

**TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION:
A STUDY OF TRIPURA TRIBAL AREAS AUTONOMOUS
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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SUBMITTED BY
ANTIARBUM RANGLONG

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UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF
Dr. HARSHA S.



**Department of Political Science
Jadunath Sarkar School of Social Science
Assam University
Silchar: 788011, India
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CHAPTER – VI

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Findings and Recommendations

This chapter presents the major findings. At the end of the chapter, suggestions and recommendations has been made, which draws from the study and analysis of the functioning of TTAADC.

An examination of the powers and functions shows that, there is lack of role clarity among different administrative units of TTAADC. Sub-Zonal Development Office, which is a replica of RD Block in non-TTAADC areas, is found to be a titular body with minimal administrative powers and acute financial constraint. It could be either empowered or restructured.

The process of sharing of Member of District Council (MDC) seats within the Council proof to be vague. Twenty five seats are kept reserved for tribals and three seats are kept unreserved. But, both in the jurisdiction of TTAADC and non-TTAADC areas, there is huge cross-settlement of tribal and non-tribal population. In view of this, tribal groups are expressing apprehensions of losing their reserved seats in future in case of delimitation of MDC constituencies are undertaken. The problem has been faced by BTC of Assam. The BTC accord (2003) made them a dominant minority by giving them special status under the Sixth Schedule. This has been felt as a gross violation of equality and democratic rights by the non-Bodo majority. In fact, there is a continuous clamour from non-Bodo communities within BTC areas for larger representation in the BTC.

Out of twenty eight MDC seats, female were given only three seats. This indicates the abysmal women representation at higher level of TTAADC. No women candidate is found contesting as an independent candidate, because they lack political awareness. Besides, tribal society in Tripura is guided by the social norms that political participation is basically regarded as male related activity. The researcher, in his M.Phil research works on 'Emerging Pattern of Political Leadership among the Halam Community in Tripura' also stated that, women are given less chance to participate in politics. The people had a notion that politics, whose activities are outside the family, should be played by male (A. Ranglong, Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, 2010).

However, one interesting fact is that, at the VC level, 50 percent reservation is given to women, which is a clear sign of equal representation. In this regard, TTAADC is well advanced to other district councils under the Sixth Schedule. Representation of women at the VC level creates enthusiasm among female representatives for active participation in local politics. In this context, Pranab Kumar Panday and Md. Golam Rabbani (2014), in their study on 'Good Governance at the Grass-roots: Evidence from Union Parishads in Bangladesh' also talks of the positive impact of women representation at local government in Bangladesh, and said that both the people and elected leaders have expressed positive views about the participation of women. Introduction of the quota system in local governments improves the situation of women in the political arena, which contributes to greater women's participation at the local level.

The functioning of Block Advisory Committee (BAC) has not been activated and streamlined. After delimitation in 2013, 13 (thirteen) new RD Blocks have been created and among the thirteen, 12 (twelve) RD Blocks could not constitute BAC, as the numbers of VC did not reach the quorum (five VCs). This illustrates that in those VCs where BAC has been dissolved, VC directly comes under the administrative control of Panchayat Samity, which is but against the norms of sixth schedule. If VCs could be administered by Panchayat Samiti, then the role of BAC itself is doubtful. Delimitation of constituency in a democracy is not undemocratic. But, the government should examine all the pros and cons before implementing delimitation. So, TTAADC and the incumbent State government of Tripura are found to be indifferent of the negative consequences of delimitation. It also substantiates that the government is disempowering the powers of TTAADC.

Governor is inclined in nominating MDCs from only two communities - Lushai and Garo. After interacting with some political leaders it is found that, nomination is made by Governor with extensive influence of the incumbent ruling political party CPI(M). Thus, those communities having political bargaining power are found to be continuously nominated. Accordingly, bigger and larger communities like Halam, Kuki, Munda etc, went unnoticed by the ruling political party. Party structure of CPI(M) is very strong in Tripura, having various strata, right from grassroot level. So, those communities having a CPI(M) party membership at a higher stratum of the party structure have, in most cases, the upper hand in influencing party state leadership for political nomination.

Health Department has failed to fulfil the expectations of people in TTAADC. As per CAG reports, expenditure on public health schemes has been considerably reduced. TTAADC is found to be indifferent to public health of rural tribals. Each year there is reports of malaria victims among tribals in Gandachhera Sub-Zone of Dhalai Zone. However, there is a report that Public Health Center in that location has been made functional in principle, but is not in reality. It is suggested that the Council should further take serious measures in improving the health of rural tribals. The State government could encourage the Council to allocate more funds in health sector.

TTAADC have the powers of framing laws on any matter relating to village and town administration, including police, public health, sanitation, social customs and marriage and divorce. But in actual practice, laws that would administer the above aspects, except village administration, are not found in any TTAADC Acts/Rules. Since the District Council has not framed separate land Act, the revenue district administration of State government is authorised for allotment of land in Sixth Schedule areas under 'Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act and Rules, 1960. When the issue is discussed with some Executive Members of TTAADC, they reported the control exercised by incumbent State government. Thus, it indicates the disinclination of incumbent State government to delegate power on the Department of Land Record and Settlement of TTAADC. The basic problem of tribals is directly related to land issue. So, empowering tribals to manage their own affair in regard to land allotment, occupation and use of lands is more significant than other aspect. But TTAADC lacks this power. In this regard, other district councils under the Sixth Schedule have proper regulation of land settlement, substantiated by Acts/Rules. For instance, the Lai Autonomous District Council in

Mizoram have 'Lai Autonomous District' (Land Holding and Settlement) Rules, 2006. The Mara Autonomous District Council of Mizoram also has 'The Mara Autonomous District Council (Non-Agricultural Land Settlement) Act, 2011, and 'The Mara Autonomous District Council (Agricultural Land Settlement) Act, 2011. Similarly, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council in Assam has well established revenue administrative system.

Although, district council is the sole custodian of and entrusted with the task of preservation of society and culture of indigenous people within its territorial jurisdiction, customary laws have not been codified in TTAADC. Law Department of TTAADC has been created in principle, but the department has not taken up codification of customary law. At present, judicial administration of TTAADC is controlled and guided by State government. In fact, it is found that there is no provision for the establishment of VC (Village Committee/Village Council) Court in TTAADC. Thus, judicial system is ignored. The Act/Rules of establishment and administration of VC in Tripura, does not include judicial powers and functions of VC. The District Council should consider and take initiative regarding the codification of tribal customary laws. In this regard, State government could take initiative and facilitate district council to codify customary laws and establish judicial system at grassroot level. For instance, district councils in Mizoram and Meghalaya has a well established system of Village Council and District Council Court.

So, the departments like Law, Land record and settlement and Health have very limited functions. But they are the most important department to preserve tribal culture, tradition, protection of land alienation, and to improve their health status. These three departments should be further empowered. In addition, powers and functions could be further delegated by addition of more departments at the disposal of TTAADC. For instance, district council like Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) and Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) of Mizoram, which are comparatively very small to TTAADC have greater number of departments at their disposal (28 and 23 departments, respectively).

The Council could not generate fund because maximum commercial activities of entire Tripura takes place outside the Council's jurisdiction. For instance, TTAADC's own

revenue resources decreased considerably by 53 percent during 2011-2012 financial year, as compared to previous year. Besides, the State government would not release fund to the District Council as per the budget approved by the Council. Amidst financial constraint, TTAADC officials are unable to utilise fund approved by the State government. This illustrates their incompetency in implementation. Officials of TTAADC headquarters reported that, some departments like Information, Cultural affairs and Tourism (ICA&T), Sports etc, implement works at the end of financial years simply to produce Utilisation Certificates (UCs). State government seems reluctant in financing with adequate fund because TTAADC is incompetent in utilisation of funds and also there is report of rampant corruption.

Transferred fund of State government constituting 40-50 percent (approximately) of TTAADC budget of each financial year, is basically utilised for salaries of deputed staff rather than development purpose. For instance, in 2007-08 financial year, 68.82 percent of transferred fund has been utilised for salary, and again as per 2012-13 budget estimates of TTAADC, only 34 percent of the total transferred fund is estimated to be utilised for development purpose and rest 66 percent for the salary of deputed staff.

From the four selected programs - rubber plantation, jhum cultivation, fish productivity and Kuroiler scheme, it is found that considerable percentage of beneficiaries got selected without any pre-information. This ensures misidentification in selection of beneficiaries. The pre-requisite of decentralised planning is the identification of beneficiaries in the Gram Sansad by involving people and their representatives. Although Gram Sansad were convened to identify the beneficiaries, there were many cases of misidentification of beneficiaries reported in the selected VCs. This is because an objective criterion for the selection of beneficiaries has not been followed.

When asked to beneficiary the reasons for their acceptance of a program without being informed of the selection, they reported that they have no opportunity to select program of their own choice. Beneficiary selection without the knowledge of the concerned person is the mode of selection which is directly against the norms and guidelines. This issue has been taken seriously and further investigation has been done. In spite of the indifference of elected VC Chairpersons in this regard, some clue has been found from informal discussion with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. In some cases,

the information about total number of beneficiaries allocated to VC for a particular program is not freely shared among the locality/villagers. Certain numbers are kept reserved for local party leaders and for their near and dear family members. Selection of beneficiaries which is kept reserved is made in a clandestine way by elected VC Chairperson and Members in collusion with local party leaders. Interestingly, with few exceptions, those beneficiaries who got selected without pre-information are found to have link with local party leaders in some way or the other.

Theories of decentralised governance postulates that by giving more powers to elected representatives, it might offset the influence or control over developmental activities by entrenched local elites. But the documentation of decision-making process in the VCs demonstrates that decisions were taken unilaterally by the VC Chairperson in some cases and in other cases the CPI(M) party leaders at VC level played an important role in the selection of beneficiaries. Such party interference and monopoly over VCs and ADCs negates the benefits of decentralisation to tribals.

The same problem faced by Bangladeshi locality has been discussed by Pranab Kumar Panday and Md. Golam Rabbani, (2014), in their study on 'Good Governance at the Grass-roots: Evidence from Union Parishads in Bangladesh.' In their findings, they highlighted that the poor people seem to lack access to beneficiary selection process and project implementation and beneficiary selection. Thus, elected leaders are more prone to offer opportunities to their political masters and friends or relatives who have helped them during election, or who can offer them a position in the social or political system. Social values, belief systems and norms of rural society do not support the participation of the poor in social and political institutions. Thus, deserved family are often neglected and due importance is given to political party affiliation. As a result, many families who have the capacity in lobbying local political leaders are benefitted consecutively.

Decentralised governance is required to bring about development in terms of fulfilling the needs of the weaker sections of the society like SCs, STs and Women. The documentation of the process of selection of beneficiaries in VCs indicates that majority of the beneficiaries selected were poor. However, there were also cases of non-poor getting the benefits. This calls for strengthening accountability and transparency mechanisms in

TTAADC in order to enable weaker sections among tribals and non-tribals to get the benefits of development.

Huge numbers of beneficiaries reported their lack of awareness in implementation of the program in which they are being selected. Out of the unaware beneficiaries, numbers of them reported that they have not undergone any sort of scheme related training. This indicates the indifference of implementing officials towards tribal people. However, it is also found that few beneficiaries have intentionally skipped program related training organised by concerned department, claiming that it is not helpful as the training is organised for formality. They further reported that going to training is merely to give attendance and therefore, does not make much sense of attending such training. Officials however, reported the uncooperative nature of tribal beneficiaries with the officials. In fact, some tribal beneficiaries have built a wrong concept that assistance given to them is fully subsidies and beneficiary need not take the trouble of recovery.

The delivery of cash to beneficiaries shows that guidelines have not been followed by implementing officials and elected VC Chairpersons. In few cases, disbursement of fund to beneficiary is made through bearer cheque. That is, one person would go to bank and collect the funds for all beneficiaries and deliver them hand to hand. Besides, beneficiaries reported of untimely receiving of program related materials like plant nurseries, which creates unnecessary problems in taking care of those materials. The reason for untimely delivery is because of the negligence of implementing officials and irresponsibility of elected VC Members.

Beneficiaries and elected VC Members reported of insufficiency of unit cost of programs. The word inadequacy is a relative terminology, and it is natural that beneficiaries would want to get more. So, their claim is somewhat far-fetched. However, in programs like 'jhum productivity,' the unit cost is meagre Rs. 700-1000 only, and the amount is insufficient to make the schemes a success. In fact, the highest percentage of beneficiaries claiming 'insufficient' is from 'jhum productivity' scheme. Issue of insufficiency in other selected programs is not valid and hence, failure of those programs could not be attributed to insufficiency of unit cost. Further, analysis revealed that beneficiaries are bound to continue with the inadequate fund received or added and

extended from own sources. In addition, maximum beneficiaries, with few exceptions, reported of not giving any kinds of commission or bribe in implementation.

Causes of failure of programs are not due to one factor. The single most important factor for failure of programs is due to a beneficiary's lack of awareness. Lack of awareness has bearings in all other aspects like malpractice, misappropriation etc, by implementing officials. Another important factor for failure of programs is untimely delivery of fund and materials. This is very acute problems faced by beneficiaries in implementation. Implementing officials should speed up the work so that beneficiaries received essential item in time. In this regard, there is big role of local elected VC chairperson. He/she should communicate with the implementing officials to speed up the works or take necessary action. Lastly, poor supervision of works by officials and VC Members is another cause of program failure. This is very crucial as the tribal needs continuous and rigorous supervision owing to their remote location and general lack of awareness. If the beneficiaries are led free without any official enquiry than there is big chances of program failure.

When the cause of poor supervisory work is further analysed, it has been found that implementing officials generally entrusted the local VC Chairperson to execute the works. As a part of supervisory work, VC Chairperson would collect information from villager (not necessarily a beneficiary), about the status of works rather than personally visiting worksite to make enquiry. Thus, VC Chairperson acts as a medium of communication in between beneficiaries and implementing officials. So, it could be found that there is somehow an act of connivance in between implementing officials and VC Chairperson in regard to supervision of works.

It is found that accountability and transparency mechanism are not strictly enforced at the grassroot level of TTAADC. Decentralisation of power is to some extent practiced in TTAADC, but tribals still lack awareness in regards to schemes and programs. In comparison within the two selected Sub-Zone, Khwmulwng Sub-Zone predominantly inhabited by Tripuri community shows better awareness than Noagang Sub-Zone, which is predominantly inhabited by Ranglong tribe of Halam Community. Since local government institutions have not taken necessary initiatives for enhancing transparency, the perception of rural people regarding local government authorities has remained negative. Few local

elected VC Members in collusion with local party members, would take an opportunity of the ignorance of general public and monopolised the local administration.

The role of CPI(M) political party leader in regards to implementation of programs at grassroot level democracy is very much perceptible. Decision in regards to 'who would get what' is extensively taken by local party leaders through elected VC Members. This is evident from the reports of non-beneficiaries. Local citizens lack interest to attend and participate in village sansad and village sabha. Their participation and interference does not make sense on account of excessive party interference. Dilip K. Ghosh (2008) also discussed the same problems faced by panchayat of West Bengal. He has cited the Reports of the Second West Bengal Finance Commission (2002), which stated, '...the attendance in the meetings of Gram Sansad declined when the participants found that their aspirations could not be fulfilled by the Gram Panchayats...'. There is general assumption that nothing will come out from these meetings. This in turn adds the advantage of local political leaders in monopolising the selection process of beneficiaries.

One important mechanism to check misappropriations in implementation process is the introduction of social audit system. But this mechanism is absent in TTAADC. Under Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District (Administration) Rules, 2016, ZDO could constitute 'vigilance committee' comprising of both officials and non-officials. The ZDO could direct the committee at any time to submit a report on all or any specific aspects of the functioning of VC. But, it is found that ZDO of North Zone has not so far constituted and therefore, the existence of the committee is only in the Act. In case of West Zone, officials reported that it function in principle but is defunct in practice. Accordingly, no official record of the report of the vigilance committee has been found. The reason of not forming vigilance committee is because of disregards of concerned ZDO to grassroot level administration. The ZDO could run the administration against the Act/Rules of TTAADC because of lack of pressure from higher officials. This signifies that local administration of TTAADC is still facing the problems of accountability and transparency, which is the basis of governance.

In respect to general areas (areas outside TTAADC), State government has constituted social audit unit, namely, Society for Social Services Madhya Bharat Chapter (SOSSMBC), a reputed NGO in India. The objective of social audit is to ensure public

accountability in the implementation of projects, laws and policies. Through this mechanism, schemes and programs under MGNREGA, implemented by Tripura is being scrutinised and audited. This social audit mechanism is not applicable to TTAADC as its administration is under the purview of Sixth Schedule. But, financial malfunction and mismanagement of TTAADC suggest that social audit mechanism should also be made applicable to areas of TTAADC, with certain modification if required. This would ensure better functioning of village level administration, and also ensure accountability and transparency in governance. Social audit mechanisms have been enforced in the states like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, and it has proved to be successful in ensuring accountability and transparency at grassroot level.

It is found that the basic causes of poor relationship of VC Secretary with local elected leaders is VC Secretary's personal disinterest in the affairs of local developmental activities. More interesting fact is that as the entire areas of TTAADC are comparatively backward and remote than non-TTAADC areas, it is regarded as a place of punishment. Hence, VC Secretaries deem it condescending to get posted to TTAADC areas and consider such postings and transfers as punishment.

In contrast, VC Secretary reports the poor relationship with VC Chairperson because of 'uncooperative nature of tribal elected VC Chairperson.' This particular reason asserted by VC Secretary is found to be convincing. In many cases tribals are not at all interested in cooperating with government officials. It thereby affects their relationship pattern and poor relationship leads to lack of cooperation between both the parties. The findings of the present study with regard to the uncooperative nature of elected representative at VC level is similar to another study on decentralisation process in Andhra Pradesh by Chinnala Bala Ramulu and Dandeboina Ravinder (2012), who in their Andhra case study stated that the elected representatives do not know how to develop rapport with the Mandal officials and district officials. They think that leveling allegations or speaking critically about the officials in the local general body meeting is the way of controlling the officials. They pointed that this attitude is a major problem in the Panchayat Raj system.

Elected VC Members also reported of poor commitment of VC Secretaries in VC works. One cause of poor commitment is that gram panchayat/VC Secretaries are filled through short term strategies like regularisation of staff that has been recruited in an ad

hoc manner. These peoples lack clear knowledge about the way accounts should be maintained and the details regarding the administration of panchayat/VC. As they lack proper knowledge, they also lose commitment in their daily duties.

Elected VC Members again reported their poor relationship with Sub-Zonal Staff. This is because of absenteeism of officials in their daily duties. Thus, elected VC Chairperson would not visit Sub-Zonal Office because officials are not available during office hour. When asked whether they complained to higher authorities against the absence of SZDO staff. They revealed that they had protested against the absence and their complaints didn't yield any result.

Similarly, Sub-Zonal Development staff also reported that SZDO is a ceremonial office in terms of powers and functions. To authenticate their statement, the actual function of Sub-Zonal Office was further analysed. It was found that, for formality, official staffs were assigned with works but no responsibilities were given. Empirical evidence shows that TTAADC is not inclined to empower Sub-Zonal Office, which is otherwise entrusted to administer numbers of VCs. Such reluctance of TTAADC to share power with the lower level structure undermines grassroot democracy and decentralisation of powers. Pratyusna Patnaik (2013), in her study on 'Scheduled Tribes in Decentralised Local Governments of India,' made an important remark on the issue of institutional and structural challenges. The author stated that decentralised reform is considered as the only hope for activating people's participation and the success of democracy. This requires genuine efforts to establish grassroots democracy with bottom-up approaches of governance. The findings suggest that, in practice panchayats are treated as a bureaucratic extension for implementation of various developmental services, through which state reinforces its top-down approach of development planning. This problem is similar to the problem faced by TTAADC with regards to state government's interference and dominance over tribal administrative set up.

There is one answer in common both from elected VC Members and Sub-Zonal staff. Neither Sub-Zonal staff regularly make visit nor do VC Chairperson and Members visit Sub-Zonal Office. Because of such gap of communication between them, all sorts of malfunctions in administration like inadequate cooperation, inadequate information to elected VC Members, lack of awareness about various development schemes among VC Chairperson, problems of coordination in implementation etc, crop up.

Thus, Sub-Zonal Office, which is an important administrative unit in a decentralisation process, could not fulfill the demands of the locality and constituents. In his study on 'Democracy Compromised: Troubled Northeast in post-independent India,' Jayanta Krishna Sarmah also questioned the functioning of Sixth Schedule in strengthening the planning process at micro level. The author further stated that from the very beginning, the District Councils in the Sixth Schedule areas have become a bone of contention between the State Government and the Council's authorities. Many limitations have come to light in the process of implementation of the Sixth Schedule which fails to satisfy the growing political consciousness of the tribal people.

Recommendations

The following recommendations could be made for better functioning of the district council in Tripura:

- 1) Power and function of different committees and administrative units of TTAADC should be further clarified. The role clarity would provide better efficiency among government officials and thereby leads to better coordination among the functionaries.
- 2) One problem of tribals in India and for that matter Tripura tribals is related to land alienation. So, TTAADC could be further empowered to make laws for allotment, occupation and use of lands. It would facilitate the tribals to live according to their own intellect.
- 3) Power could be further delegated in regards to town administration, including police, public health, sanitation, social customs and marriage and divorce. Customary laws could be codified and all kinds of trials and suits related to their matters could be left to them.
- 4) Empowerment of women should be further encouraged within TTAADC. They should be given opportunity in different political platform. In addition, women oriented development program could be more implemented at village level.

- 5) TTAADC could also be empowered by raising budget. It would ultimately fulfill the hopes and aspiration of the tribals and avoid further anti-government movement that crippled the process of development.
- 6) Initiatives could be taken by TTAADC to mobilise its own resources for fundraising. In this regard, the state government could lower its share of taxes as against Council, in those resources that are within the jurisdiction of TTAADC.
- 7) To check corruptions and leakages at various levels of TTAADC administrative units, social audit mechanism could be implemented. A system of ombudsman could also be introduced to address the queries of citizens.
- 8) Jhum cultivation among the tribals should be further discouraged. Jhumia resettlement project, as already started, could be taken up in a rigorous manner. They could be further engaged in settled cultivation like rubber plantation and other agriculture allied activities.
- 9) The awareness level of the tribals should be augmented in connection to development programs available at their disposal. This would mobilise them to participate in the entire process of implementation and thereby leads to better output.
- 10) Selection of beneficiaries of various schemes would be an important test of the transparency and fairness of the present set up. For each scheme, there should be clear eligibility criteria which can be expressed in terms of criteria for exclusion as well as criteria for inclusion. The selection of beneficiaries should be made by the gram sansad using these criteria. The prioritisation by the gram sansad should be adhered to by the village council except where there is factual error or disagreement. Records of a beneficiary selection should be made a public document. The adherence to such objective criteria nullifies the politicisation of beneficiary selection.
- 11) The opinions expressed by the various groups about the felt needs and aspirations of the community and its problems would be a long catalogue, which no level of government can fulfill at one stroke. Since, resources for village planning will be very limited, an Action Plan could not be a 'shopping list' of all the needs that the villagers would like to see fulfilled. The gram sansad must therefore set priorities and consider

the viability of the needs of tribal people. Programs related to agriculture and horticulture is expected to be helpful for tribals as the nature of works is more or less similar to jhum cultivation. Programs related to entrepreneurship should be implemented with comprehensive training of selected beneficiaries.

- 12) One of the first steps in decentralised planning is to understand the village itself. This would mean gaining sufficient knowledge about the physical and socio-economic conditions in the village in order to obtain useful insights on the current state of affairs and how it can be improved or changed to achieve the desired goals. Elected VC Members need to be sensitised so as to be knowledgeable about the physical and socio-economic conditions of their village. In addition, they should be given comprehensive training in connection to the village level administrative system, so as to make them aware of their duties and responsibilities, including their powers and functions.
- 13) Functionaries of TTAADC should be made sensitise with the tribal's way of life including their basic socio-economic problems. Preference could be given to tribal staff in carrying the developmental works within the district council, as they are expected to be accustomed to the tribal way of life.
- 14) Finally, the government could think of re-framing the Sixth Schedule, which is custodian of the autonomous district council. The present Acts and Amendments in the Sixth Schedule are found only to be a consolatory alternative for the tribals, who are in constant demands of protection from assimilation. It minimally helps in the uplift of tribals.