opinion that a real solution of the problem of unemployment lay in hard labour by the unemployed people. He, then, alleged that in spite of the fact that our youngmen were always prepared to do hard labour, the Government failed utterly in utilising the surplus manpower in the developmental activities. He admitted that the Government took some steps for providing employment to the unemployed, but the scope of those steps was very limited. Moreover, with the existing socio-economic structure and the policy of the Government

remaining unchanged, it would not be possible that all the unemployed youths would get employment. Hence the Government should provide allowances to the large number of unemployed youths and continue the same long as it did not succeed in providing them with employment, he demanded.<sup>84</sup> The original resolution, after a prolonged and heated debate, was put to vote and lost.

In March, 1972, the Government itself expressed concern that unemployment problem in the state had assumed an alarming proportion. It was creating a sense of despondency and frustration in the educated youths, it added. It, however, assured that it would lay special emphasis on the solution of the problem of unemployment. Not only those departments that were connected with employment would be geared up to meet that challenging situation, but the entire Government machinery would work towards that end, it added.<sup>85</sup> But the opposition alleged that though the Government declared year after year that it would set up large-scale industries like Jute and Paper Mills in Tripura in order to mitigate the problem, no step in that direction was evident till then. To worsen the situation, even the medium and small-sized industries that had been there in the past had become defunct due to the defective policy of the Government, it added. Thus, according to a Government estimate itself, the tribals had forty thousand spinning wheels in their possession, but all those became closed due to non-availability of raw materials. It, therefore, requested the Government to take steps for revival of all closed-down small and medium-sized industries and to set up some medium-sized industries in the public sector in order to mitigate the deepening unemployment problem in Tripura, but no attention was

paid to its request.<sup>86</sup>

The opposition also alleged that the Government had utilised rupees five lakhs only in the previous year out of a total Central grant of thirty seven lakhs of rupees for solution of unemployment problem; and in that manner, lakhs of rupees were being sent back to Delhi year after year. It viewed that if the Government would spend, say, rupees ten crores for the development of irrigation system, employment could be given to ten thousand unemployed after five years, but it would not think in terms of such a long-term project. Again, if the Government could create some leave reserve posts (which was endorsed by the Central Government), employment could be given to a good number of unemployed youths to those posts, but it was not up doing, it alleged.<sup>87</sup>

During the budget session of the year, the opposition alleged that though the Central Government raised the slogan of distributing land to the landless by curbing the ceiling-limit of land possessions, the Government of Tripura was not serious about taking steps for amending the land reforms act to do the needful and as a result, the problem of rural unemployment persisted and aggravated.<sup>88</sup> It alleged further that though the Government declared that it would give employment to 2000 unemployed within that financial year, but within 3 months of its assumption of power, it dismissed four thousand employees and workers, and from that it followed how much sincere it was about solution of the problem.<sup>89</sup>

It, then, regretted that the problem of unemployment stood on the verge of eruption, no effective programme was there in the budget to solve the problem and to utilise the

surplus manpower in development projects. The Government talked a lot about industrialisation, but it was not serious about building up the necessary infrastructure like extension of railines, improvement of communications and generation of electricity. Again, though raw materials for starting a Jute Mill was abundantly available, no step was there for setting up such a mill.<sup>90</sup> It, then, viewed that if adequate number of electrified pumpsets were employed in agriculture in Tripura (as was being done in other parts of India), solution of unemployment problem in rural Tripura would come within easy reach, and the problem of giving land to the landless would not remain so much hard. It, therefore, demanded that electrified pumpsets must be introduced abundantly in Tripura and for that, electricity was to be collected from the Urium Project of Assam, kaptai Project of Bangladesh and Dambur Project of Tripura (on its completion), and viewed that would go a long way to bring about rapid agricultural development also. But no heed was paid to its demand.<sup>91</sup>

In March, 1973 again, the opposition alleged that though the number of registered educated unemployed rose from 15,706 in June, 1972 to 18,100 in January 1973, and that registered uneducated unemployed rose from 1620 in 1957 to 18,193 in 1973, the Government was not up and doing for proper industrial development of Tripura for creating more employment opportunities. The problem of unemployment further aggravated as hundreds of employees of the Government offices, Tripura Road Transport Corporation and the industrial estate of Udaipur were dismissed from their service, but no attention was being paid for making alternative provision for them, it added. The Government claimed that its Crash Programme

on rural employment would engage more and more attention on development of minor irrigation, food protection, anti-waterlogging measures, roads, etc., but the Opposition viewed that those measures might at best give temporary relief to the marginal, submarginal and poor peasants, but would not give them any long-term relief.<sup>92</sup> Referring to an information furnished by the Government that out of 2274 appointments that had been made in 1972-73, 863 had been sponsored by the Selection Board appointed by the Government, it observed that from that it followed that 1311 appointments were given through backdoors. The Government informed further that the Selection Board had appointed 21 Interview Boards that had interviewed some 13,122 candidates, but no step was there regarding further recruitment, and in that manner, the Government started to bypass the problem of unemployment, it added.<sup>93</sup>

Taking part in the discussion on the budget estimates of the year, the opposition members stated that though the Minister in his budget speech, mentioned that more than thirty six thousand registered unemployed were there in Tripura, he did not say anything about many more thousands of unemployed who did not get their names registered. It was regrettable that the Government was not serious about taking up an effective programme through which the serious problem could be solved, they added. It was mentioned that encouragement would be given to the unemployed youths to start mills, factories and business at their initiative, but no mention was made about the source from which they would get the money to invest, they further stated.<sup>94</sup> The percentage of the working people to the total population of Tripura had come down

from 38.6 in 1961 to 27.9 in 1971, and that of the cultivators had come down from 64.2 in 1961 to 54 in 1971; and it showed that many workers had lost their jobs and many cultivators lost their land in the last decade, they continued. Thus the weavers in villages lost work as their looms stopped functioning due to lack of yarn, the workers of bidi factories lost work as their factories closed down due to lack of inputs, many workers of teagardens lost work as a good number of gardens closed down. Thus, the problems of employment was worsening day by day, but the Government was not putting forward any concrete and effective programme for the solution of the problem, they regretted.<sup>95</sup>

A Government Statement of 1974 revealed that the crash rural employment scheme, the Public Works Department and the Forest Department of the Government together generated more than 18 lakh mandays employment for the rural unemployed. But the Opposition observed that the achievement would appear quite insignificant if the plight of lakhs of half-employed in villages who used to remain unemployed for 8 to 9 months every year was taken into consideration. Again, though twenty tea gardens of the state were closed down and the labourers were thrown out of employment, the Government did not even give test relief works to them, it added. Further, as the small scale industries of the state could not run smoothly due to irregular supply of raw materials, the labourers working in those industries were losing their jobs in increasing numbers. Again, due to scarcity of petrol, the motor industry of the state faced serious crisis and the workers faced termination. Finally, the weavers and blacksmiths could not go on with their small trades for

want of raw materials. The Government talked a lot about self-employment, but it did not make provision for necessary financial assistance for the purpose, it added. It also alleged that though foundation stones of some industries had been laid in different parts of Tripura at different points of time in course of the last few years, no concrete step was taken till then for building up those industries. The Government stated that some industrialists and entrepreneurs should come and set up industries in Tripura in the public sector, but it did not mention why such industrialists were reluctant to come, it added. Again, no mention was there about the difficulties for which industries in public sector could not be set up. It stated further that the Government announced time and again since 1972 that attempts would be made for extension of rail-link from Dharmanagar to Agartala, but it never specifically mention as to when and how that extension would take place.<sup>96</sup>

In the budget session of the year again, the opposition alleged that the problem of unemployment further aggravated due to the indifference and inaction of the Government. The problem could be solved to a great extent by starting agro-based and forest-based industries, and appointing more teachers for the one-teacher schools, but the Government was not up and doing, it added.<sup>97</sup> It also stated that as the problems of price-rise, food scarcity and unemployment further deteriorated with the lapse of time, the common people of Tripura had been getting more and more agitated, and in order to solve those problems, the Government should have formulated an effective and comprehensive programme. A concrete and effective shape should have been given to the budget in order to solve

those deepening problems including the problem of unemployment, but judged from that point of view, the budget had totally failed to fulfil the aspirations of the masses, it added.<sup>98</sup>

In March, 1975, an opposition member regretted that though three years of the regime had already elapsed, no concrete and effective step was taken till then for solving the deepening unemployment problem. No step was there for rapid industrialisation and extension of railines and development of power, he added. A real break-through in agriculture could have provided the rural unemployed with works, but progress in that regard was also not encouraging. He, therefore, urged the Government to take immediate necessary steps for generation of employment potential both in agricultural and industrial fields.<sup>99</sup> Another member stated that though the number of educated unemployed in Tripura was more than forty five thousand, the Government was not coming forward with effective steps for solution of the problem. Over and above that large number of registered unemployed, a large number of uneducated unemployed were there both in urban and rural areas, but the Government was totally indifferent to their problems. He then, urged the Government to take appropriate necessary steps so that both the educated and uneducated unemployed of urban and rural areas of Tripura (including those who became unemployed due to prohibition of jhum cultivation) could get work.<sup>100</sup> But the Government did not pay any heed to the requests of the opposition members.

Taking part in the budget discussion of the year again, an opposition member stated that the acuteness of the problem had become so much gigantic that Government



services alone would not solve the problem. In order to handle the problem effectively, rapid development must be brought about both in the agricultural and industrial sectors, he viewed. The government announced year after year that a Jute and a Paper mill would be started, but no concrete step in that direction was evident till then, he regretted. For a real breakthrough in agriculture, all lands above the ceiling limit should be seized and those should be distributed among the real tillers of the soil, but the government was not up and doing in that regard also, he added. <sup>101</sup>

In March, 1976, an opposition member stated that over and above 46 thousand registered unemployed, there was many more thousands of unemployed in Tripura who did not register their names, and steps must be taken on emergency footing to provide them with work. He criticised both the Central Government and the state Government for their dilatory policy in setting up a jute and a paper mill and observed that it would not be possible to win over the support of the people of Tripura to the 20-point programme keeping thousands of unemployed without job. He, therefore, urged both the governments to take immediate and effective steps for setting up the proposed industries with an eye to provide the unemployed with work and also to bring about rapid economic development of Tripura, but no attention was paid to his request. <sup>102</sup>

From the above discussion, it is evident that the Opposition availed itself of each opportunity to focus the deteriorating unemployment problem of Tripura and it demanded remedial measures for at least a temporary solution of the same, but the government turned down all its demands on the floor of the House. The government,

however, accepted some the Opposition's demands and suggestions eventually and it is evident from a few government statements. Thus, a statement of 1971 revealed that the government accepted some of the opposition's suggestions like urging the Central Government to take an early decision on the question of the construction of a railway-link from Dharmanagar to Agartala for the sake of rapid industrialisation of Tripura and to set up a Jute Mill in order to provide some unemployed with work. The suggestion of the opposition to provide special assistance to industrial or small groups for setting up cottage and small-scale industries were also accepted partially and on principle when the Government declared its decision to induce educated youngmen to pursue schemes for self-employment in the fields of agriculture, small industry and various other enterprises. The demand of the Opposition for taking steps for mitigating rural unemployment was also fulfilled to some extent as soon as the small and marginal farmer scheme and the Crash Programme for rural employment were implemented.<sup>103</sup> A subsequent Government statement showed that the government accepted some more suggestions of the opposition for solution of rural unemployment by devising and implementing programme for the marginal and small farmers and those meant for providing works to the landless workers.<sup>104</sup> Again, the Crash Programme that was undertaken previously for generating rural employment was further expanded to include development of minor irrigation, flood protection, anti water-logging measures, afforestation, land reclamation, completion of feeder-roads, etc.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, though the suggestions of the opposition for taking steps for reviving the closed down medium-sized and small-scale industries in order to

mitigate the deepening unemployment problem was voted down time and again, the government subsequently decided that steps would be taken to set up the village and small scale industry on strong footings.<sup>106</sup>

It is, thus, clear that ultimately the government had to accept some of the demand and suggestions put forward by the Opposition for solution of the problem of unemployment and therein lies the success of the opposition.

### **Demand for industrialisation**

Both the Government and the opposition were well aware of the fact that Tripura had not advanced much in the industrial sector and that steps for rapid industrialization must be taken for the sake of economic advancement of the land. The demand for industrialisation was raised 58 times by the opposition through motions of thanks to Administrator's, Lieutenant Governor's and Governor's Addresses, budget discussions, cut motions against demands for grants and private members' resolutions, and the opposition availed itself of each opportunity to pressurise the Government to take appropriate steps for rapid industrialisation of Tripura, but little attention was paid to its demands.

In October, 1963, the Government claimed that during the past few years some progress had been made in the sphere of small scale industries. Moreover, two industrial training institutes had been started in Dharmanagar and Kailashahar in various trades, it added.<sup>107</sup> Commenting on the Government claim, the opposition stated that the piecemeal measures taken by the Government would not be able to solve the economic problems being faced by the common people of Tripura. Hence it suggested that in

order to build up a firm economic foundation of Tripura, steps should be taken for development of national industries in Tripura. If government or non-government industries were not started to relieve the 12 lakhs of cultivators of Tripura, Tripura would have no hope of economic improvement, it added.<sup>108</sup> But no step for starting any large or medium industry was taken.

From a Government statement of 1964, it was learnt that the Industries Department had been mainly concerned with small scale industries and also the running industrial institutes. Further, the two industrial training institutes that had been started under the department started providing training for trades like blacksmithy, carpentry, motor Mechanism, etc.<sup>109</sup> But the opposition commented that the Government should not confine its endeavour to the development of carpentry, pottery, Khadi and other village industries alone. It suggested that the Government should try its utmost for rapid industrial development in order to mitigate the deepening unemployment problem of the territory. Thus, some agro-based industries like jute and sugar mills and forest-based industries like paper mills and furniture factories could be set up and thousands of unemployed youths could get employment in those mills and factories, it added.<sup>110</sup> No attention was, however, paid to its suggestions.

In December, 1964 a resolution was tabled by an Opposition member requesting the Central Government to take immediate steps to set up in Tripura mills and factories for the production of cotton yarn, paper, sugar and jute textile. The mover of the resolution stated that it was a matter of deep regret that even after seventeen years of Independence, no mill or industry was set up in

Tripura and the major portion of the money sanctioned for the purpose during the three five year plans were refunded to the Central Government. He pointed out that as there was no more scope of agricultural expansion in Tripura and the pressure on land was ever on the increase due to continuous influx of the refugees from East Pakistan, her economy and social structure reached a collapsing stage. In view of this, he urged the Central Government to take initiative for setting up mills and factories in Tripura in order to divert the pressure on land and to provide job facilities to the urban and rural unemployed.<sup>111</sup> Taking part in the discussion on the resolution, the Leader of the Opposition alleged that the government was not at all up and doing for the development of power and communications which were essential preconditions for the setting up of any industry. In this connection, he pointed out that the ruling party had opposed the proposal initiated by the opposition in the Territorial council to request the Central Government to take up the schemes for construction of railways from Dharmanagar to Sabroom. Like-wise, the proposal of the Opposition to expedite the Dambur Hydro-Electric Project was then rejected by the government on the plea that its schemes for bringing bulk supply of power from Umium Hydro-Electric Project of Assam would meet the requirement of power, but the government realised subsequently that the power from Assam alone would not do. Contradicting the government view-point that there were scarcity of raw materials in Tripura for the running of industries, Shri Chakraborty pointed out with supporting data that sugarcane, cotton, jute etc. grew in abundance in the territory. He, therefore, requested the government to be up and doing for the development of power and communications, start new

industries and to take steps so that the existing industries survived.<sup>112</sup> Some members from the treasury benches then took part in the discussion and after a heated debate, the original resolution was put to vote and lost.

The Chief Minister informed the House in March, 1965 that the starting of a few large and medium-sized industries based on raw materials available locally was under active consideration of his government. It informed further that special emphasis would be laid on the development of small scale industries and with that end in view steps would be taken to set up a Small Industries Corporation in order to extend all sorts of assistance to the small industries.<sup>113</sup> The Opposition, in its turn, alleged that the Government talked a lot, but did not take steps for setting up a single medium or small scale industry at its own initiative. To worsen the situation, the small-scale industries that were being run in private initiative were collapsing as no protective measure was there, it added. Again, though industrial loan was given to 800 entrepreneurs, most of them did not start any industry. But no step was taken against them as they belonged to the ruling party. It alleged further that the Leader of the party in power propagated every off and on that he would secure the green signal from Delhi for large-scale industry in Tripura, but in his budget address of the year there was no mention about any measure for starting even a medium-sized industry and for extension of railway link upto Sabroom.<sup>114</sup>

A Government statement of 1968 revealed that the programme for development of industries was still then confined to village and small industries with accent on handloom, cane and bamboo works and the creation of

skilled artisans in vocational and engineering trades. The Industrial Estates at Arundhutinagar and Udaipur were growing in popularity and one at Kumarghat would be established soon, it added.<sup>115</sup> But the statement could not at all satisfy the Opposition and hence it moved a motion to discuss on "Absence of Provision for starting Jute Mill, Paper Mill, Spinning Mill, Sugar Mill etc." Pointing to the fact that economic development of Tripura without proper industrialisation was inconceivable, it pleaded strongly for starting some large-scale industries at an early date. In that connection, it stated that all raw materials for starting and running large scale industries like Paper Mill, Jute Mill and Sugar Mill were abundantly available in Tripura. Hence, if those industries were started, those would go a long way in mitigating the unemployment problem and the problems faced by the agricultural labourers. It regretted that no provision had been made for the starting of industries, and demanded that necessary provision should be made for rapid industrialisation of Tripura.<sup>116</sup> But the motion was turned down.

In March, 1967, the Government informed the members of the House that as a result of intensive road building activities for over a decade, the transport difficulties in Tripura had ceased to some extent and hence it had now taken up plans for setting up of industrial units. Again, in order to provide a stimulus for the growth of industrial potential, it had decided to purchase power in bulk from the Umium Hydro Electric Project of Assam. further, in order to facilitate the marketing of finished products of the industrial units of the territory, it had decided to start sales emporia at New Delhi and Calcutta, besides continuing the sales emporia already on existence.

Contradicting the Government claim that remarkable progress was brought about in the sphere of transport and communications, the Opposition stated that in spite of the fact that lakhs of rupees had been expended during the last three plans in that head, transport problems still persisted and the bridges that had been started much earlier could not be completed till then. It, then, alleged that though the Government had been propagating for the last five years that railines would be extended from Dharmanagar to Subroom, power would be pruchased from Assam and Dambur Hydro Electric Project would be completed soon, no effective step was taken till then in those regards. Again, though lakhs of rupees were given as loans to industrial entrepreneurs during the last 3/4 years, no new industry was started. Further, the Small Industries Corporation Ltd. as had been floated with a capital of Rupees 10 lakhs also failed to fulfil its objective, it added. In fine, it urged the Government to take immediate necessary steps for rapid industrialisation of Tripura which alone could bring economic prosperity in the territory and provide employment facilities to the unemployed.<sup>117</sup>

The Government informed the House in March, 1968 that it had taken further steps to hasten supply of bulk power from Assam. Moreover, the Gumti Hydro-Electrical Project was also making further headway. Again, a training centre in Powerloom and a calandring and sizing plant would be set up soon, it added.<sup>118</sup> But the statement could not satisfy the Opposition and it demanded that a proper review and assesment of the works done so far by the Department of Industry should be made. It also pointed out that most of the medium and small industries that had been started taking loan from the Department were, by



then, turned into defunct bodies and as a result, the total industrial production of the territory went down to a great extent. Thus, the total handloom products fell far short of the requirement of the territory and hence large quantity of such products had to be imported from outside markets. It opined that if steps would have been taken for setting up some powerlooms and some more handlooms, that would have met the requirement of the people and led to the economic development of territory. It was also of the view that so long as the Government would not be up and doing for solving the problems of power and communications, not even the medium sized industries could flourish in the territory.<sup>119</sup>

A Government statement of 1969 informed the House that very active measures would be taken for encouraging planned growth of industry and to create conditions which would provide incentive to private entrepreneurs to come to Tripura and to set up industries. The activities of the Tripura small Industries Corporation would be increased in the following years, it added. Implementation of the programme of establishing a calandering and sizing plant in the public sector at Agartala had also been taken up and it would be set up very soon so that its services were available to the handloom and powerloom industries. Further, negotiations had been continuing with private parties for setting up industrial units in Tripura, like a Steel Rolling Mill, powerlooms, a glass and ceramics unit and a plywood factory.<sup>120</sup>

Commenting on the statement, the Opposition viewed that if the Government was at all serious about industrial development, it would have given first preference to the question of extension of reillink, but no mention about

that was made in the statement. It, then, demanded that the Government must give positive assurance that it would try its best for extension of raillink at least upto Agartala within next two or three years. Again, though the Government had been propagating ever since the days of the Territorial Council that power would come from Assam and Dambur Power Project would be completed soon, very little progress was made in those regards, it alleged. Moreover, though lakhs of rupees were expended for the growth of industry and good number of industrial loans were given to private parties during the last three plan periods, the desired industrialisation did not take place, it added. It, therefore, demanded that immediate necessary steps must be taken by the Government for the growth of industries in Tripura, but no attention was paid to the demand.<sup>121</sup>

In March, 1970, the Government informed the House that facilities like the supply of industrial raw materials at reasonable rates, marketing of finished products through the Government run Central Marketing Organisation and Sales Emporia, Power subsidy for small units, loans under the State Aid of Industries Rules, allotment of land on liberal terms would be extended to private entrepreneurs for the development of industries in Tripura.<sup>122</sup> The Opposition alleged that the Government was not up and doing to build up new industries in the public sector. To worsen the situation, it was indifferent to the maintenance of the existing industries also, it added. Thus, though many buildings were constructed for the industrial estates at Udiapur, Arundhutinagar, Teliamura and Kumarghat, those were lying empty and the machineries of those estates were being eaten away by rust as those were lying

abandoned for long. It, therefore, demanded a thorough investigation into the mismanagement in the industrial estates at an early date. It alleged further that due to the lack of any measure of protection by the Government, the cottage and small scale industries that were being run privately were no longer able to withstand competition with the outside products and hence stood on the verge of extinction. It, therefore, demanded that adequate protective measures should be taken to save those industries, but the demand was rejected.<sup>123</sup>

A Government statement of 1971 revealed that though there was much scope for the establishment of small and medium industries in the territory, entrepreneurs were shy to come forward to take advantage of the facilities being offered by the Government. It informed that a study team of the Government of India had come to examine the possibility of starting a Jute Mill in Tripura and the Government hoped that a decision would soon be taken by the Central government recognising the need for starting such a factory in the Territory.<sup>124</sup> The opposition alleged that the party in power was not at all serious about industrialisation and that was why it did not make any sincere effort for extension of railines upto Agartala. Again, though the Government had been propagating since the days of the Territorial Council that industries like Jute and Paper Mills would be started under Government initiative, no concrete step was taken till then in that direction, it added. Further, the deplorable state of the industrial estates caused by mismanagement clearly exposed the inaction and indifference of the Government towards industrial development of the territory. It councluded urging the Government to be up

and doing for rapid growth of industries in Tripura, but no heed was paid to its request.<sup>125</sup>

The Government informed the House in March, 1972 that considering the locational disadvantages, it intended to lay stress mainly on those small-scale Industries for which there was market and raw materials locally available. An endeavour would be made for the development of local initiative, local entrepreneurs and local schemes, it added. It stated further that it also intended to invite outside investments to enable the prospective entrepreneurs to come forward to set up new industries in Tripura.<sup>126</sup> But the opposition alleged that though the Government stated year after year that a Jute Mill and a Paper Mill would be started, no step in that direction was being taken. There was no initiative for starting medium-sized industries also, it added. Further, the small and cottage industries of the state had been collapsing for the lack of raw materials. It, therefore, requested the Government to arrange regular supply of raw materials to the small and cottage industries at cheap rates so that those industries could revive and flourish.<sup>127</sup> It also alleged that though extension of railines was essential for industrialisation of Tripura, the Government was not up and doing for that; nor did it pressurise the Government of India for link railway from Bangladesh to Tripura with mutual consent. Further, though the Government informed earlier that the Gumti Hydro Electric Project would be completed by the end of 1971-72, it was not completed till then; nor any indication was there about any target time within which it would start generating electricity, it added. The problem of unemployment had been deepening day by day, but the

Government did not come forward with concrete programme for setting up large, medium and small-scale industries, it regretted.<sup>128</sup>

During the budget session of the year, the opposition members stated that though the Government had consistently been requesting the outside entrepreneurs to set up paper mill and jute mill in Tripura, none would feel encouraged to come until and unless communication and transport systems of the state were developed and railways were extended from Dharmanagar to Agartala. An appeal should therefore be placed before the Central Government for adequate financial aid so that steps for the development of transport and communication and extension of railines could be taken up without further delay, they added. In case the Centre disagreed or delayed in making necessary sanction, all members should unite irrespective of party affiliations to take resolution in support of the demand, and, if necessary, movement should be launched against the Centre for realisation of the demand and all steps would have to be taken for enlisting popular support to that movement.<sup>129</sup> They also alleged that though a survey was conducted in Kumarghat in 1949 for setting up a paper mill there, no effective step for starting the mill was taken till then. The Government gave the idea that a jute mill would be set up soon, but from the sad experience of the past, it could be safely concluded that it would not materialise. The Government informed earlier that the Dambur Project would be completed within 1971-72, but now it indicated that the Project would be completed in 1974. From all these, it followed that the Government was expert in uttering hollow slongans only, they alleged..<sup>130</sup>

From a Government statement of 1973, it was learnt

that due to lack of technical know-how and knowledge of big industrial management, the Government had been in correspondence with the Government of India to locate Jute Mill in the private, or failing that, in the Joint Sector in participation with the State Government. Similarly, the Government intended to take advance action during the following year for setting up a Sugar Mill to introduce, promote and expand the growth of sugarcane. Efforts were in hand to seek collaboration of outside entrepreneurs in that and other such Projects. The various incentives and other similar measures had generated a congenial atmosphere to draw local and outside entrepreneurs in various fields such as Fruit canning, Sodium soap, etc., it added.<sup>131</sup> The Opposition sharply criticised the decision of the Government to request the Central Government for setting up Jute Mill in Tripura in Private or Joint sector. It viewed that since the capitalists always invested their capital in such trades as yielded them maximum profits, no industrial development could be brought about depending on private capital. Again, as joint sector meant 75 per cent private capital and 25 per cent state capital and as it always protected the interests of the monopoly capital, hence the possibility of setting up any industry in Tripura under joint sector was equally bleak. It, therefore, requested the Government to urge the Government of India to set up mills and factories in Tripura in the public sector. The government might also send request to the socialist countries like Poland, East Germany, etc. to extend co-operation and assistance for rapid industrialisation of Tripura, it added.<sup>132</sup>

Taking part in the general discussion on the budget estimates of the year, the opposition alleged that though

the Government claimed that it had attached due importance to the setting up of industries, it was not up and doing in taking appropriate step for building up the infrastructure for starting industries. Thus, though 30 per cent of the total allocation of the last four budgets were spent for construction, repair and development of roads, road communication did not improve upto expectation. Again, bridges over many rivers were not completed till then and many areas still remained inaccessible. Further, the condition of power was such that regular bulk supply could not be expected, and depending on such uncertain supply of Power no big project for industry could be undertaken. In view of the above, it suggested that the Government should better take steps for building up medium and small-scale industries. It, then, alleged that though the condition of the existing small-scale industries became precarious, the Government was not coming forward to assist them. Thus, though forty thousand handlooms were there in the tribal areas, those could not run for want of yarns and potters could not buy wheels for want of money. Again, though most of the teagardens of the State had become closed, the Government did not deem it necessary to take over the Gardens in order to save the unemployed workers, and from that it followed that the Government had no feeling or sympathy for the weaker sections of the people, it added.<sup>133</sup>

A Government statement of 1974 informed the House that the Jute Mill had been approved in the state sector and the foundation had been laid. Similarly, under the Tripura Small Industries Corporation Ltd., the foundation of Khandsari Sugar Plant had been laid. The Paper Mill Project and Surgical Cotton and Pharmaceutical Project

were under the consideration of the Government of India and their approval was awaited. Similarly, expansion of the three existing Industrial Estates to take up more units was in hand and good progress had been made to establish further Industrial Estates at Dharmanagar, it added.<sup>134</sup>

Taking part in the discussion on the statement, the Leader of the Opposition alleged that while the Government talked a lot about starting large scale industries, the match factories and aluminium factories of the state were closing down for want of regular supply of electricity. Again, though a Small Scale Industries Corporation was there and it was entrusted with the task of supplying raw materials to the soap and candle factories, and steel, stainless steel, oil and lubricants etc., to other small industries; it failed to maintain regular supply of those raw materials, and as a result, all those industries faced extinction, he added. In addition, the motor industry of the state faced a serious crisis for want of petrol and petrochemicals. Again, weavers of the rural areas could not keep their looms functioning for want of yarn; they were instructed to form registered societies and they followed the instruction, but still yarn was not made available to them, he alleged. In the like manner, rural industries like carpentry, etc., faced serious crisis, but the Government did not come forward to solve the problems, he added.<sup>134b</sup> In course of discussion on the statement, the C P I member made reference to a statement given by the Prime Minister a few months back that a good number of industrialists of India had started investing their profits in the blackmarket and in speculation; and observed that it followed therefrom that there was no possibility of starting any industry in the private sector in Tripura as



there was no possibility of getting maximum profit here and hence the Government should deeply ponder over the matter and take step for industrialisation in Tripura in the public sector.<sup>136</sup>

The Government informed the House in March, 1975 that a limited company under the name and style of "Tripura Jute Mills Limited" had already been incorporated and the letter of intent for setting up the Jute Mill had been received from the Government of India. Again, the Khandsari Sugar Plant had been established and had gone into production and the Government had a proposal to set up more such units in different parts of the state. Further, the letter of intent had been received in respect of the proposed paper mill of 250 tons capacity per day. To organise handloom and handicrafts industries in the state on a commercial footing, a company in the name and style of "Tripura Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation" had been incorporated. In spite of the handicaps of communication and power, the Government had been able to create a climate for industrialisation in the state for private entrepreneurs also by offering financial assistance, marketing of products, building of industrial estates, granting of subsidies on transport, investment, consumption of power and rate of interest, it added.<sup>136</sup>

Participating in the discussion on the Government statement, an Opposition member stated that though the Government mentioned that Jute, Paper and Cotton Mills would be set up in Tripura, it did not specifically mention the time-limit within which the mills would be set up, and hence the unemployed and other depressed sections of the people would not remain content with the assurance. He expressed satisfaction to learn that steps were being

taken for developing transtraffic facilities through Bangladesh, but regretted at the same time that no mention was there about extension of internal rail communication. He, therefore, demanded firmly that due attention must be paid for rapid improvement of communications as, without that, industrialisation of Tripura was inconceivable.<sup>137</sup> Another Opposition member, in his speech, alleged that though the handicaps of communication and power had to be overcome for creating an atmosphere of industrialisation, the Government was not serious about removing these obstacles. The completion of the Gumti Hydel Project was being delayed due to indifference and negligence of the Government and supply of Power from Assam was also not regular, he added. Referring to the plan of the Government to develop transtraffic facilities through Bangladesh, he observed that the Government had rightly pointed out that the project, when completed, would connect Agartala and Belonia with Bangladesh with rail, but it did not mention about any step for extending railines from Dharmanagar to Subroom via Agartala. Again, no mention was there about steps for improvement of internal communication system that was very much backward as would be evident from the deplorable condition of the Assam-Agartala road, the 'life line' of Tripura. In view of all these, he urged the Government to take immediate necessary steps for development of communication and power.<sup>138</sup> But no heed was paid to the demand and request of the opposition.

Taking part in the budget discussion of the year, the CPI member stated that the Finance Minister indicated in his speech that a jute mill and a paper mill would be set up, but he did not mention anything about the progress in that

direction. He regretted in that context that though talks about a jute mill were continuing for the last four years, no definite indication was made till then whether the proposed mill would be set up at all. He then viewed that provision for adequate amount of capital should be made for investment in the public sector for the setting up of industries. Otherwise, solution of the problems of unemployment and economic backwardness of the state would never come about. Again, in order to solve the deepening unemployment problem of the state effectively, rapid development must be brought about in both agricultural and industrial sectors, he added. <sup>139</sup>

The Finance Minister informed the House in course of his budget speech of 1976-77 that the Government was continuing with vigour its efforts to widen and diversify the industrial sector with particular reference to small industries and development of handicrafts. Thus, the Tripura Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation, the Tripura Small Industries Corporation and the Tripura Khadi and Village Industries Board were trying to step up their activities and even exploring possibilities of export arrangement, he added. Further, improvement was being brought about in the performance of the Industrial Estates already set up and more and more private entrepreneurs were being induced to start industries within the state. In respect of the Government Jute Mills, orders for the purchase of machinery had been placed and civil works were in progress. Again, the proposal for setting up a paper mill at Fatikroy of Kailashahar for producing 250 metric tons daily of exportable Paper Grade Pulp was also in an advanced stage of consideration and the Government of India had promised to make their

decision known within a very short time, he added. <sup>140</sup>

Taking part in the budget discussion, an opposition member alleged that the Government talked of setting up a Jute Mill and a Paper Mill year after year, but it was not up and doing for improvement of communications and extension of railines. Further, though the Government was attempting to induce more and more industrialists to start industries in Tripura, none of them would be interested to invest capital here as the finished products of the proposed industries could not be exported to other parts of India in absence of rail communications. Hence, he viewed that it was not enough to include an affirmative proposal in the budget ; sincere efforts were also to be made in order to make it effective. In that connection, he pointed out with regret that though a resolution was passed in the Parliament for extension of railines from Dharmanagar to Kumarghat and necessary provision were also made in the Central Budget for the purpose, the North Eastern Council declined to allocate the fund on the plea that the proposed extension would not bring any profit. He wondered how could the question of profit or loss arise in case of such a vital issue on which the future economic development of Tripura depended. He, therefore, urged the Government to take up the matter with the Council and pressurise it to reconsider its decision in the interest of the industrial development of Tripura. <sup>141</sup>

Participating in the discussion, the CPI member stated that both the Government of India and the Government of Tripura should come forward and take specific steps for rapid industrialisation of Tripura, for, mainly on that, the economic development of the state largely depended. The Government informed that a jute mill and a paper mill

would be set up soon, but steps must be taken on emergency footing for early completion of the same in view of the fact that the problem of unemployment of the state was worsening day by day, he added. No one expected that such a gigantic problem would be solved overnight, but it was only expected that all efforts would be made for rapid industrialisation in the interest of the unemployed youths and the economic prosperity of the land, he concluded. <sup>142</sup>

It is evident from the above discussion that the opposition members availed themselves of all the opportunities to focus the urgency of industrial development of the state and to pinpoint the lapses of the Government in that regard. At the same time, they put forward some constructive suggestions to remove the difficulties that stood in the way of industrialisation of Tripura, but all the suggestions were turned down by treasury benchers. But a few Government statements show that the Government ultimately accepted some of the demands and suggestions of the Opposition. Thus, in 1971 the party in power, in effect, accepted some of the Opposition's suggestions like paying attention to existing small-scale industries, and taking of steps for improvement of power and communications, and urging the Central Government for taking steps for early extension of the railway link from Dharmanagar to Agartala. <sup>143</sup> Similarly, the demand of the Opposition for extension of railines from Dharmanagar to Subroom for the sake of industrial development of the state was honoured to some extent in 1974 when the Government took the decision to take steps for development of transtraffic facilities through Bangladesh connecting Agartala in the West and Belonia in the South, <sup>144</sup> though the decision was not materialised in the long run. In 1976

again, the Government, in effect, accepted some more proposals of the Opposition by promising steps to "Widen and diversify the industrial sector with particular reference to small industries and development of handicrafts."

The Government also set up the Tripura Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation, the Tripura Small Industries and the Tripura Khadi and Village Industries Board and they reportedly started stepping up their activities. Further, steps were taken for bringing about improvement in the performance of the Industrial Estates already set up and more and more entrepreneurs were induced to start industries within the state.<sup>145</sup> Likewise, though the demand of the Opposition for starting large-scale industries like Jute, Cotton and Paper Mills were voted down time and again, the Government ultimately took steps for setting up a jute mill and even order for the purchase of machinery were placed. Again, the proposal for setting up a paper mill for producing 250 metric tons daily of exportable Paper Grade Pulp was placed before the Government of India for consideration.<sup>146</sup>

Our discussion in the preceding pages clearly shows that the Opposition in the Tripura Assembly dealt with contemporary economic problems also in an appreciable manner. The economic problems and issues raised and fought by the opposition in the Assembly were : the problem of food deficit and price rise, employees' and workers' demand for wage-rise, problem of unemployment, and demand for industrialisation. In course of discussion on the issues, the Opposition vehemently criticised the Government for its failure to solve the problem of food shortage and price rise, to raise the emoluments of the employees in view of the continued price-rise, to solve the

unemployment problem, and to take steps for rapid industrialisation. At the same time, it voiced the demand that adequate steps must be taken for abundant supply of foodstuffs and for containing the price-line, for revising the pay-scales of employees and for extending the Central rates of dearness allowance to them, for providing the urban and rural unemployed with works, and for taking appropriate necessary steps for rapid industrialisation for the sake of economic advancement of the State. Though the demands and suggestions of the Opposition were voted down time and again by the Government side, the Government had to accept and implement some of its demands and proposals, and this fact amply proves that the Opposition attained considerable success in dealing with the economic problems and issue also.

1. T. L. A. P., 30-9-1964, pp. 118-120
2. Ibid., 21-12-1964, pp. 29-35 (Motion by Aghore Deb Barma)
3. Ibid., 30-9-1964, pp. 118-120
4. Ibid., 21-12-1964, pp. 29-35 (Motion by Aghore Deb Barma).
5. Ibid., 25-3-1965, pp. 25-28.
6. Ibid., 9-5-1965, pp. 40-45 (Resolution by Birchandra Deb Barma).
7. Ibid., 14.3.1966, pp. 7-8
8. Ibid., 23.3.1966, pp. 21-24 (Budget speech by Birchandra Deb Barma).
9. Ibid., 25-3-1966, pp. 44-48 (Resolution by Birchandra Deb Barma).
10. Ibid., 15.3.1967, pp. 20-32 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Administrator's Address, 1967-1968 by Aghore Deb Barma).

11. Ibid. 23.3.1967, pp. 202-204 (Budget speech, 1967-68 by Bidyachandra Deb Barma).

12. Ibid., 30-9-1968, p. 27

13. Ibid., 22.3.1968, pp. 19-21 (Budget speech by Aghore Deb Barma).

14. Ibid., 18.3.1969, pp. 26-27 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Administrator's Address, 1969-1970 by Aghore Deb Barma).

15. Ibid., 28.3.1969, pp. 64-66 (Cut motion against demand for grant on Agriculture by Aghore Deb Barma).

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18. Ibid., 30.3.1970, pp. 23-24.

19. Ibid., 30.3.1970, pp. 31-33 (Budget Speech by Abhiram Deb Barma).

20. Ibid., 15.3.1971, pp. 2-5.

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23. Ibid., 26.3.1971, pp. 20-22 (Budget Speech by Abhiram Deb Barma).

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25. Ibid., 4.4.1972, pp. 28-31 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the governor's Address by Sudhawa Deb Barma).

26. Ibid., 26.6.1972 pp. 21-22 (Budget speech by Sudhanwa Deb Barma).



27. Ibid., 13.3.1973, pp. 9-12, 13.3.1973, pp. 36-37 (Amendments on the motion of thanks to Governor's Address by Jitendralal Das and Anil Sarkar).

28. Ibid., 28.3.1973, p. 18 (Budget Speech by Nripen Chakraborty).

29. Ibid., pp. 29-30 (Budget Speech by Amarendra Sarma).

30. Ibid., 12.3.1974, p. 39 (Discussion on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, 1974-75 by Jitendralal Das).

31. Ibid., 1.4.1974, pp. 33-34 & 36 (Budget Speech by Jitendralal Das).

32. Ibid., 10.3.1975 p. 23 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address by Jitendralal Das).

33. Ibid., pp. 28-29 pp. 28-29 (Amendment by Anil Sarkar).

34. Ibid., 22.5.1975, p. 48 (Budget speech by Jitendralal Das).

35. Ibid., 9.3.1976, pp. 8-9 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, 1976-77 by Jitendralal Das).

36. Ibid., p. 13 (Amendment by Bulu Kuki).

37. Ibid., 24.3.1976, p. 33 (Budget speech by Jitendralal Das).

38. Ibid., pp. 52-53 (Speech by Bhadramani Deb Barma).

39. Ibid., 25.3.1976, pp. 16-19 & 27-28 (Speeches by Bulu Kuki and manindra Deb Barma).

40. Ibid., 15.3.1967, p. 17 (Administrator's Address, 1967-68).

41. Ibid., 11.3.1971, p. 6 (Governor's Address, 1974-75).

42. Ibid., 12.3.1973, p. 6 (Governor's Address, 1973-1974).

43. Ibid., 26.3.1965, pp. 64-65, and 2.4.1965, pp. 45-50 (Resolution by Atiqua Islam).

44. Ibid., 19.3.1969, pp. 30-31.

45. Ibid., 18.3.1970, p. 5.

46. Ibid., 20-3-1970, pp. 39-41 (Amendment by Aghore Deb Barma).

47. Ibid., 1.4.1970, pp. 29-31 (Cut motion against the demand for grants on administration of justice by Aghore Deb Barma).

48. Ibid., 13.4.1970, pp. 34-37 (Private members' resolution by Aghore Deb Barma).

49. Ibid., 15.3.1971, p. 10

50. Ibid., 18.3.1971, pp. 56-57 (Amendment moved by Abhiram Deb Barma).

51. Ibid., 25.3.1971, pp. 25-26 (Budget speech by Abhiram Deb Barma).

52. Ibid., 26.3.1971, pp. 40-42 (Budget speech by Aghore Deb Barma).

53. Ibid., 15.3.1973, pp. 26-28 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, 1973-74 by Ajoy Biswas).

54. Ibid., 11.3.1974, pp. 15-16 (Governor's Address, 1974-75).

55. Ibid., 12.3.1974, pp. 34-35 (Discussion on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, 1974-75 by Nripen Chakraborty).

56. Ibid., 14.3.1974, pp. 38-40 (Discussion on the motion by Ajoy Biswas).

57. Ibid., 18.3.1974, pp. 43-45 (Discussion on Supplementary Demands for grants for 1973-74 by Nripen Chakraborty).

58. Ibid., 20.3.1974, pp. 27-29 (Discussion on the supplementary demands for grants, 1973-74 by Ajoy Biswas).

59. Ibid., 26.3.1974, pp. 35-36 (Budget discussion, 1974-75 by Nripen Chakraborty).

60. Ibid., 27.3.1974, pp. 59-61 (Budget speech, 1974-75 by Ajoy Biswas).

61. Ibid., 12.3.1975 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the

Governor's Address, 1975-1976 by Ajoy Biswas).

62. Ibid., 17.3.1975, pp. 23-24-27 & 29 (Discussion on the Supplementary demands for grants for 1974-75 by Nripen Chakraborty).

63. Ibid., p. 48 (Discussion on the Supplementary demands for grants for 1974-75 by Jitendralal Das).

64. Ibid., 29.3.1975, p. 21 (Speech by Sudhanwa Deb Barma).

65. Ibid., 22.5.1975, p. 8 (Budget speech, 1975-76 by Jitendralal Das).

66. Ibid., 9.3.1976, p. 8 (Discussion on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, 1976-77 by Jitendralal Das).

67. Ibid., 18.3.1976, p. 17 (Budget speech, 1976-77 by Jitendralal Das).

68. Ibid., 15.3.1971, p. 10 (Lieutenant Governor's Address, 1971-72).

69. Ibid., 11.3.1974 pp. 15-16 (Governor's Address, 1974-75).

70. Ibid., 8.3.1976, p. 8 (Governor's Address, 1976-77).

71. Ibid., 13.8.1964, p. 18 (Budget speech, 1964-65 of the Finance Minister).

72. Ibid., 23.3.1964, pp. 23-25 (Budget speech by Dinesh Deb Barma).

73. Ibid., 21.12.1964, pp. 61-64 (Private members' resolution by Dinesh Deb Barma).

74. Ibid., 25.3.1965, pp. 28-29 (Budget speech, 1965-66 by Nripen Chakraborty).

75. Ibid., 19.12.1967, pp. 28-30 (The discussion tabled by Abhiram Deb Barma).

76. Ibid., 12.3.1968, p. 31 (Budget speech, 1968-69 by Finance Minister).

77. Ibid., 22.3.1968, p. 32 (Budget speech, 1968-69 by Aghore Deb Barma).

78. Ibid., 17.3.1969, p. 10 (Administrator's Address, 1969-70).

79. Ibid., 18.3.1969, p. 25 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Address by Aghore Deb Barma).

80. Ibid., 18.3.1970, p. 12 (Lieutenant Governor's Address, 1970-71).

81. Ibid., 20.3.1970 pp. 45-46 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Lieutenant Governor's Address, 1970-71 by Bidyachandra Deb Barma).

82. Ibid., 15.3.1971, p. 8 (Lieutenant Governor's Address, 1971-72).

83. Ibid., 18.3.1971, pp. 53-54 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Lieutenant Governor's Address, 1971-72 by Aghore Deb Barma).

\* Resolution moved by Promode Ranjan Das Gupta.

84. Ibid., 12.4.1971, pp. 53-54 (Supporting speech to the resolution by Aghore Deb Barma).

85. Ibid., 31.3.1972, p-5 (Governor's Address, 1972-73)

86. Ibid., 3.4.1972, p. 25 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address by Abhiram Deb Barma).

87. Ibid., p. 40 (Amendment by Ajoy Biswas).

88. Ibid., 26.6.1972, p. 44 (Budget speech, 1972-73 by Bajuban Reang).

89. Ibid., 28.6.1972, p. 21 (Budget speech by Ajoy Biswas).

90. Ibid., 29.6.1972, pp. 42-43 (Cut motion against demand for grants on General Administration by Anil Sarkar)

91. Ibid., 10.7.1972, p. 39 (Discussion on the Tripura Appropriation Bill, 1972 by Nripen Chakraborty).

92. Ibid., 14.3.1973, pp. 26-27 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, 1973-74 by Samar Choudhury).

93. Ibid., 15.3.1973, pp. 24-26 (Amendment on the motion by Ajoy Biswas).

94. Ibid., 30-3-1973 pp. 31-32 (Budget speech by Amarendra Sharma).

95. Ibid., p. 53 (Budget speech by Samar Choudhury).

96. Ibid., p. 35 (Discussion on the motion by Jitendra Lal Das).

97. Ibid., 26.3.1974, pp. 28-29 (Budget speech, 1974-75 by Nripen Chakraborty).

98. Ibid., 1.4.1974, p. 36 (Budget speech by Jitendra Lal Das).

99. Ibid., 10.3.1975, p. 25 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, 1975-76 by Jitendra Lal Das).

100. Ibid., 11.3.1975, pp. 26-27 (Amendment on the motion by bajuban Reang).

101. Ibid., 22.1975, pp. 43-44 & 49 (Budget speech, 1975-76 by Jitendra Lal Das).

102. Ibid., 13.3.1976, pp. 27-28 (Budget speech, 1976-77 by Jitendra Lal Das).

103. Ibid., 15.3.1971, p. 10 (Lieutenant Governor's Address, 1971-72).

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107. Ibid., 7.10.1963, (Budget Speech, 1963-64 by the Chief Minister).

108. Ibid., 10.10.1963, p. 7 (Budget discussion by Aghore Deb Barma).

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112. Ibid., pp. 40-46 (Supporting speech by Nripen Chakraborty).

113. Ibid., 10.3.1965, pp. 32-33 (Budget Speech, 1965-66 by the Chief Minister).

114. Ibid., 23.3.1965, pp. 25-27 (Budget discussion by Nripen Chakraborty).

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116. Ibid., 2.4.1966, pp. 45-46 (Cut motion against demand for grants on Industries by Ramcharan Deb Barma).

117. Ibid., 25.3.1967, pp.201-202 (Budget speech, 1967-68 by Bidyachandra Deb Barma)

118. Ibid., 12.3.1968, pp.33-34 (Budget Speech, 1968-69 by Finance Minister).

119. Ibid., 22.3.1968, pp.-33-34 (Budget speech, 1968-69 by Aghore Deb Barma).

120. Ibid., 17.3.1969, p. 6 (Administrator's Address, 1969-70)

121. Ibid., 18.3.1969, pp.30-36 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Address by Aghore Deb Barma).

122. Ibid., 18.3.1970, pp. 9-10 (Lieutenant Governor's Address, 1970-71).

123. Ibid., 20.3.1970, pp. 43-44 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Address by Aghore Deb Barma).

124. Ibid., 15.3.1971, pp.-6-7 (Lt. Governor's Address, 1971-72)

125. Ibid., 18.3.1971, p. 51 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to the Address by Bidyachandra Deb Barma).

126. Ibid., 31.3.1972 p.6 (Governor's Address, 1972-73).

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128. Ibid., 26.6.1972, pp.36-37 (Budget speech by Sudhanwa Deb Barma).
129. Ibid., 28.6.1972, pp. 34-35 (Budget speech by Abhiram Deb Barma).
130. Ibid., 12.3.1973, pp. 4-5 (Governor's Address, 1973-74).
131. Ibid., 28.3.1973, pp. 21-29 (Budget speech of 1973-74 by Nripen Chakraborty).
132. Ibid., 28.3.1973, pp. 21-29 (Budget speech of 1973-74 by Nripen Chakraborty).
133. Ibid., 11.3.1974, p. 11 (Governor's Address, 1974-75).
134. Ibid., 12.3.1974, pp. 23-25 (Discussion on the motion of thanks to the Governor's Address, 1974-75 by Nripen Chakraborty).
135. Ibid., pp. 35-36 (Discussion by Jitendra Lal Das).
136. Ibid., 7.3.1975, p-5(Governor's Address, 1975-76).
137. Ibid., 10.3.1975, pp. 24-25 (Amendment on the motion of thanks to Governor's Address, 1975-76 by Jitendra Lal Das).
138. Ibid., 12.3.1975, pp. 28-29 (Amendment by Abhiram Deb Barma).
139. Ibid., 22.3.1975, pp. 49-50, (Budget speech, 1975-76 by Jitendra Lal Das).
140. Ibid., 18.3.1976, p.25 (Budget speech of the Finance Minister, 1976-77).
141. Ibid., 24.3.1976, pp. 21-22 (Budget speech by Sudhanwa Deb Barma).
142. Ibid., 24.3.1976, p. 39 (Budget speech, 1976-77 by Jitendra Lal Das).
143. Ibid., 15.3.1971, pp. 8-11 (Lieutenant Governor's Address, 1971-72).
144. Ibid., 11.3.1974, p. 5 (Governor's Address, 1974-75).
145. Ibid., 8.3.1976, p.4 (Governor's Address, 1976-77).
146. Ibid., p. 5 (Governor's Address, 1976-77).

## CHAPTER SIX

# CONCLUSION

Our discussion in the previous three chapters shows that the Opposition could not play its role in the Territorial Assembly of Tripura in a befitting manner, This was due to two factors, namely, first, most of the prominent Opposition members including the Leader of the Opposition had been kept under detention for all but one Session (the Budget Session of 1965-66) during the first Territorial Assembly, and secondly, the strength of the Opposition was much reduced in the Second Territorial Assembly after the Election of 1967. For all that, the level of success obtained by the Opposition in the Territorial Assembly was considerably high. The discussion in the foregoing pages has amply revealed that the Opposition members in the Territorial Assembly brought to the force all the basic problems of the masses, social, economic, political, educational and cultural and it pressurised the Government to find proper solution for them. They expressed the view repeatedly that the problems of the people of Tripura could neither be seen nor solved in an isolated way. The Opposition leaders on several occasions expressed the view that the problems being faced by the people of Tripura as also of the rest of India were the inevitable results of the capitalist road of development which stood for the affluence of a few at the expense of the bulk of the population. Hence a real solution of the problems lay in abolishing the existing socioeconomic structure and in building up a socialist order in its stead, they emphasised. They were also of the view that remarkable remedial and reformatory measures could have been taken even within



the present socioeconomic set up and temporary relief could have been extended to the common people if sincerity and honesty prevailed among those who were at the helms of affairs. The achievement of Opposition in the Territorial Assembly lay in the fact that even within its limited strength, it fought tooth and nail for the safeguard of the fundamental social, economic and political rights of the masses and pressurised the Government and sometimes compelled it to take measures to give at least temporary relief to the common people of Tripura. The high level of success of the Communist Opposition of Tripura and particularly of the CPI (M) during the period 1963-1971 was reflected in the Parliamentary Election of 1971 in which CPI (M) snatched both the parliamentary seats in Tripura from the ruling party securing more votes than the Congress in 20 out of 30 Assembly Constituencies and polling 43 percent of the total votes cast.<sup>1</sup>

We have also noticed that since the Territorial Assembly was a powerless body, the scope of functioning of the Opposition was very much limited in that Assembly, and as the Union Territory Administration could not fulfil the aspiration of the people of Tripura, the Opposition fought both inside and outside the House for a full fledged Assembly and also for the statehood of Tripura. After the status of statehood was granted to Tripura and the state Legislative Assembly started functioning, the legislative Opposition got enough scope to make itself felt and effective and to engage itself in the struggle for political rights and political justice for the people, a struggle that got new dimension during the time of 'Emergency'. The Opposition members who were 19 in number in the State Assembly, fully utilised the legislative time they got during the

period from March, 1972 to March, 1975 after which most of them were arrested and kept under detention for long nineteen months. During the period upto March 1975, they fought relentlessly for extension of some vital social and economic rights to the masses side by side with the struggle for protection of their political rights. Though the government rejected all the demands of the Opposition on the floor of the House, it had to concede some of their demands ultimately and therein lies the success of the Opposition. During the Emergency, the struggle for protection of basic socio-economic and political rights of the masses was resumed and continued inside the Assembly by those opposition members who stayed outside the prison-bars. Though all their demands and suggestions were turned down by the Government side, they courageously stood against each and every Government measure which they considered as anti-people. In the state Assembly also, the Opposition members went on exposing the evils and limitations of the capitalist path which the Governments of India and Tripura were pursuing. They put forward certain remedial measures also for both immediate and ultimate solution of the problem arising out of the paths of capitalist development, but no attention was paid to their suggestions. The success of the opposition lay in fact that it could ultimately depose the Congress Party from the state power of Tripura, forming alliance with the C. F. D. Party. Its success became much more glaring in the Election of 1977 in which it wiped out the Congress Party, its main rival, from the electoral map of Tripura.

The Opposition members applied the same legislative methods in the Territorial Assembly and in the state

Assembly and the issues and problems they raised and fought through those media were almost similar in nature. But there was a qualitative difference between the roles played by the opposition in the Territorial Assembly and the state Assembly, and it is evident from the fact that the treasury bench gave more importance to the Opposition in the state Assembly by taking into consideration larger number of its demands and suggestions than those in the Territorial Assembly, and thus the Opposition in the state Assembly proved itself to be more effective than the opposition in the Territorial Assembly.

### **The General Features of the Legislature Opposition in Tripura**

From the discussion in the previous three Chapters about the role played by the Opposition in the Tripura Assembly during the period under review, it clearly appears that legislative Opposition in Tripura had certain general features of its own. The features were as given below.

First, the Legislative Opposition in Tripura exposed the Government omissions on many occasions and opposed all those measures of the Government which it considered to be contrary to the public interest. It constantly criticised and scrutinised the Government policy and sought to make the government a more useful instrument of democracy. It continuously applied the various parliamentary methods to compel the Government to admit its mistakes and to take appropriate remedial measures. The members of the opposition asked questions from Ministers regarding their departments and discussions were initiated. Even two motions of no-confidence were moved against the Government. The

persons in power were kept in check from doing anything arbitrarily by all means, and they had to try to save themselves from the displeasure of the House. Thus, the Opposition in Tripura highlighted the weaknesses in the administration and exerted constant pressure on the Government to modify its mode of action. It did not remain content with pressurising the Government to modify its policies and programmes, but it carried on efforts to depose the party in power from office.

Secondly, the Opposition in Tripura often proposed alternative measures differing from those of the ruling party. It ventilated public grievances through parliamentary methods like questions, half-an-hour discussions, adjournment motions, etc., and secured discussions particularly on questions and issues that agitated the public mind and tried to press the Government to solve them.

Thirdly, it tried its best to ensure that the administrative apparatus of Tripura remained non-political. With that end in view, it started and continued its efforts to ensure a neutral and non-political civil service and to see to it that the civil service did not identify itself with the party in power.

Fourthly, the Opposition served as the watchdog of the liberties of the people. It alleged time and again that the economic crisis of Tripura as also of the rest of India had been deepening day by day and the people had risen in revolt against the anti-people policies of the Government, and that the Government had been adopting semi-fascist methods in order to silence the protest movements. Rigging of elections, gangsterism and subverting of democratic

civil liberties were the weapons used by the party in power to keep itself in power, it added. It, further, alleged that civil liberties, the right of forming associations, freedom of speech and movement were being denied to the people every off and on and during the 'Emergency' in particular.

Fifthly, it educated the public opinion also. It regularly provided information and knowledge about different public affairs to the electorate and made them capable of debating decisions of the party in power. In this manner, it enable, an average citizen to express his opinion freely and fearlessly. By placing alternative programmes before the electorates, it helped them exercise the judgement on vital issues, for, in the absence of such programmes, they would not have the knowledge of intricate problems involved or the capacity to understand them. Very often, it pointed out that there were several aspects of a question or issue and that the one adopted by the Government was not always the correct one.

Sixthly, though the Opposition opposed most of the bills and resolutions as moved by the Government, yet it did not oppose those only for the sake of opposition. Instances were not rare when the Opposition members extended support to the government bills, resolutions and motions which, in their opinion, aimed at solving vital socio-economic problems of the common people. Although the party in power and the Opposition appeared as hostile parties, yet very often there existed understanding between them about the fundamentals of democracy. They worked together, especially in the arrangement of business in the House. The Government often consulted the Opposition on major policies and incorporated some of the proposals and suggestions of the Opposition, if not instantly, but by

making suitable legislation eventually. The Opposition also sometimes supported the Government proposals which it considered as pro-people.

Seventhly, the Opposition directly partook in the making of laws and their members were by right elected to select committees, standing committees, etc. The Government, for fear of criticism, tried to bring in well-considered legislations before the legislature, while the Opposition tried its best to point out weaknesses and defects in Government's proposals. Hence the view that the only duty of the Opposition is to propose nothing, to oppose everything and to turn out the government is not wholly true so far as the functions of the Opposition in the Tripura Legislature during the period under discussion was concerned.

Lastly, the legislative Opposition in Tripura took active part in the discussions on some issues of national and international significance from time to time. Thus, it participated in the discussions on the issues of national importance like national integration, Indo-Pak war, 1965, election of V. V. Giri as the President of India, and the U.S. move to set up military base in Diago Garcia; and international issues like Vietnam, Bangladesh, etc.

### **The Unique and distinctive features of the Legislative Opposition.**

From the discussion in the foregoing pages about the general features of the legislative Opposition in Tripura, it is evident that as the Opposition in Tripura had functioned within the general constitutional framework of India, it revealed a common pattern with the Opposition in the Indian Parliament. But the Society and Politics in

Tripura during the period under review were characterised by certain peculiar features which influenced and conditioned the role and functions of the Tripura's legislative opposition to a great extent, and as a result, it got certain specialities. An attempt will now be made to find out the unique features of the legislative opposition in Tripura.

The first and foremost unique feature of the legislative opposition in Tripura (1963-1976) was structural. Whereas, according to H. S. Fartyal, there were four-fold Opposition parties in the Indian Parliament during the period 1952-1970, namely, the right wing, the moderate left wing, the extreme left wing and sectional and regional opposition parties,<sup>2</sup> the Communist Opposition was the only Opposition in the Tripura Legislature during the period. Upto March, 1965, the CPI was the only Opposition Party in the Tripura Assembly and after that, the CPI(M) was formed and the two parties went on working hand in hand with each other. Since strong ideological identity had been there between the two component parties of the Opposition, the Opposition worked most of the time as a cohesive force. Further, true to its convictions, the legislative opposition in Tripura, in addition to its vociferous and consistent Opposition of the daily programme and methods of Government, had been vigilant in its obligation to challenge the existing system as a whole. It is evident from the role played by it that it was alive to its principal final goal : the transformation of a class society into a socialist society, but it felt at the same time that this long-term aim should be achieved with the help of time and within the framework of the present society. The Opposition parties and the CPI(M) in particular, also believed that much progress

had been achieved towards this aim by their activities in opposition during the last decades.<sup>3</sup>

The functional distinctiveness of the legislative opposition in Tripura was as follows :

It laid great emphasis on the tribal problem. Originally most of the inhabitants of Tripura were tribals, but owing to continuous influx of displaced persons from erstwhile East Pakistan, the demographic character of Tripura totally changed and the tribals were reduced to minority. The Opposition fought strongly both inside and outside the Assembly in its demand for adequate socio-economic safeguards to the tribals, but in doing so, it did not forget its obligation to fight the politics of tribalism and communalism. This unique feature of the legislative opposition in Tripura distinguished it from the Opposition in the Indian Parliament in so far as the former employed a major share of its legislative time in spearheading the tribal problems and in pressurising the Government for taking remedial measures, while the latter raised the problem only occasionally.

The legislative opposition in Tripura was equally alive to the problems of the immigrants also. It was fully aware of the fact that the displaced persons had to leave their hearth and home and to take refuge in Tripura under the pressure of a historic compulsion. Demands were, therefore, voiced repeatedly by the Opposition for their immediate economic rehabilitation. As days passed on, the Opposition took a class outlook so far as the problems of the tribals and the refugees were concerned. In lieu of placing demands for the tribals and the refugees in general, it went on giving more and more stresses on the demands for measures



for economic rehabilitation of the weaker and poorer sections among the tribals and the non-tribals. This also gave the legislative opposition in Tripura a near distinctive character as in no other state legislature in India other than the possible exception of West Bengal and Kerala Assemblies was the class outlook reflected in the functioning of the Opposition in the same manner as far as the problems of the poor and the downtrodden of the various castes and communities were concerned.

The class-composition of the opposition legislators of the Tripura Assembly was reflected in their speeches in the legislature. As most of the opposition legislators came from middle class and lower middle class families a good number of them could not get higher education,<sup>4</sup> and hence the speeches delivered by them were not always upto the mark; but their commitment to the cause of the poor and the downtrodden in society and their conviction in the inevitability of social transformation in socialist direction seemed to be genuine, and these were reflected in their speeches. Only the opposition stalwarts raised issues of national and international importance and significance side by side with the local and regional problems and issues, but the others, on most occasions raised the problems and issues of their respective constituencies. True, the standard of speeches of most of the opposition members in the Indian Parliament was much higher than that of many opposition legislators of the Tripura Assembly, as the Parliamentarians were mostly more educated. But the Parliamentarians belonging to the right-wing and sectional and regional parties hardly raised their voices for protection of the interests of the poor and the downtrodden<sup>5</sup> Again, far from voicing the demand of socialist transformation of

the social order, the members of the right wing parties advocated capitalist development and the members of the sectional and regional parties fought for protection of their sectarian and local interests, and sometimes even in disregard of national interests.

Language media of the Tripura Assembly was English upto 15.3.1964 and from 16.3.1964, Bengali. From the opening session of the first state Assembly, kak-Barak, the mother-tongue of the tribals was used by some tribal legislators of the Opposition as the media. it is worthwhile to note in this context that it was the opposition legislators who took the initiative to deliver speeches in Bengali after Bengali was accepted as the official language of the territory. Thus from 16.3.1964 (the day in which discussion on the demands for supplementary grants for 1963-64 started) Opposition leader Aghore Deb Barma started his speech in Bengali, <sup>6</sup> and the other Opposition members in the Assembly followed his instance. The Chief Minister, the other members of the Council of Ministers and some Congress members also spoke in Bengali on that day, but on several occasions upto the Budget Session of 1965-66, the Chief Minister and some other Ministers addressed in English. After that Session, however, Ministers and all other members of the Treasury Benches also went on delivering their speeches in Bengali. Again, though the demand of the Opposition to recognise Kak-barak as the second official language was turned down repeatedly, some tribal legislators of the Opposition started and continued their speeches in the language from the opening session of the state Assembly in order to create pressure on the Government to give recognition to the language, but with no effect. In the Parliament of India,

English and Hindi were the main media during the period under review, and the major regional languages were also allowed. But for the recognition of the regional languages as media, the Opposition in the Parliament had not to create any pressure on the Government.

Tripura was almost solely dependent on the Central aids during the period under discussion and hence it would not be unnatural if the opposition legislators were moderate in their tones and tempers, but actually reverse was the case. More often than not, the Opposition stalwarts sharply criticised the Party in Power in Tripura and also the Centre for its failure to solve the deepening social, economic and political problems and issues of local, regional and national importance. Large number of instances of such acrid and vociferous criticism are spread over the pages of the proceedings of the Tripura Legislature of the period under review.

Another important speciality of the legislative opposition in Tripura comes to light if we compare its level of business with that of the opposition in Indian parliament.

From a superficial comparison between the achievement of the Opposition in the Indian Parliament and that of the legislative Opposition in Tripura, it may, no doubt, appear that the national opposition played a more effective role than the Tripura Opposition, but an in-depth analysis will show that the reverse was the case. True, the Government of India accepted at least some of the demands and suggestions of the Opposition in the Parliament, but the Government of Tripura turned down all the suggestions of the Opposition in the Assembly. But the Opposition in Tripura did not keep silent at its defeats in the Assembly,

rather, it went on bringing its unfulfilled demands to the masses outside. It organised and launched a series of movements all those years in support of its demands, and the Government had to fulfil a good number of demands of the opposition, if not instantly, but eventually. Thus, the struggle of the opposition, both inside and outside the Territorial Assembly for the statehood of Tripura compelled the Government of India to concede the demand and thus Tripura attained its statehood. Again, the pressures exerted by the opposition inside and outside the Assembly went a long way in the release of the political prisoners including opposition leaders in 1963, 1966 and 1976. Similarly, the demands of the opposition in the Assembly for the Commissions of Enquiry into the incidents of police firing at Agartala in 1966 and at Kamalpur in 1968 were accepted by the Government and it is evident from a Government statement that showed that the Commissions were set up and they submitted their reports and those had been under examination of the Government.<sup>7</sup> In the like manner, the government of Tripura accepted a good number of political, social and economic demands of the opposition, though not instantly, but eventually.

From this it is clearly evident that the Opposition in the Tripura Assembly was, in no way, less effective than the opposition in the Indian Parliament. On the Other hand, the manoeuvrability of the Tripura Opposition to utilise the factional feuds of the ruling party to its advantage was far more sophisticated and effective than that of the national opposition. Thus, the skilful handling of the factional infighting in the ruling party of Tripura by the Opposition during the days of the Second Territorial Assembly led to the dismissal of the Singha Ministry a few

months before its term was over and president's rule was imposed on the Territory. The Opposition in the state Assembly utilised the factional feuds of the party in power in such a sophisticated manner that its candidate for the biennial election of the Rajya Sabha of 1974 came out victorious defeating the Congress candidate. It continued its manoeuvre with a greater zeal and in the process it almost reached the point of ousting the Sengupta Ministry from power, and getting the smell of the imminent danger, the Government caused the arrest of most of the Opposition members including their leader on the eve of the Budget Session of 1975-76 and detained them in jail for a long period of time.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, the Opposition succeeded in deposing the Ministry from power by making alliance with the C. F. D. Party (founded at all India level by Jagjivan Ram) in March, 1977. the Opposition in the Indian parliament also aimed at deposing the Congress Government from power and, with that end in view, it moved some censure motions against the Government, but with no effect. It was itself so weak and fragmented that it could hardly think of deposing the Government by winning over the disgruntled section of the ruling party to its side. For all that, the national opposition came to power by severely defeating the Congress Party in the Election of 1977.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the Opposition in Tripura also captured power following its landslide victory in the Assembly Election of December, 1977.

The success of the national opposition was mainly due to the factors like polarisation of non-Congress votes, emergency excesses, etc. It is a common knowledge in India that the Congress party did not get even half of the total votes polled in any General Election of India upto the

Election of 1971<sup>10</sup>. And hence as all the right-wing national opposition parties came together in 1976 reacting to the 'Emergency excesses' and merged and formed the Janata Party and made seat adjustments with most of the left parties, the Congress Party faced miserable defeat in the Election of 1977. But the victory of the Tripura Opposition did not come that way. Our study of the Election results of the Tripura Assembly of 1972 (in Chapter Two) has shown that the CPI(M) and the independents with its support got 12 out of 19 S. T. reserved seats, but they got only 6 out of 41 other (35 open and 6 reserved S. C.) seats. In the Election of 1977 the CPI(M) captured 14 out of 17 S. T. reserved seats and the remaining 3 seats were won by the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (formed in 1967). Out of the rest 43 seats, the CPI(M) got 39 seats and its allies the Forward Block and the R. S. P got 1 and 2 seats respectively.<sup>11</sup> from this it is evident that the patronage of the major section of the non-tribal voters which had been a monopoly of the Congress Party upto the Election of 1972 shifted to a great extent towards the Left Front headed by the CPI(M) in the election of 1977. It may be argued that the Left Front attained the unprecedented victory taking the advantage of multi-cornered contests, but even a cursory glance at the results of the election will show that the Front candidates secured a clear plurality of votes in 33 out of 60 Constituencies.<sup>12</sup>

Now, what was it that gave the Left Front of Tripura the laurels of this landslide victory ? There were some important factors that contributed to this like loss of political credibility of the Congress MLAs who defeated first to the CFD and then to the Janata Party, anti-Congress wave in Tripura as in other parts of contemporary

India, Janata misrule at the Centre, Opposition of the C. F. D. and the Janata Ministers of Tripura to all the pro-people proposals of their Communist Counterparts, and the part played by the Opposition inside and outside the Assembly during the past decades. A deeper study will reveal that the last-mentioned factor was all the more important in comparison with the other factors. Our discussion in the foregoing pages has amply shown that the opposition repeatedly raised and fought the basic socio-economic problems of the masses on the floor of the Assembly and pressurised the government to take steps for solving those problems. Side by side, it launched and continued series of movements in support of popular and political demands all those years. All those struggles were reflected in and carried into the Assembly by the Opposition. These functions of the opposition inside and outside the Assembly played a great job in moulding public opinion in its favour. It went on continuing election campaigns even after the elections were over and in the process it succeeded in winning over the support of larger and larger numbers of people to its side and it was this overwhelming support that enabled it to come to power by severely defeating the Congress and the other national parties.

1. Results of Election (Parliament), Tripura (1971), Election Department, Government of Tripura, Agartala.

2. Fartyal, H. S., The role of Opposition in Indian parliament, Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad, 1971, p. 8.

3. Interview with the Opposition stalwarts like Nripen Chakraborty, Anil Sarkar, Ajoy Biswas, Samar Choudhury, Aghore Deb Barma and Sudhanwa Deb Barma during 15-20 December, 1984.

4. Interview with the opposition stalwarts during 15-20 December, 1984.

5. Fartyal, H. S., Op. cit., Chapter III, IV & V.

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Shakdher, S. L. (ed.), Synopsis of Lok Sabha Debates (1972-1975), Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi.

6. T. L. A. P., 16.3.1964, P. 8.

7. T. L. A. P., 17.3.1969, p. 9, (Administrator's Address, 1969-70).

8. Editorials of local dailies and weeklies of Tripura of the contemporary period and interview with Opposition leaders like Nripen Chakraborty, Anil Sarker, Ajoy Biswas and Sudhanwa Deb Barma on 15th & 16th December, 1984.

9. In the Lok Sabha Election of 1977, the Janata party got 43.06 per cent of the total votes polled and secured 299 out of 542 seats.

10. The Congress party got 44.99%, 47.78%, 44.73% and 43.06% of the total votes cast in the Lok Sabha Elections of 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967 and 1971 respectively. (Source : Relevant Election Results).

11. Election Results, Triura (1977).

12. Ibid.



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