

Dimensions and Challenges of the 10th Regional Saras Fair, Agartala: A Geographical Analysis

Dhirendra Nath Das Stabak Roy Saptarshi Mitra*

Department of Geography and Disaster Management, Tripura University, Suryamaninagar, Tripura 799022,
India

Abstract

In post independence time one of the major emphases given by the Government of India was to eradicate the poverty of rural poor through different poverty alleviation programmes like Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). In SGSY scheme the rural people belonging to same economic background having a common desire to work together were organised in small informal groups to start employment generating activities are known as Self Help Groups (SHG). Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India organises annual sale cum exhibition fair in different regions to provide a platform to sale and promote the products produced by the SHG members. Regional Saras Fair, Agartala is an annual phenomenon since 2006 which is playing an important role for the folk artisans of Tripura to sale the products of rural cottage industries in the urban market. The present study tries to highlight the nature and dimension of Saras fair and socio-economic development of the SHG members. Also explain future strategies for development of the Saras fair as well as the participating SHGs. The methodologies that have taken to carry out this study is extensive literature review to gather knowledge about different aspects and dimensions of poverty alleviation programmes, collection of primary data by using structured schedule through stratified random sampling techniques, 86 number of participating SHGs interviewed. Secondary data has been collected from the District Rural Development Office and Govt. websites. Saras Fair have opened a new dimension in promotion of rural products and encouraged the participants and other stakeholders in the development of rural products which has to achieve poverty free nation. Thus, formation of stable market for the SHG products may solve the rural poverty problem.

Keywords: Self Help Group, SGSY, Saras Fair, Rural Development

1. Introduction

The Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) is aimed at assisting the poor families (Swarojaris) above the poverty line by ensuring appreciable sustained level of income over a period of time. This objective is to be achieved by inter alia organising the rural poor into Self Help Group (SHGs) through the process of social mobilization, their training and capacity building and provision of income generating assets (MoRD, 1999).

Self-Help Group may be defined as a self-governed, peer controlled information group of people with similar socio-economic background and having a desire to collectively perform common purpose. The District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) are entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the SGSY in India and different Banks provide financial aid or loans to the SHGs for starting employment generation activities. Saras Fair is being organised to give exposure to rural artisans (entrepreneurs) dealing with SGSY to develop markets for products manufactured by SHG members. This initiative was taken by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India in the direction of promoting rural products and building capacities of Swarozgaris or SHGs since 1999-2000. It was organised, for the first time, with a view to give exposure to rural artisans/entrepreneurs/ officials dealing with SGSY to a major international event in the country to develop markets for products manufactured by beneficiaries of the programmes of the Ministry and to create awareness amongst urban consumers of Delhi and surrounding areas about rural products. SARAS was promoted as an umbrella brand for promoting all the rural products.

It has opened a new dimension in the promotion of rural products and encouraging swarozgaris and other stakeholders in the development of rural products/artisans. Saras fair has been able to demonstrate the capacity of the rural poor to produce goods for sale in global market. The fair provides a forum for the Self-Help Group of the SGSY beneficiaries, rural artisans and crafts men to display and sell their products, earn additional income, and gain valuable exposure of national and international levels. This exhibition-cum-sale covers a wide range of products from all over the country and paves the way for developing linkages with the buyers. The success of the SARAS fair lies in the wholehearted participation of the artisan community from all parts of the country.

In Tripura also the Regional Saras fair has been going on since 2006 providing a platform for the SHGs to exchange their views and interacting with other SHGs as well as buyers and other line departments and selling their finished products. SARAS 2015 was another event in the chain for assisting these artisans, opening new opportunities for them, improving their awareness level and exposing the richness of products from rural poor to the huge urban markets.

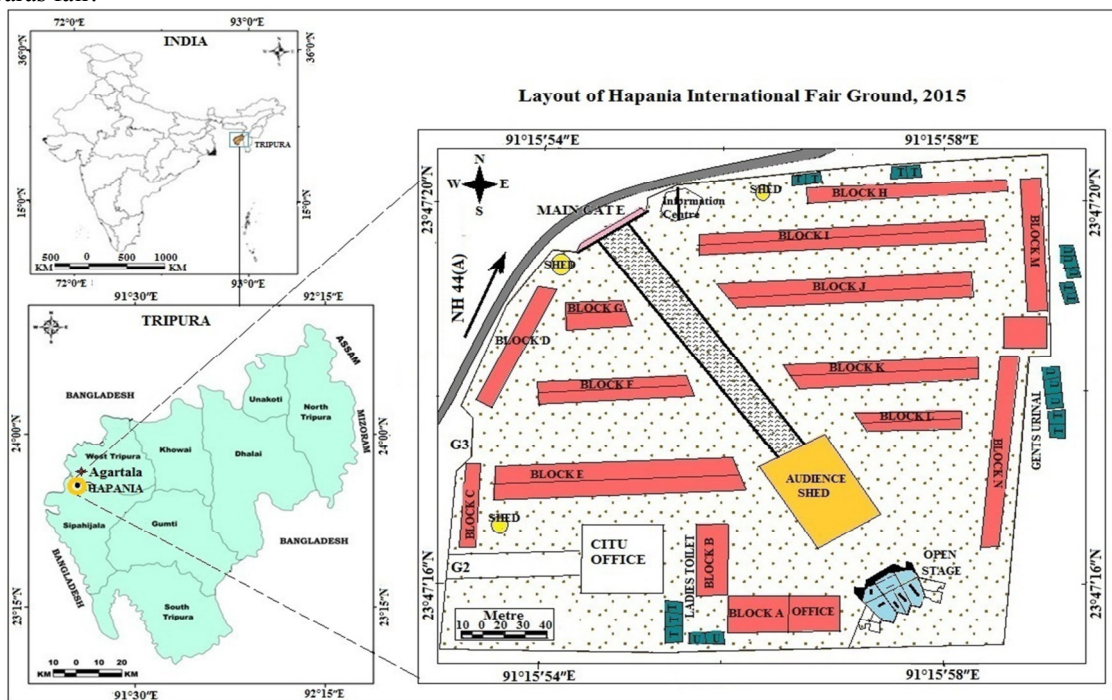
2. Objectives

The objectives of the present study includes-

- 1. To highlight nature and dimension of 10th Saras Fair 2015, Agartala,
- 2. To explain Socio-economic dimension of 10th Saras Fair,
- 3. To trace out the problems of the fair and suggest few strategies for future development of the Saras Fair as well as the participating SHGs

3. Location of the Study Area

The 10th Regional Saras Fair 2015 was held during 3rd -15th January, 2015. This Saras Fair has a fixed period of time (10 to 15 days) for the SHGs, organised by the Rural Development Department, Government of Tripura, with 90 per cent financial help from Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India. The venue of the 10th Regional Saras Fair 2015, Agartala was at the Hapania International Fairground located about 6 km away from Agartala, Capital City of the State, along the National Highway 8 (Fig.1). The Fair ground is well organised with the capacity of more than 430 stalls adequate open space for parking within and outside the fair ground. Space was also available in the outside for parking of vehicles for visitors, vehicular movements was easy due to plain surface. Organising agency (District Rural Development Agency under Department of Rural Development, Government of Tripura) provided drinking water facility, separate toilets for ladies and gents, well connected electricity. A fire brigade machine and medical facilities were also duly arranged by the management of Saras fair.



1 Location Map of the Study Area

4. Methodology and Database

Methodology contains a great importance as it determines the whole design of any study. The methodology is to carry out the study has categorised into three stages viz. Pre-field stage, Field stage and Post-field stage. In the Pre field stage, Govt. websites and a number of literature reviews have been done to gather knowledge about different aspects and dimensions of poverty alleviation programme like SGSY.

In field stage, among the total 430 participating SHGs with varying categories shops in 10th Regional Saras Fair 2015 Agartala, 86 SHGs were selected through stratified random sampling technique. Personal interviews of the participated members of these 86 SHGs have been done with a structured schedule which contains proper parameters. Some secondary data have been collected from the District Rural Development Agency Office of West Tripura District and Government websites.

In the post field stage the report has been prepared for the final presentation of the whole study. With the help of GIS software (Arc GIS 9.3) layout map of fair ground has been prepared.

5. Significance of the Study

Poverty alleviation is one of the major challenging issues in India. To overcome the problem of poverty

especially rural poverty many policies and programmes in the post-independence period have been implemented. Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) is one of the major programmes to improve the livelihood of the rural poor people through Self Help Group movement. This is a holistic programme covering all aspects of self-employment through some organisations of the poor into Self Help Groups, by giving them proper training to their skill, management training, training in accounting, guiding them in all perspectives, introducing them with banks for credit, aiding them with Government subsidy, technology and infrastructure and marketing facility. (The fund is shared by the Centre and the State in the ratio of 75: 25 for North-Eastern States it is 90:10). Marketing of the SHGs products is though the responsibility of SHGs yet the Government help the SHGs organise yearly Saras Fair in every States and sometimes internationally for providing platform to the groups for exhibition and sale their products. This Saras Fair is one of the major sales cum exhibition programme of the products produced by the SHGs as well as create a market and platform of promotion. The aim of the fair is to open a new dimension in promotion of rural products and encouraging participants and other stakeholders in the development of rural products. Saras Fair targets to provide a platform not only for direct sales in rural markets, but also for giving exposures to rural artisans or entrepreneurs in different aspects of marketing and developing linkages with other markets and organisations.

6. Discussion and Finding

The economic empowerment of the Self Help Group members (SHGs) under the SGSY scheme goes through some stages viz- group formation, capital formation by monthly savings of SHG members and revolving fund, training in management, accounting, skill development and taking up of livelihood activity for income generation. The members of SHGs have to practice savings and inter-lending among members to grow the habit of thrift and credit among the members and based on the performance the 1st graded SHGs were assisted through bank loans and subsidy for income generation. Saras Fair is organised to give exposure to rural artisans, entrepreneurs specially SHGs. The participants are bringing different impressive ranges of rural products which include handicrafts, textiles, artwork, furniture, agro based and agro allied products and items of daily use etc. Saras Fair 2015, is an event in the chain for assisting SHGs and is an aim for opening new opportunities for them.

SARAS 2015 was another event in the chain for assisting rural artisans, opening new opportunities for them, improving their awareness level and exposing the richness of products from rural poor to the huge urban markets. In Tripura also the Regional Saras fair has been going on since 2006 to till now, successfully organising 10th number of Saras fair. It provides a platform for the SHGs to exchange their views and interacting with other SHGs as well as buyers and other line departments and sale their finished products.

Table. 1. District-wise Sample participation of SHGs in Saras fair

Districts	No. of Sample Participation	Percentage of Sample Participation
North Tripura	13	14.94
South Tripura	6	6.90
West Tripura	35	41.38
Dhalai	4	4.60
Unakoti	8	9.20
Gomati	4	4.60
Khowai	4	4.60
Sepahijala	6	6.90
Other States	6	6.90
Total	86	100.00
Source: Primary Survey, 2015		

From 1st April 2001 up to 31st March 2013, about 40,441 SHGs have been formed through DRDAs different districts of Tripura. In Tripura total 15,321 SHGs have been identified as ST groups while 7450 as SC groups, 6094 as OBC groups and 2846 as Religious Minority groups. The 8730 groups which are composed of mixed category of people are categorised as other SHGs. SGSY attempts to ensure up-gradation of technology in the identified key activities. The technology intervention seeks to add value to the local resources, including processing of the locally available materials from natural and other resources for producing better upgraded products for promotion of marketing of the goods produced by the SHGs. The SHGs also participate in exhibitions, local and district melas as well as in State, National and International levels to display and sale goods produced by them. The administration also tries to explore development of marketing of SHG products within and outside India

All eight districts of Tripura and many of states of the country namely West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland participated in 10th Regional Saras fair held in Agartala, Tripura. (Table-1). The participation of SHGs is the highest from West Tripura District due to good road connectivity, nearness of the fair premises and frequency of variables, highest population as well as concentration more SHGs in the district.

The number of participation of SHGs in the second and third position is North Tripura and Unakoti Districts respectively (15 and 9 per cent) due to district level infrastructural development. Participation rate of Dhalai, Gomati and Khowai District is about 4.60 per cent. On the other hand, Sipahijala and South Tripura District had about 6.9 per cent participation rate in the fair.

Table.2. District wise Sales Summary in Saras fair

Districts	Total Sales()	% of Sales	Average Daily Sales(in Rs)
North Tripura	949943.00	5.37	73072.5385
South Tripura	1804470.00	10.19	138805.385
West Tripura	6084070.00	34.37	468005.385
Dhalai	640459.00	3.62	49266.0769
Unakoti	323382.00	1.83	24875.5385
Gomati	1099043.00	6.21	84541.7692
Khowai	1634109.00	9.23	125700.692
Sepahijala	1599606.00	9.04	123046.615
Other States	1011220.00	5.71	77786.1538
Projects	2554501.00	14.43	196500.077
Total	17700803.00	100.00	1361600.2
Mean	2212600.375		
SD	1644597.916		

Source: Primary Survey, 2015

During the Saras Fair 2015, the participating SHGs sale their products, it is found that the highest sale claim by the participating SHGs (Table 2) from West Tripura District. The lowest selling recorded during this fair by the SHGs from Unakoti District (Table 2). Interestingly the SHGs participating under different projects recorded second highest sale (Table 2). This may be happening due to their products variety, market based/demand based products, more support from the projects as well as their locational advantages in the fair. Because of low budgeted sub standard promotional policy not able to cover the fair by the television or print media Nationwide SHGs.

Table.3 Activity-wise Sample Participation of SHGs in Saras fair

Activities	Number of SHGs	% of participating SHGs
Clothings	21	24.42
Wolen Clothings	3	3.49
Cane work/Crafts	2	2.33
Bamboo work/Craft	10	11.63
Wooden Items	1	1.16
Jute crafts	3	3.49
Ornaments	2	2.33
Toy Making	2	2.33
Cap Shop	1	1.16
Earthen Idol	1	1.16
Carpet Works	2	2.33
Gift Items	2	2.33
Cup Plate	1	1.16
Flower Nursery	4	4.65
Pickle Making	1	1.16
Honey Making	2	2.33
Fast Food	8	9.30
Vegetable Vending	7	8.14
Tea Leaves	2	2.33
Projects	1	1.16
Banks/Financial Institutions	1	1.16
Offices	1	1.16
Medicinal Plants	1	1.16
Grocery	2	2.33
Kitchen ware	2	2.33
Book Shop	1	1.16
Fruits	1	1.16
Black Smith	1	1.16
Broom Sticks	1	1.16
Total	86	100.00

Source: Primary Survey, 2015

It was observed that maximum SHGs were sale traditional cloth, the second position occupied by the bamboo handicrafts (because Tripura is the homeland of many tribal community and they are well known for their traditional weaving and craft works) and third position by the fast food products It was found that the micro credit linkage, micro enterprise through the SHGs and the promotion of marketing through Saras Fair supplies fresh oxygen and rejuvenate the traditional handloom and bamboo craft industry in rural areas which are indigenous products of the people of Tripura. (Fig 2) clearly indicate that the major portion of the products which were sold in the Saras Fair 2015 was actually produced in small scale village industry level

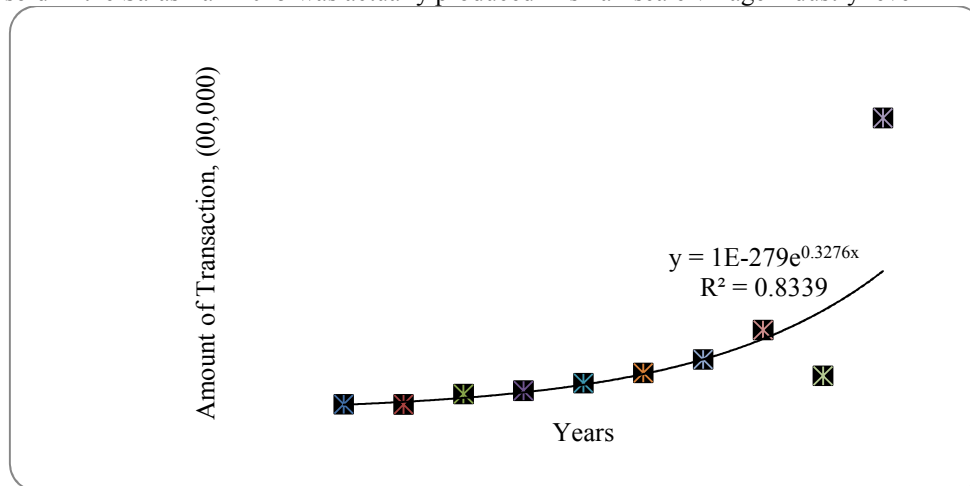


Fig: 2. Yearly Total Amount Transactions in Regional Saras Fairs, Agartala during 2006-2015

This graph (Fig 2) highlights that the trend of total amount of transaction since its inception to 2015. (Fig 2) shows that each year barring 2007 the amount of sale went up till 2015, (the peak selling year), which means the selling trend is impressive. This may be due to increase of variety of products, more visitors and increase of participating SHGs due to changing market nature, customer behaviour or good advertising and Govt. initiatives. On the other hand, during the year 2014, total sale decreased drastically. The reasons behind this may be due to less advertisement, transition period of SGSY/NERLP-NRLM, less presence of Volume of product, less gathering of visitors or less no of participating SHGs or earlier location of Saras fair.

Years	No. of SHGs	Percentage of Participating SHGs
0 to 3	14	16.28
4 to 7	23	26.74
Above 7	49	56.98
	86	100.00

Source: Primary Survey, 2015

It was found that SHGs participation active for more than seven years is maximum in this Saras Fair and less than three years old SHGs participation is less (Table 4). This may be happening because of selection criteria, old groups are capable for production and they have reached in the maturity level or may have received bank loan for different IG activities etc. In the same way, maximum participated SHGs took part more than three times in the Saras Fair. The reasons behind this may more benefitted achieved through this Saras Fair Table 5).

Table 5. Duration of Participating SHGs in the Saras fair

Duration	Number of SHGs	Percentage of Participating SHGs
1st Time	20	23.26
2nd time	14	16.28
3rd time	14	16.28
More than 3rd time	38	44.19
	86	100

Source: Primary Survey, 2015

7. Problems Identified in the Saras Fair

7.1 Size of the Stall

In Saras Fair, two types of stalls; are provided one Small (5feet x 15feet) which is too small to display all items

for attracting people and the other is Medium size (10feet x15feet) which may somehow manage to accommodate and display greater volume of products. Due to small area many SHGs were not capable to store and display all types of products. The small size of stalls may be one of the causes of lesser sales in this fair.

7.2 Location of the Fair

The 10th Regional Saras Fair was held at the Hapania International Fairground, West Tripura District which is located about six kms away from the heart of Agartala City. Due to the outward location of the fairground, this fair could not attract more people. This place is connected with Gomati, Sepahijala and South Tripura Districts through the NH 8. Due to rarity of communication (just opposite side of the city) visitors from North, Unakoti, Dhalai and Khowai Districts did not come to the fair in large number as well as the number of participation of SHGs of those districts were less.

7.3 Selection of Participation

SHG's has been selected block wise for participation in Saras fair. Selection process and mode of selection should base on activities undertaken by the groups. But majority number of SHGs are not interested to undertake the initiatives and entrepreneurship of attending the stalls and staying away from homes to Hapania during the period of the fair.

7.4 Accommodation:

Accommodation facility is very essential for the participating SHG members which are generally arranged by the host organization. Adequate accommodation is not available for the participants due to lack of availability of space and non-availability of low cost hotels, guest houses etc. This was also a drawback of fair. In future the administration should take note of it and take necessary steps so that such problem does not shown in future.

7.5 Promotion and Advertisement

According to the Ministry of Rural Development, Saras Fair is a promotional exhibition of products of SHGs, but process of promotion cannot take place without proper promotional strategy. Advertisement is one of the major promotional tools of marketing. Mass media especially television forecasting and news coverage was not adequately found in 10th Saras Fair. Few regional (Agartala based) news channels however forecast the lectures delivered by Government official or organizing committee but there was no focus on products of SHGs.

7.6 Product Scale:

In Saras Fair different SHGs come with diverse products. But it is very difficult to promote all products with equal importance.

7.7 Language

Some Kokborok speaking SHGs come from interior of the villages had faced difficulties to explain or convince Bengali speaking customers due to language difference. The Saras Fair organisers may provide some multi lingual person for Kokborok speaking group

7.8 Intensity of Visitors

The flow of visitors to the Saras Fair was low due to the location of the fair ground. It was observed that people are less interested to visit the new venue i.e. the Hapania International Fairground. As visitors and sale becomes less the SHG members become less interested in participating in the Saras fair.

8. Prospects, Future Dimension of Saras Fair

Main motto of Saras Fair is to encourage the SHGs to sale their products which will usher better economic development among the swarozgary. Saras Fair has been able to demonstrate the ability of the rural poor to produce quality goods for sale in urban, metropolitan as well as international markets. Saras Fair has opened a new dimension in promotion of rural products and encourages the participants and other stakeholders in the development of rural products which may help achieving poverty alleviation indirectly. But until and unless definite arrangements are made to capture stable urban or international market for the products of rural artisans, it is very difficult to success and cannot solve the poverty scenario of rural poor. Ten days fair may temporarily help in promotion of SHGs and their financial development, future Saras Fair and the SHG programme largely depends on the creation of national or international markets for SHG products in a constant manner.

9. Conclusion

The success of every programme depends upon the collective efforts of all stakeholders. Saras Fair also emphasises on convergence with various schemes of Rural Development along with line departments or

ministries to strengthen the existing occupations of the rural poor. It is imperative that DRDA, banks and other institutions which are involved in the promotion of SHGs should understand their responsibility towards society. Hence it is essential that there should be proper coordination and cooperation to fulfil the objectives of the poverty alleviation programmes. The SHGs should also be encouraged to undertake some innovative activities which can give them more earnings. This will also provide wide scope to SHGs to improve their awareness level and exposing the richness of products from rural poor to the huge urban markets

References

- Debbarma, B. & Goswami, P.J. (2013). Economic Up-liftment of Tribal Population in Tripura Through Tribal Self Help Groups, *Indian Journal of Dalit and Tribal Studies and Action*, 2 (2), 18-24.
- Garikipati, S. (2012). Microcredit and Women's Empowerment: Through the Lens of Time-Use Data from Rural India, *Development and Change*, Institute of Social Studies, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK, 719-750.
- Jain, P. (2012). *Self Help Groups: Economic and Social Empowerment of Tribal Women*, Arise Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi.
- Mehta, S.K., Mishra, H.G. & Singh, A. (2011). Role of Self Help Groups in Socio-Economic Change of Vulnerable Poor of Jammu Region, *International Conference on Economics and Finance Research IPEDR vol.4*, IACSIT Press, Singapore.
- Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (2011). *Northeast Rural Livelihood Project: Social Assessment and Tribal Development Framework*, Govt. of India, New Delhi.
- Ministry of Rural Development (1999). *Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana: Guidelines*, Government of India, New Delhi.
- Ministry of Rural Development (2012). *National Rural Livelihoods Mission: Briefing Book*, Government of India, New Delhi.
- Ministry of Rural Development, (2014). *Annual Report 2012-2013*, Government of India, New Delhi.
- Neogi, D., & Dey, A. (2013). Work Participation of Women in Self Help Groups and Resultant Impact on Vulnerability: A Case Study from North-East India, *Paripex-Indian Journal of Research*, 2, (10), 194-197.
- Tapan, N. (2010). *Micro Credit, Self Help Groups and Women Empowerment*, New Century Publications, New Delhi.
- Verma, N.K., Pandey, D.K., & Upadhyay, A.D. (2013). Performance Evaluation of Fishery Based Self Help Groups in West Tripura, *Indian Research Journal Ext. Education*, 13(3), 15-18.

Dhirendra Nath Das was born in 1st September, 1973 at Lakhimpur District of Assam, India, He had completed his Graduation in Humanities from Darrang College, Tezpur Assam in the year 1994. He had completed Post Graduation in Geography from Cotton College, under Gauhati University in the year 1997. At present, he is perusing Research under the supervision of Dr. Saptarshi Mitra, Assistant Professor, Department of Geography & Disaster Management, Tripura University, Tripura, India.

Stabak Roy is an ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Science Research) Project Fellow in the Department of Geography and Disaster Management, Tripura University. He did his BA in Geography at University of Calcutta in 2012 and MA in Geography and Disaster Management at Tripura University in 2014. His research and publication interests include Railway Infrastructure, Transport Planning and Tourism.

Dr. Saptarshi Mitra is presently, serves as an Assistant Professor in Tripura University in the Department of Geography & Disaster Management. Dr. Mitra completed his Master degree from Calcutta University and did his Ph.D. from the Calcutta University too. His research interested in Regional Planning, Rural and Urban development and Transport Planning and Management