

Developmental Justice: Understanding The Relationship of Commons and Globalisation
Through the Periphery
A Case Study of Tripura**

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INTRODUCTION:

Globalisation, the buzzword of the moment, has thrown up a large number of issues that are as varied as they are diverse. Nowhere is this more true than in the third world where ancient customs and cultures are locked in a battle with the sweeping changes that globalisation has brought about. The prevailing means of measuring and analysing the pros and cons of globalisation are more often than not based on weighing its effects on the mainstream society, i.e. the class of people who are actually involved in the process of globalisation. But the advocates of the free flow of goods and capital claim that the globalisation will benefit all people everywhere, hence the impetus on the whole process. Therefore it is only logical that globalisation must not be seen merely through its effects on the mainstream social structure. In order to be truly aware of the effects of the policies of globalisation, we should also look at the effect it has on the peripheral fringes of society.

In the case of India the accelerated process of globalisation can be traced back to the process of liberalisation that was ushered in during the early 1990's. India is moving towards fulfilling its obligations under the WTO, which calls for free market and service regime by 2005. India had hitherto been following closed economic policies, and the changes that have been introduced have had a significant impact on the Indian economy.

The purpose of this Paper, however, is not to analyse the effects of globalisation on the Indian economy. It is to understand the impact of the process on the peripheral society. For this purpose, this paper is limited to a study of the state of Tripura, one of the remotest states in India. Tripura

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provides an excellent contrast between the changes that globalisation has brought about in the modern society of the country and the tribal cultures that are struggling for existence in the state.

Indeed, it has been the policy of successive Indian governments that we must attain unity in diversity. This means that India has made efforts towards bridging the gap between the tribal society and the modern urban society. In this context, for achieving a holistic view, we must understand the effects, consequences and spread of globalisation on the peripherals. Therefore in the Indian context there can be no other better example than the most inaccessible state in the country, which has in the past fifty years undergone major changes. Being the only state which has undergone a demographic change in the post-independence period it is very interesting to note the consequences that have arisen as a result of population influx from across the border and the socio cultural impact of the same.

A BRIEF BACKGROUND STUDY OF THE STATE

The state of Tripura is one of the seven states in the North East part of India. It is a land-locked state, surrounded on the Western, Northern and Southern sides by an international border with Bangladesh and on the East by Assam and Mizoram which are the only land links to mainland India. Until 1947 the state had been a princely state with a dynastic ruler. The British suzerainty was limited to the appointment of a political agent who had the power to recognize the ascent to the throne of each successive ruler. By far the dynastic rule remained unhindered. After independence of the country an agreement of merger was signed by the regent Maharani on September 1947 and the state became a category C state under the Constitution, which was later converted to a Union Territory in 1956 and attained statehood in 1972. The state has well developed institutions of local self-governance in both the Autonomous District Council (ADC) and non-ADC areas.

About 59% of the total land area is classified as forest land and is under the ambit of the Forest Conservation Actⁱ. Numerous limitations have been imposed under this legislation with respect to the use of forest land.

Despite being geographically the smallest state in the region, it is the second most populous state after Assam. The percentage of the rural population living below the poverty line is 73.58%, as per the survey conducted in 1993.

Per capita State Domestic Product (SDP) of the state during 1994-95 was Rs. 4376/- at current prices against the all India average of Rs 8282/-. This was not only much below the national average but the lowest in the North Eastern region. The economy of the state is primarily agrarian with agriculture contributing 42% of the (SDP) and 64% of employment. Small and marginal farmers constitute 90% of the total number of farmers in the state. For the educated people of the state, the only worthwhile employment is to be found with the government bureaucracy. This is because private investment is nearly nil. The manufacturing sector has remained almost static at about 7%ⁱⁱ.

SPECIFIC PROBLEMS OF TRIPURA

The state has no significant Central Government or private sector Investment. The state is a net importer of capital, through Central transfers as grants and loans. It is unable to retain the transferred capital because of reverse transfers as payments for food and other essential imports and because of the low Credit-Deposit (CD) ratio. The present low credit-deposit ratio is a very serious constraint to the increase of labour productivity in the state. This is compounded by the practical collapse of both short-term crop credit and investment credit. It is clear that without institutional credit mechanism these sectors cannot develop.

The government responsibility towards industrial development lies in the creation of infrastructure and in developmental programmes. Government funds should target infrastructure development that is not commercially exploitable, for example, roads, bridges, public health care and other public utilities. Commercially exploitable activities may be safely left to non-government funding. However, this presupposes that the necessary infrastructure exists, in order to attract such investment. As a strategy, the government should identify the infrastructure that it is committed to providing and ensure it's availability. Basic physical infrastructure, such as a

dependable transport system, power, etc. is a pre-requisite for economic development. Even though there has been some improvement in the availability of infrastructure in the state during previous Central planning policy periods, the present state of infrastructure, both in terms of quantity and quality, has remained abysmally poor as compared to the national level and even in comparison to other north-eastern states. As a result, the state of Tripura has been continuously beleaguered by lack of development since independence. This in turn has led to socio-economic problems in the state. While the central government has been advocating privatization and disinvestment, less developed states like Tripura would hardly gain from such policies as no private agency would come forward to invest in a state with inadequate infrastructure.

Terrorist activities have sprung up like mushrooms in the North East, both by the tribals and other communities. Tripura is no exception to this problem. Perhaps the causal link between terrorism and the tribal people can be traced to the steady ouster of their way of life. The traditional means of livelihood for them was the forest. As a result of the forest laws, court decisionsⁱⁱⁱ and government policies, tribals have been denied access to their traditional common property resources. The law says that anyone who wishes to access the forest for its produce will have to go through the government departments. Till now, the tribals had been free to go and collect whatever they needed from the forest. Today they have been forced to approach the government for obtaining upon monetary consideration what was once freely available to them. It is inequitable to expect them to raise money from other sources than the forest as they have no other training or skills. In fact, the forest was the only means of revenue and sustenance for them. The rationale of the law and policy is to prevent the destruction of the forests, which, it is felt, can only be done through government regulation. This is in complete ignorance of the historical fact that tribals have been living in harmony with the forest from time immemorial. If there was any means of sustainable development as far as the forests are concerned, it can only be through incorporating the principles that are part of the tribal way of life. Any industrial use for the forests without regard to sustaining them would necessarily mean destruction, sooner or later. Inefficient government regulation has not helped to save the forests either. Poaching and illegal felling of trees is common place. Moreover, the settled means of cultivation has spelt the end of the *jhum* method of the tribals. They have been relegated to a position where they are faced with a shortage of land, and therefore food. Demographic, political and economic developments have

combined to alienate the younger generation of tribals. Bengali refugees were not only being settled on land that the tribal people had known to be their own, but more and more people were encroaching upon the land and driving the tribals into the interior. No tribal had any records. All land under the sky was theirs to roam, to hunt, to burn and to cultivate. Their world was changing. Initially they did not mind. A tribal person shared whatever he had with others in need. But the problem was getting more acute as years passed by. The refugee influx increased. More and more land was lost by the tribal people.

The state is mainly an agrarian economy. Agriculture accounts for 48% of the State Domestic Product (SDP). Before independence the state had a majority population of tribals who practiced *jhum* cultivation. The basic feature of this type of cultivation is the slash and burn technique. Shifting cultivation is essential to this method, as opposed to settled cultivation, which was practiced by the original Bengali population, and the later settlers. The major field crop is rice with more than 50% of the gross cropped area. This area is decreasing.

The prevailing consensus of opinion on the alienation of tribal lands in Tripura is that private ownership did not exist among the tribals of the state in the past. Land was held collectively by the community and the rights enjoyed by an individual tribal over a particular piece of land on which '*jhuming*' or shifting cultivation, the mainstay of the tribals, was practiced was neither permanent nor heritable or transferable.^{iv} This meant that the tribals regarded the land on which they lived and worked as a common property resource. The needs of the *jhumia* were few and could be met from their own production. So they neither needed nor were allowed to transfer lands. However, with the passage of time and the development of the state's economy, the needs of the shifting cultivators increased partially at least, due to their exposure to the higher standard of living of the Bengalis. The diversification of demand ensuing from their exposure to a 'superior culture' as well as the absolute increase in their demand arising from the increase in their numbers meant that the produce from *jhums* no longer satisfied their entire demand. Their production from *jhuming* also declined or remained constant at best as a result of the shrinking land mass available to them for *jhuming* and the declining yields from *jhuming* accompanying the shortening of the *jhum* cycle as a result of the shortage of lands suitable for their cultivation practice^v.

With an increase in their populations, the end result of all this is that the tribals have been reduced to a state of abject poverty and are alienated from their traditional means of livelihood. It is no surprise, therefore, that they have resorted to violence in order to be heard.

In light of the terror problem, more and more people are hesitating to invest in Tripura. This is also a major cause for the lack of industry in the state.

The state has an interesting demographic composition, comprising of 19 tribes (See Table – I)^{vi}. There are 35 Other Backward Communities and the General communities mainly comprise Hindu Bengalis and a smaller proportion of Muslim Bengalis. Tripura is the only state in India which has undergone a total demographic change after independence was achieved in 1947 from British rule. The main reason is unchecked migration into the state, mainly from across the international border with Bangladesh. A holistic view of the demographic and economic situation of the state necessitates an examination of the effects of globalisation in traditionally “left-out” areas which means peripheral places where traditional values and culture have been the dominant way of life. Thus a combination of factors like demographic changes and political and economic vagaries have resulted in the alienation of the tribals^{vii}.

TABLE I: TRIBAL POPULATION BY TRIBES.

Name of Tribe	Total Population
Bhil	839
Bhutia	22
Choimal	18
Chakma	34798
Garo	7298
Halam	28968

Jamatia	44502
Nowatia	7181
Khasia	457
Kuki	9502
Lepcha	106
Lushai	3735
Mog	18231
Munda	7993
Orang	5217
Riyang	84002
Saontal	2725
Tripuri	330871
Uchai	1306

Source: 1981 Census

- Till partition, Tripura was a tribal majority state (56.37% in 1921, about 51% thereafter). Subsequent figures are (36.85% in 1951, 31.53% in 1961, 28.95% in 1971, 28.44% in 1981, 30.95% in 1991).

TABLE – II: TABLE SHOWING TRIBAL POPULATION OF INDIA

State/ Union Territory	Total Population	Schedule Tribe Population	Percentage
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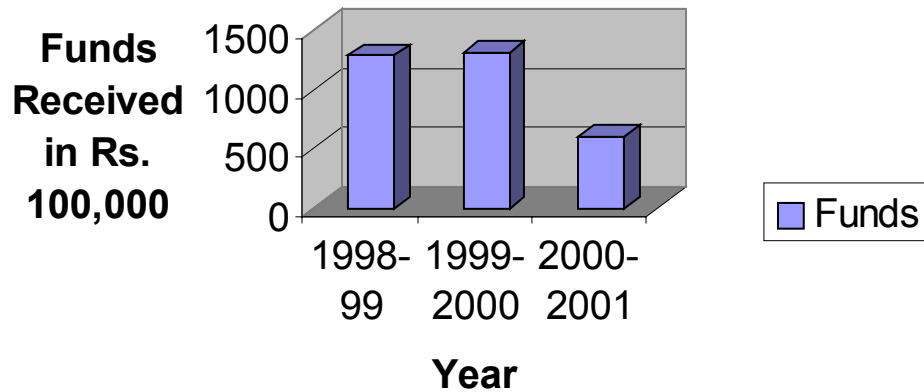
Andhra Pradesh	35,983,447	1,324,368	3.68
Assam	11,872,773	2,068,864	17.42
Bihar (Now bifurcated into Bihar and Jharkand)	46,455,610	4,204,770	9.05
Gujarat	20,683,350	2,754,446	13.35
Jammu Kashmir	3,560,976	.....	.....
Kerala	16,903,715	207,996	1.23
Madhya Pradesh	32,372,408	6,678,410	20.63
Madras (Presently Tamil Nadu)	33,686,953	252,646	0.75
Maharashtra	39,558,718	2,397,159	6.06
Mysore (Presently Karnataka)	23,586,772	192,096	0.81
Orissa	17,548,846	4,223,757	24.07
Punjab	20,306,812	14,132	0.07
Rajasthan	20,155,602	2,309,447	11.46
Uttar Pradesh	73,746,401	.....	.....
West Bengal	1,34,926,279	2,063,883	1.53
Nagaland	369,200	343,697	93.09
Union Territory and Others			

Andaman and Nicobar Island	63,548	14,122	22.22
Delhi (Presently National Capital Territory)	2,658,612	.....	.....
Himachal Pradesh (Now bifurcated into H.P. and Uttaranchal)	1,351,144	108,194	33.81
Lakswadeep Islands	24,108	23,391	97.03
Manipur (Presently State)	780,037	240,049	33.77
Tripura (Presently State)	1,142,005	360,070	31.53
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	57,963	51,261	88.44
NEFA (Presently divided into states)	336,555	.....	.....
Pondicherry	369,079	.....	.....
Total	438,445,915	29,886,300	6.80

Source: 1961 Census

Note: The status and Boundaries in some cases have changed since then.

Funds Received from Govt of India for Tribal Development Programmes



Source: Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Tripura.

Tourism both domestic and international, has been widely recognised as an important activity for creating employment and income-generating opportunities on a large scale. This is the main reason for the recent international air link provided from Guahati, the capital of Assam. Tourism industry is nonexistent in the state as a policy of inner line permit (that is now being relaxed). This means that entering the state is not possible without a special government permit. As the state is a sensitive border area, it was felt that for security purposes the movement in and out of the state required some amount of regulation.

Low level of education is a big hindrance to the development of tribals. Education and economic development are important in the tribal areas. Lack of educational facilities in the tribal areas is a serious concern. No economic development can be fruitful without proper facilities for education in the tribal areas. Similarly education is not possible unless the economy of these areas improve.

In the course of time the pressure on land increased alongside the rise in population. This resulted in riots in 1980, between the Bengali and tribal populations, which was the first

indication of the things to come for the next two decades. Even today tensions exist between the two communities.

Being a border state and with no major economic activity due to lack of forward and backward linkages the state is perennially at the mercy of Central government dole. Infrastructural bottlenecks and lack of a congenial atmosphere due to terrorist activities has also not helped in any way the improvement of the states performance^{viii}.

Today the state of Tripura finds itself faced with a major problem, that of the vicious circle. There is a vicious circle of poverty because the people who were dependent on the natural resources of the forest commons have now to approach the government and pay for what was theirs earlier. Where are they to raise the money from? Effectively the government is asking them to pay for what customarily was their source of revenue. This has led, along with the tribal Bengali conflict, to an explosion of violence in the region. And blood begets blood. One community will keep avenging the loss of their members at the hands of the other. And so on and so forth. The successive state governments have failed to find a solution to both these interlinked vicious circles.

No better example can be given of government apathy to this insurgency issue than the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) example. The TNV was reputed to be the most fearsome and ruthless of the tribal insurgent groups in the 1980's. The TNV entered into an agreement with the government whereby they would surrender, and lay down arms. This would be done in exchange for land and cultivation areas to be given to them. The surrender took place. But soon enough the tribals were brought down to earth by the realization that the government had no intention of doing anything more substantial than backing up empty promises with meaningless words and dialogue. The TNV no longer existed. But other groups sprang up to take its place immediately. Why did this happen? The simple reason is that the tribals were being given a raw deal even after agreeing to surrender. They laid down arms in the hope that they would be given a chance at life, but it was in vain. In this context, it is not surprising that these problems continue even today. Till such time as the government decides to act seriously on this issue, meaning thereby giving the tribals their due, the insurgency will likely continue.

HAS GLOBALISATION ACHIEVED ANYTHING FOR TRIPURA?

History has shown that capitalism has been the formula of success while socialism (communism) has been relegated to the confines of idealists dreams. Capitalism is a profit oriented doctrine of success. We must, therefore, before it is too late, examine its pros and cons. Any idea of individual profit is a tool for selfish realizations. Though the Soviet experience of socialism has shown that achieving collective equality through hierarchical structures is not the right mode of governance, that in itself should not in itself be heralded as the failure of socialism. After the failure of the bipolar world concept it is now the time of a single world where there is a free flow of everything. In other words it is the era of free moving goods and capital, made possible by the destruction of national barriers. However it must be examined as to whether the free-flow advocates are in a way paving the way from heterogeneity to homogeneity. In the international arena, there is a growing fear that the first world nations are going to continue their dominance over the less developed nations. One group of nations should not be allowed to rule over the whole world through their economic might. A situation of uniculture is to be avoided. Rather, the fruits of free trade should be shared by all. So also within the national boundaries, there is a legitimate expectation that the benefits of industrial development should reach all. It should not be that those who are in a position to benefit do so in such a manner that others are completely excluded even from getting a chance to partake in the sharing of benefits.

The politics of development is deeply interwoven with the politics of votes in India, more so in the case of Tripura. That large scale migration has not been dealt with a strong hand by the successive governments is due to the politics of the vote-bank and the same has not been confined to Tripura but also to other North Eastern States, the most prominent being Assam. That migration may be a bone of contention is not in line with the ideas that globalisation professes. A truly global perspective clearly suggests that there will be free-flow of people and goods in spite of man made barriers, for the common good. Therefore it is in one way an erosion of the nation-state authority since they can not derive advantage by resorting to politics of barrier. However as is evident we have moved from the time of colonialism to that of neo-colonialism. Thus instead of political hegemony it is now the time of economic hegemony. The

economic gospel as preached by the west is blindly followed by the rest of the world without understanding the merits and demerits, which in itself is a politics of dominance. A clear analysis will show that in reality we follow a top-down approach wherein in (most) cases nation states are governed by Institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and in extreme cases indirectly by TNCs.

The whole process of globalisation has lead to the demand for industrial goods, even from India. Great impetus is being placed on furthering the spread of the industrial base. As a result, a lot of states in the country are giving more and more importance to the setting up of manufacturing plants and export processing zones. But the state of Tripura can hardly boast of any major industry. Of note can be the Jute Mills, which however is hardly of any importance and a seasonal pineapple canning center. Inadequate infrastructure like roads, banking and power have become major hindrances for the development of the state. The common refrain is that someone would have to be foolhardy to invest in the state because of the lack of power and railway links, not to mention the threat to personal safety due to the insurgency problems. But this does not mean that the state does not possess the capacity to convert its natural advantages into income generating assets. The process of liberalisation has been avoiding the state and that is because it is to the advantage of the more prosperous regions of the country. The politics of development are simple and clearly exposed here. One of the major third world criticisms of the GATT was that the third world countries were not encouraged to do anything other than to extract their natural resources and hand it over to the industrialised west. These nations would then take the raw materials and convert them into the finished product. Then these goods would be sold all over the world, including the nations from where the raw materials came at a tremendous profit. The third world was left to be nothing more than “drawers of water and hewers of wood”. This is exactly what is happening in the national context as well right now. One may argue that in the international context this is no longer true because of the new WTO. But in the country at least this is happening. The states that have already got an industrial base have a vested interest in the prevention of development of industry in Tripura. They would rather that they get the benefit of all the opportunities that the globalisation and liberalisation process accords them. Thus we see that there is actually not much of advancement in the state, for this as well as the other reasons outlined above. The whole process of globalisation and liberalisation is being used to further the

interests of only those who are in a position to directly benefit from it. The people of Tripura who are on the peripheral fringes of the society are being left out and denied the benefits that globalisation can bring them. Studies have revealed that the majority of the uneducated people in the state, i.e the tribals, are finding employment only in the unorganised primary sector. This is nothing more than the extraction industry to feed the insatiable fires of the factories elsewhere. The situation is going from bad to worse and there does not seem to be anything that is being done about it.

There is also another explanation for the lack of interest in the state. In the pre liberalisation era in India, the central government was intent on allowing the public sector units (in the words of India's first Prime Minister, "the temples of modern India") to be the only players in the industrial arena. Private investment was heavily regulated, to the extent that only the rich and economically strong could manage to do so in a profitable way. Therefore the government spending was geared towards development of the state owned units. For this reason grants were made to the various state governments to establish and run industries. But in many places inefficient management and political interference led to these units becoming nothing more than non performing assets, a drain on the economy. Even in this period, there was inadequate investment in the state due to the hostile terrain and lack of proximity to the markets of the country. While the other states in the country had the opportunity of at least trying to reach, what has been described in classical economics as the "take off" stage of industrial growth (which was actually achieved by states like Gujrat and Maharashtra), Tripura could not even conceive of coming close to it. As soon as liberalisation occurred, the whole policy changed. The view now was that the private sector should take over, hence the whole process of disinvestment was initiated. This works fine in areas where there are no potential hazards to the private sector in terms of return on their investments. But in places like Tripura, there exists a situation, for the reasons explained above, where the private sector will not be willing to risk its money. Hence the only industries are the few remaining old public sectors units. Compounding the problem is the growing reluctance of the government to pump money into what it regards as unrevivable units. Anyway due to the prevailing situation the state industry was in a bad shape, and was not doing well. With cutting off of funds, the death knell for industry in Tripura has truly been sounded.

What is development? In the context of notions like inter-generational equity and sustainable development, the question arises whether the present mode of development the right means for the end. The capitalist machine is run on profit realization. It has been seen time and again that economic liberalism has been adopted as the road to success, not taking into consideration the given time and place or situations. In our quest for development we often sacrifice the more important non-obvious to achieve the obvious. Thus ecological considerations take a backseat in the face of so-called economic development.

At this stage the question of sustainable development raises itself again. There is a very real danger that the rate at which the extraction is being carried out will ensure that sooner or later the resource base will exhaust itself. Then what will happen to the people of the state? The tribals have already found themselves in a situation where they are unable to continue with their traditional way of life that involves the forest and shifting cultivation. All that is left to them is the manual labour. If the need for that also dies out, then they would be rendered totally destitute. They would become complete victims of the globalisation process.

CONCLUSION:

For the state of Tripura, the future looks bleak indeed. Historical problems are now being compounded with the notions of globalisation and liberalisation. Is there any scope for improvement?

There can be no doubt that liberalisation has come to stay. The only question for the people of Tripura and such peripheral members of society the world over, is whether it can do anything for them, or will it turn out to be just another damp squib as far as they are concerned. So far rhetoric has been the only approach. For these people the only possible solution is developmental justice.

The term “developmental justice” means that every part of society should share in the fruits of development. In the case of Tripura, in both the pre liberalisation and the post liberalisation eras, there has been no improvement of life for the tribals and other people in the periphery. On the

other hand, in order to “protect” the forests, the tribals have been driven out of what was once their traditional land. In such a situation, festering of violence is not a matter of surprise. The vicious circle of poverty and the vicious circle of violence has to be broken somewhere.

In spite of the current problems it cannot be denied that the tribals have led a self-sufficient way of life that revolved around common property. In the light of this, the government policy must ensure that it incorporates principles of Participatory Resource Management as has been the case with Joint Forest Management. But, it has to be remembered that more often than not such principles are relegated to paper rather than actual practice (the JFM being a good example) and therefore, the government must make a conscious effort towards implementation.

It is undeniable that in today’s world more importance is given to economic might. But it is equally true that there should not be a blind copy of any economic model. Each economic model must be place and context specific. Indeed, there would have been no concern if every product would have commanded the same price. Therefore, it should be seen that the strengths must be utilised properly^{ix}. In this case effort must be made firstly to bring the state out of the culture of violence. The state should channelise its expertise in handicrafts and horticultural produces and carve out a market for itself. Indeed it is possible to promote goods in the international market of Bangladesh, Thailand and Burma by creating Special Economic Zones in the state, because of its proximity with these regions and more so in the changing geo-political scenario. Setting up of Special Economic Zones and Export Promotion Zones under the new trade policies would provide the right impetus in this regard.

The point in this case is that the prevailing situation is that the state is a hotbed of violence, unrest, and other problems. A solution has to be found to end the vicious circle. This paper does not propose to provide immediate solutions as they cannot be found so easily. But as far as globalisation and liberalisation are concerned the governments at the state and the center can at least incorporate the principles of developmental justice in order to reduce the increasing gap between the haves and the have nots, that is the major destabilising factor in the relationship between the progressive community in the main stream and the people on the peripheral fringes of society.

ⁱ Tripura Darpan Tathya Panji O Nirdeshika, 2001, pp 76-77

ⁱⁱ Approach to People's Plan in Tripura

□ *T.N. Godavarman Thirumalakpad v. Union of India* AIR 1997 Supreme Court 1228, AIR 1998 Supreme Court 769, AIR 1999 Supreme Court 97.

□ B.P. Mishra, *Socio-Economic Adjustment of Tribals: Case Study of Tripura Jhumias*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, pp 75-76

□ Malabika Das Gupta, "Land Alienation among Tripura Tribals", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol – xxvi, 1991, p 2112,

^{vi} For an exhaustive study on the tribals see, S. B. K. Dev Varman, *The Tribes of Tripura A Dissertation*, Directorate of Research – Government of Tripura, 1986

^{vii} Murkot Ramuny, "Changing Face of Tripura", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol – xxiii, 1988, p 1879

□ Governor's Speech for the Assembly Session, 2002

^{ix} For a view of the possible opportunities in the state see, Malabika Das Gupta, "Illusory Gains of Liberalisation", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol – xxx, 1995, p 604