The Tripura branch of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (KGNMT)  
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The author gives an account of the activities of KGNMT for the socio-economic development of poor, women and children apart from its efforts for peace in Tripura.

Tripura is located in the south west of Assam and is surrounded on three sides by Bangladesh. This state has 856-km long border with Bangladesh and also has border with Assam and Mizoram. The peculiar position of the state causes difficulties in communication. Over 60% of the total area is classified as forest area, leaving less than 27% area for cultivation. Due to the great inflow of population from Bangladesh at the time of Partition, Tripura has become the most populous state after Assam in the eastern region.

According to census report, 31% of the total population is ST and 80% people live in the rural areas. Excessive pressure on available agriculture land has changed the pattern of land holding. Most of the tribal people are agricultural labourers and have no land of their own.

There was no organised industrial growth in the state. A great number of people are living below poverty line. The state is endowed with vast green forest and oil resource. The sex ratio, child mortality rate and life expectancy in the state is higher than the other states of India. Poverty and unemployment are serious problems apart from dowry death, child marriage and Daini killings.

Against this backdrop, The Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust set up its branch in Tripura on May 27, 1994 to work for the promotion of the socio-economic development of downtrodden women and children living in remote villages. Well-known social worker, late Anurupa Mukherjee, had made relentless efforts to establish a branch in Tripura.

From its inception, the branch has taken up a number of programmes to achieve its objectives. The branch runs four Balwadi centres, three schools under Sarba Siksha Abhiyan and one creche in distant areas. Every year it organises awareness camps, workshops and rallies to empower women. It has organized several vocational training programmes for unemployed women keeping in view local needs. Nearly 100 self-help groups have been organised in three blocks of the West district by the branch to make the women self-reliant. Every year it organises Mahila Mela to promote indigenous handicrafts and folk culture.

Mahila Shanti Sena

The whole north-eastern region is affected by insurgency. Normal life of common people in Tripura is disturbed. The people are leading a life under the fear of the gun. In this situation, Sarvodaya Ashram and K.G.N.M.T. initiated a programme named Mahila Shanti Sena for restoration of peace in the land.

Tripura branch of K.G.N.M.T. began its peace work by organising a one-day training camp on the 21st August, 2001 at Agartala. Sri Shankar Das,
chairperson, Agartala Municipality, attended the occasion as chief guest. Many eminent persons of Tripura attended the meeting. Sixty-six rural women participated in this training camp. The project started formally from the training camp held on 4th February, 2004 at Agartala for five days. Sixty-seven women took part in the camp. Acharya Rammurtiji of Sarvodaya camp and R.N. Upadhyay and Smt. Radha Bhatta, secretary, K.G.N.M.T. participated in the training programme. Honorable governor Misses Manju Sahay inaugurated the camp. The MSS dispersed from the camp with a pledge to establish peace. After this programme another training camp was organised in the village, Lefunga, under Mohanpur block. Ninety tribal women participated in the camp. At present arrangements are being made for a one-day camp at Takerjola block which is a highly sensitive block.

A one-day camp was organised on the 6th February, 2005 as the annual day of MSS project at Agartala Press Club. Chief Minister Shri Manik Sarkar inaugurated the camp. Altogether 153 MSS activists from remote villages took part in the conference. Sixty new MSS took pledge to abide by Shanti Sena objectives. After this conference a peace march of 250 women was taken out with placards bearing slogans in support of peace. Trained MSS activists are working at present at three blocks of West Tripura district and they are trying to build healthy neighbourhood. The Tatpar Shanti Sena takes up door-to-door campaign against the use of drug and alcohol with the help of local panchayats. They are also trying to motivate tribal women to discard the dealing in country liquor and choose alternative method of earning by forming self-help group. MSS is playing effective role in the resolution of family disputes through peaceful discussion and meetings and has raised voice against dowry system and child marriage. Rural women are encouraged to become self-reliant and create joint capital through small savings by forming self-help groups. In all respects, MSS is trying to create an atmosphere of peace and amity so that the culture of peace prevails in every sphere of life.