

The Tripura model

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Tripura embarked on a unique path to peace, one that was not dependent solely on security measures but involved investment in human development and people's participation in the implementation of socio-political and economic policy as well. More than a decade later, the human development consequences of peace have been remarkable.

In 2005 and 2006, we spent some months in rural Tripura as part of work on the Tripura Human Development Report (the Government of Tripura and the United Nations Development Programme had commissioned the Foundation for Agrarian Studies to write the report). The threat of violence was ever present, and elaborate arrangements had to be made to ensure the safety of the members of our team, mainly students and youth. Although insurgency was on the decline by the time the Tripura Human Development Report 2007 was published, acts of insurgent violence still continued. Indeed, the idea that the people had to be free from threats to life and limb in order to achieve their full potential was an important part of the Report.

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar has often said that economic and social investments and people's involvement are essential components of the peace process in the State. The landmark repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, or AFSPA, in 2015 in the State was an outstanding symbol of the success of this policy.

We returned to Tripura in the summer of 2016 to resurvey three villages we had first surveyed in 2005. The principal change was a palpable atmosphere of peace and personal safety in the State, even in its most remote reserved-forest settlements. The progress achieved over the last 10 years in several indicators of human development — especially in education, health, and employment — is the State's peace dividend, and is worthy of public attention.

Let us examine some of these achievements.

Literacy has been described as being "the basic personal skill that underlies the whole modernising sequence." Separatist militancy in Tripura was an obstacle to the spread of literacy and schooling. Progress in literacy has been particularly rapid in Tripura over two decades. According to the Census, the share of literate persons above the age of seven years rose from 73% to 87% between 2001 and 2011. We now have data from surveys conducted in 2005 and 2016 in Khakchang, a fully Scheduled Tribe village in North district, Mainama, a village in Dhalai district whose population is 67% Scheduled Tribe, and Muhuripur, a village in South district.

A measure of progress in schooling of the population in these villages is the number of years of completed schooling among women in the age group 18 to 45 years. In Khakchang in 2005, more than 50% of women in the age group had not completed a year of schooling. By 2016, the median number of completed years of schooling among women in the age group was seven — outstanding progress for a decade. The corresponding figure for Mainama, also a Scheduled Tribe dominated village, was six years in 2005 and nine years in 2016.

Data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) indicate that the infant mortality rate (IMR) in Tripura almost halved between 2005-6 and 2014-15, declining from 51 per thousand live births to 27 per thousand. According to data from the most recent Sample Registration Bulletin, IMR further declined to 20 per thousand in 2015.

Peace and security enable the expansion of employment and livelihoods.

The growth rate of per capita State Domestic Product (SDP) has been over 8% per annum in eight

out of the last 10 years (2005-6 to 2014-15). In the last four years, when per capita Net Domestic Product of India was growing only at around 5% per annum, per capita SDP in Tripura grew at 9 to 10% a year.

For the last five to six years, Tripura has ranked first among the States of India with respect to the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Over this period, the average number of days of employment obtained per household in India ranged between 40 and 50 days. In Tripura, from 2011-12 to 2014-15, the corresponding figure was about 80 days a year. In 2015-16, the number rose to 94 days. The unilateral decision of the Government of India to reduce the allocation of resources for the rural employment guarantee scheme has hit the State Government hard. According to Gautam Das, editor of the Agartala-based daily, *Desher Katha*, the present allocation will be adequate only to create 42 days of employment per household in the current year.

An important feature of Tripura's economy over the last decade has been a rise in labour force participation and work force participation, particularly among women. This is in marked contrast to India as a whole, where data show a decline in female labour force participation and work force participation over time. National Sample Survey (NSS) data show that in rural India, female labour force participation fell from 49% in 2004-5 to 36% in 2011-12. In Tripura, however, over the same period, female labour force participation rose from 17% to 38% (urban areas showed a slightly lower rate of growth than rural areas).

A labour force, by definition, includes those in work and seeking work. The work participation rate (WPR) rose among men and women, rural and urban, over the seven year period. According to NSS data, the female work participation rate in rural Tripura rose from 12% in 2004-5 to 31% in 2011-12. In rural India, it fell from 49% to 35% over the same period. In Tripura, work participation rates rose among males, urban and rural, and among urban females as well.

An important factor in the dramatic rise in work participation rates, especially among women, has been the improvement in the security environment, which encouraged women to enter the labour force in much larger numbers than before. The rise in work and labour force participation rates, particularly among women, is both a positive achievement and a challenge. The challenge is to generate adequate employment opportunities to absorb the increasing number of women who will join the work force. Tripura's path of development is one that respects administrative autonomy for regions where people of the Scheduled Tribes are predominant in the population, and the principle of unity of its diverse people. An inclusive path of development, one that encompasses the poorest in the population and the most far-flung of forest-based human settlements, is a precious legacy. It would be great unwisdom to reverse or disrupt such a path.

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The definition of harassment needs to be constantly updated, and the process for justice made more robust

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