

50 Years of Statehood: Still a long way to go

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The State of Tripura turns 50 years old this January. January 21, 1972, was a historic moment for the people of the state as Tripura attained the status of a full-fledged state that day. In fact the transformation from a monarch started with the signing of Merger Agreement by the Queen Kanchanprabha Debi on September 9, 1949. The period preceding and following was equally eventful, with a lot of aspiration, struggle and decisions involved.

For Tripura standing at the crossroad, with 50 years since gaining complete Constitutional benefits (in 1972) and with development indicators for next 25 years, development might have different meanings for different strata of the society. In another perspective also GSDP, indicators, particular rank in various indices, growth rate, all these are too mathematical or statistical, whereas development in general is subjective to a great extent. For the common people the latter is more relevant than the former. A veteran may like to still cherish at the bygone era of monarchical luxuries, customs or the traditional values at their best. On the contrary, a youth of 21st century might prioritise the modern infrastructure, digital revolution and virtual world with less concern for Garia, Gajan, Ker, loin loom, jhuming, embellishing oneself with traditional costumes, or enjoying the lullabies of the elders.

In Retrospection:

Political evolution apart, a common man today misses out on the days of going to the market with 10 rupees or even less, the barter system, the intimacy in social bonding, the frank neighbourhood when the young ones were happy to roam around with the grazing cattle, or jumping into the river with fellow children and not with cartoon shows on television. Socialisation meant nothing but face-to-face interaction even some 10-15 years ago. Summer days were comfortable even without air-conditioner, as the family members used to relish at the cool breeze on the *tong ghar* or the courtyard in the lazy evening. Nobody had to worry about getting an organic produce at higher price, as almost everything was organic. Pollution related issues and loss of bio-diversity were not priority topics of discussion. What we are trying to emphasise today was a routine part of daily life. Such a beautiful time existed in a nascent state Tripura, despite the lacking of modern sophistication and convenience.

The changes have come not just in the administrative set-up, but in economic, social, and religious life. Along the evolutionary journey from monarchy to democracy we had to accustom ourselves with the changing lifestyle. Base of our economy has always been agriculture and this sector has been overwhelmed with transformation in various aspects. First of all the aboriginal people of Tripura had to be weaned off jhum system of cultivation gradually. The system, although persists till today, is at minimal level. With the expansion of education many of them have given up agriculture (jhum particularly), or have found different vocations to sustain themselves. This apart, the system of settled agriculture has undergone massive transformation. Proportionate with the increasing population emphasis has been on increase in production, introduction of new varieties and new technologies. The government has begun to play a significant role in the lives of farmers with lot of inputs in terms finance and technical knowhow outreach programmes. In the recent past PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, PM Fasal Bima Yojana, Mukhyamantri Fasal Bima Yojana etc. have been launched to provide a shield against natural vagaries, and situational hurdles in the farmers' life.

Today's life is more of comfort, may be at the cost of substance. With the extended road network, rail network, air connectivity, people have got used to a convenient life. With door-to-door drinking water supply, surplus power generation, credit link and market facilities, economic activities have gained a new dimension. Commercial relations are now faster and far wider. Industrial growth is easier with the coming of Single Window system and farmers are having greater outreach with Kisan Rail and government support for export. Pineapple, jackfruits of Tripura are now being served on foreign platter. The wave of urbanisation is now going beyond cities more with the slogan and programme of Digital India. People in rural areas are getting the benefits of online transactions and service delivery through Common Service Centres. IT and tourism are the two new and popular entities in industrial sectors.

Social sector is equally a priority area for the government, although there is more room to play, as social issues are very subjective. When the number of social security schemes went on increasing, women are far empowered with the rising economic self-reliance to which concept of SHG has made an apparent difference, whether the society itself needs to be changed more is a question to debate on. Let the social scientists and civil societies have a say on it vis-a-vis our traditions and norms. Today quacks seem to be losing their job and the health care system is getting stronger day by day. Even few years back setting up of Oxygen plant was not a priority in this sector, but ironically COVID-19 has made a place for it in the state.

Culture is another subjective topic where critics always get a chance to play their role. As Tripura has taken pride in its composite culture, of late the cultural ambience has taken a new turn. The list of festivals with universal appeal is getting longer, with the kind of fervour Christmas, Ganesh Festival, Diwali Mela etc. occasions started generating. On the one hand we are adapting to alien cultural segments, on the other hand efforts are on to preserve our heritage. Vernacular languages, festivals, costumes etc. are being preserved and promoted at the official level now. Tribal Research Institute and the Directorate of Kokborok and Other Minority Languages are just part of such an attempt.

Journey ahead – what to look for?

Session of self-retrospection may continue for pages. So, it is better to look forward, by applying the lesson of the past, the resource of the present. Recently the state government has tried to a leap forward by setting a 25-year goal. With such an objective it is coming up with a blueprint of development strategy for the next 25 years.

Basically we have to work on with emphasis for ensuring overall development and a better future for the people of the state. Primary sector has always been at the forefront of policy making, so no exception this time, as agriculture and allied activities contribute about 30 per cent to GSDP (2019-20) of the state. Welfare activities in the field of education, health, nutrition, welfare of disadvantaged sections etc. must continue to have the process of development going. We may hope that the recently launched two schemes namely Mission 100-Vidyajyoti and Mukhyamantri Tripura Gram Samriddhi Yojana will play a significant role in this direction. We also need to do a lot in the field of cleanliness, climate change, industrial growth, connectivity and make use of the prevailing and upcoming infrastructure like SEZ at Sabroom etc.

Cutting long story short, let us hope for a better tomorrow. Despite the surging COVID cases, despite all the loopholes in the society, we can nothing but pledge to act at our best to face the challenges ahead in an organised and united manner.

(a special feature on Statehood Day)