

# 11 Conclusion

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In line with the notion of development in the capability approach, where development is seen as equitable advancement in the richness of human life – which ensures opportunity for all – we set two broad objectives for the Second Human Development Report of Tripura: (a) to systematically develop an understanding in minute detail of the processes of human development in Tripura, and (b) articulate clearly the different agentic roles that have made these developments possible; in other words, it is an attempt towards recognizing the ‘big’ role played by the so-called ‘small’ agents, not easily visible to the larger world. The objectives delineated in the initial proposal aimed to make a modest departure from the established practice of measuring human development in the following way. The First Human Development Report of Tripura not only brought out the developmental achievements of the state clearly but also outlined the challenges that lie ahead. We have intended to extend this line of enquiry by documenting in detail the processes involved in actualizing these achievements. The urgency of such documentation is not only pertinent to Tripura’s furthering its successes, but is also – perhaps more – important for the policy debates and interventions in the field of human development in the country. The importance added to capturing the process aspect of Tripura’s development, alongside updating the measurements, has found reflection in the questions framed in the initial proposal.

Following the approach spelt out in the proposal – i.e., a rigorous analysis of secondary data followed up by a primary investigation in 1000 households across the state – we have devoted substantial time to reading and analysing the data available in the public domain. The findings of the exercise have not only reinforced the account of Tripura’s sustained progress – dealing with several challenges such as higher incidence of social and economic disadvantage, geopolitical and topographical adversities, and so on – but also indicated towards Tripura’s making a positive departure following the line of social justice: unlike many states, even including Kerala and Tamil Nadu – in some social measures – Tripura’s development achievements are found to be more equitable and inclusive. (The much hyped model state of development, Gujarat, is in fact way behind Tripura in several core human development indices.)

The inclusiveness seems to have begun with literacy, with a sustained approach to narrowing down the gaps between the achievements of various social categories – women, Dalits, Adivasis and so on. Commendable as it is, Tripura's acquiring the 5<sup>th</sup> position in the literacy table of 2011 Census is characterized by its remarkable achievement in improving the Tribal literacy rate by 22 percent point; indeed, despite Kerala's overall success in literacy achievements (94 percent as opposed to 87 percent of Tripura) Tripura's literacy rate among the tribals (79 percent) is higher than that of Kerala (76 percent). It has significantly lowered the gender gap in literacy to 9 percent point, which appears to be a distant dream for many Indian states.

As regards the health indicators, Tripura is slightly behind Kerala and Tamil Nadu – the best performing states – but much ahead of the national average. Tripura's achievement in eliminating the practice of open defecation has been remarkable – reducing the proportion of open defecation to 14 percent (as against 53, 43 and 42 percent respectively for India, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, Census 2011) – testimony to the state's strong commitment to realize this crucially important goal. Given the stress on equity, some further interventions, particularly in the area of public health (such as provision of drinking water, establishing more PHCs and so on) should make the state a clear achiever in "ensuring longer and healthy life" of the people.

The achievement in literacy, inter alia, other socially oriented political interventions – including settlement of tribal land issues, decentralisation of power and expansion of autonomy, resolving the ethnic crises, steering alert governance, and so on – seem to have resulted in narrowing the gaps between various social groups in many other development measures.

Let us see for example the housing conditions: 54 percent of the houses in Tripura report the conditions to be "good"; the figure is considerably lower than that in many other states, but what is remarkable is the fact that Tripura records the lowest gaps between various social groups in this regard, and in fact the difference between the average (54 percent) figure and that for the STs (53 percent) is almost negligible (Census 2011).

Effects of similar equity driven initiatives are reflected in the figures pertaining to accessing banking services: the state has not only scored much higher (79 percent of the households availing banking services according to census 2011) than Tamil Nadu and Gujarat (and also

Kerala) in this respect, but has also registered a much narrower inter-community gap as compared to the other states.

Committed initiatives on the part of the state following a line of social justice, have found reflection in its expenditure pattern, with 16 percent of GSDP being spent in the social sector. This has not only resulted in improving the social indicators (education and health) manifold but also seems to have positively spilled over in the economic front; this is best manifested in the state's success in reducing poverty and inequality. Tripura's achievement in poverty reduction, during 2004-05 to 2009-10 (23 percent point), has been remarkable. Also, the efforts in narrowing inequality seems to have started bearing fruit; the rate is still not very high (3 percent point, as against 19 percent point in Kerala during 2004-05 to 2009-10). However, given the fact that during the same period Tamil Nadu's success is almost invisible and Gujarat has tended to follow a reverse route (with a sign of increased inequality), Tripura's achievements offer a lot of new research and policy motivations for continued and serious exploration, analysis and discussion in the field of human development.

Amartya Sen's analysis half a century ago, that social sector investment in Kerala would pay off in the form of improved economic indicators, was vehemently critiqued by almost all the *pundits*; yet, Kerala has proved that prediction to be true. The indications from Tripura reinforce the thesis: its per capita income is much lower – and understandably so – than the advanced states, but the pace of increase is rather quick and promising.

Emphasis of Tripura on equity and justice in its approach to human development seems to have established – and also drawn from – some sort of newer governmentality that has been successful in amalgamating democratic functioning with ensured efficacy. One example of this is the better delivery of public services, namely, education, ICDS, health, food and social security (of course they all need much improvement), and also the crucially important centrally sponsored programmes like NREGS. That the state has taken social policies and public services seriously, unlike many states, is clear from the data on provision of schools, ICDS centres and health sub-centres, food and social security initiatives (although there still lie major gaps, particularly in the provision of primary health centres); school enrolment and attendance, enrolment in ICDS, immunization, and so on (of course with areas of further improvement in efficiency in implementation).

Important as they are, the statistical numbers however, are inadequate to understand the complex operational issues involved in Tripura's experiments that have earned her the distinction of being a "contributor" to fresh insights regarding the theory and practice of development. While making a positive departure from the dominant human development paradigms – Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh trajectories – it has drawn substantially – rather than ignoring – from those experiences; in particular structural forces, such as land concentration, that have a bearing on human development achievements; these larger forces have not escaped the state's policy attention. It is perhaps her internalization of these previously gained experiences in Tripura's concrete situation that has led her to define and re-define several developmental issues, seriously addressing the complexities of social (such as ethnic), economic (such as class divisions) and political (such as party-political dynamics) tensions – individually as well as in combination with each other (such as ethno-political and class-political, political-economical and ethno and geo-cultural) – and finding ways and means to resolve the conflicts, paying heed to both the inherent socio-symmetrical (such as equitability in land distribution and other cooperative behaviours) and other humanitarian elements as well as external interventions.

Nevertheless, as has been reported in the preceding chapters, the story of Tripura's Human Development does not only highlight the distinctive achievements but also draws attention to some major deficiencies, and the probable linkages that caused to curb the progress in certain areas. The present report thus has attempted in each of the chapters to follow a line of recording the successes and pointing to the remaining areas of improvement. The prevalence of gaps – some of which may be easily remedied – alongside the remarkable achievements can perhaps be seen as a result of some unresolved contradictions between the political subjectivity and the social objectivity. To wit, while governmental initiatives that have drawn substantially from a pro-people political philosophical outlook and that made some significant departures, as mentioned above, the process of development, it seems, is yet to free itself from the "implementational" approach to develop substantial reliance upon an agentic approach. In the former, namely, the implementational approach, the government is primarily responsible for delivering the services. No doubt that the government is playing this role with commitment and resultant efficiency. However, once the task stops there, and the political process ceases to facilitate the people to build up a movement through their own agencies, development is bound to stop at the doorstep of "governmentality", keeping the social relationships unchanged. For

example, there is no lack of commitment from the government to make educational facilities available for all the hamlets in the state; but, as regards “spread of education”, which could free the people from the prison of “tradition” and help them choose a progressive path, political imagination seems to have fallen short in grasping the relevance of the task. As a result, not only the quality of teaching and learning in the schools appear to suffer from certain incompetence but also there seems to be a serious lack in creating an overall environment of education in the state, which is manifested in the yet-to-be-grown reading habit among the masses in general. A government can provide such infrastructure for education so as to make the facility accessible for all; but to create real inclination towards education that makes human beings free from all bondages, there is no other way than building up an amalgamated socio-political movement.

Similarly, that there still flow the undercurrents of tension between the tribals and non-tribals can be seen as a result of a partially comprehended objectivity: while government initiatives can narrow down some measurable differences, and in this case has actually done so to a large extent, deep-rooted ethno-cultural differences constructed through the passage of history cannot be eradicated just through governmental service delivery. Rather, the measurable advancements can actually feed the perception of discrimination among the divided groups: while tribals’ enhanced socio-economic status may lead them to evaluate the discriminations in a different – rival – way, the same advancement can make the other – traditionally advantaged – groups envious and even hostile. Here too, political imagination needs to go beyond governmentality to think anew on the complex intertwining of class, ethnicity, culture, language, and gender. The progresses that Tripura has made have created the demand for taking the progresses further – notionally and in practice, politically and socially, and governmentally and through peoples’ agencies, the plausibility of which has been underlined by the various movements, such as the movement for literacy, and social churning, such as the emancipation of the tribals and subsequent negotiations and balancing acts. Small as they are, the agentic components are very much present in Tripura society. Tripura’s human development achievements have perhaps made it mandatory for the political and social actors to recognize with clarity the role of the small agents and their potential role while moving further ahead.