

An Account on the Tribal Uprisings in Tripura (1860-1943): Contemporary to the Freedom Movement in India

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ABSTRACT

During the British occupation, Tripura was a princely state that paid regular tribute to the British government. In 1871, the government appointed a political agent in the princely state of Tripura. However, the monarchs of Tripura not only encouraged planters from Noakhali and Chittagong to ensure a steady supply of cash from established farming, but they also desired Bengali people for administrative purposes. Furthermore, the monarchs encouraged Bengali farmers to inhabit forest tracts in their realm. Thus, the rulers harboured animosity against the non-indigenous, who were seen as 'outsiders' by the local indigenous since they took responsibility for their difficult predicament. The rulers of princely Tripura gradually began to encounter revolts from various tribal populations as royal officials attempted to levy massive taxes on them and reserve woods for the state capital. As a result, as the concept of nationalism was gaining traction in India and Indians revolted against British tyranny, indigenous communities in Tripura were also battling for their rights against British-supported royal authorities. My case study will provide insight on the causes and repercussions of Tripura's tribal uprisings, which also contributed to the transformation of the princely state's socioeconomic and political landscape.

Keywords: Tribal Uprising, Tripura, draconian rule.

INTRODUCTION

Mythological description in *Vishnupuran* depicts that Kirat is situated in the east of the Indian sub-continent and they were form Lauhitya dynasty. Then with the course of time Kirat changed in to Tripura. The genesis of the name Tripura occurred from different sources. Mythology suggested that Tripura came from "*Triprashur*" or from the name of goddess "*Tripurashundari*". Again, it is also popular that the origin of the name of the state is connected to the name of Tripur, who founded this kingdom and also related with Dhurya. According to the legends Dhurya was the banished son of the Yayati, the king of lunar race.

In the historical chronicle of Tripura 'Rajmala' it is mentioned that People from Tripuri or Tipra community used to call water as 'Twi' in their language and gradually 'Pra' enjoined to it and it became 'Twipra'. After several reconstruction and deconstruction of this word 'Twipra' it became Tripura. Again, in the ancient history book of Arakan(presently the Rakhine State in Myanmar), 'Rajowang', Tripura is mentioned as 'Thurtan' and 'Takleng' was called by Manipuris instead of Tripura during early period. Tripura was reffered as 'Jajinagar' or 'Jajnagar' by the Muslim Historians like Minhaj-i-Siraj.

Though the British said they would not interfere but as the time passed they breached their commitment and started interfering even in the hill administration. During the late 60s of 19th century they started to interfere over the hill portion of the then Tipperah which was solely under the control of the Maharaja of Tripura. In 1870 the British scrapped the independence of hill Tripura or ‘*Swadhin Tipperah*’ by imposing the ‘Nazrana’ resolution which mentioned that *Triperrah* wouldn’t be mentioned as *Swadhin Tipperah* or *Independent Tipperah*. As Birchandra Manikya was already having a rough situation in ascending the throne he did not oppose the resolution. Lastly, a British Political agent was appointed for hill Tripura in 1871A.D. during the reign of Maharaja Birchandra Manikya.

BRITISH RELATIONSHIP WITH TRIPURA

Kings of Tripura played a dual role in ruling ‘Hill Tripura’ and Chakla roshanabad since Mughal period to India’s independence. They acted as king in the hill portion of Tripura but were remained zamindar in the plain fertile portion called Chakla roshanabad. In 1761 when British came in to contact with Tripura they found out this dual ruling system and gradually they gained the authority in the plain land.

Chakla roshanabad was a very fertile land and W.W Hunter opined that the Chakla roshanabad was the most valuable portion of Tripura and this place yielded larger revenue than the whole Tipperah kingdom. This land was comprised of Noakhali, Tipperah, Sylhet and Brahmanbaria territories.

Internal dispute among the royals of Tripura was very common. During the reign of Dharma Manikya , Chhatra Manikya’s great grandson Jagat Manikya invaded Tripura and also taken Mir Habib, the dewan of Neobat of Dhaka and Aka Saddak, zamindar of Baldakhal as his companions. Shuja-ud-din Khan aslo, the then Nawab of Bengal, also supported them. Hence, in the battle of Comilla Dharma Manikya was defeated and lost his position in the plain area. But interestingly the hill area remained intact and he fled there. Thus in 1733 the plain land became a part of Nawab of Bengal. Shuja-ud-din named that fertile area as ‘Chakla roshanabd’ in which ‘Chakla’ meant round and ‘Roshanabad’ meant lands of lights. Mir Habib conferred the title of ‘Raja’ to Jagat Thakur and he became Jagat Manikya. But he only succeeded the plain land as it was under Nawab’s control, now he became the zamindar of land that had to pay annual land revenue to the Nawab of Bengal. Hence forth, this administrative part of the Tripura kingdom converted in to a separate zamindari with an annual payment of revenue. As the Nawab of Bengal decided to award back the zamindari to Dharma Manikya, Jagat Manikya could not able to remain as the ruler of the plain area for a long period of time.

Mukunda Manikya succeeded the place of Dharma Manikya. During mid-18th century Samsheer Ghazi attacked the weak kings of Tipperah and captured the whole area along with the fertile plain region by paying a hefty amount of revenue to the Nawab of Bengal. Samsheer Ghazi, who was portrayed as dacoit by some scholars but also some of them, sketched his character as a rebel. He was described as a messiah for the people of Tipperah who were oppressed under the family feud among Jay Manikya, Bijay Manikya and Indra manikya. But Mir Qasim did not like the popularity of Ghazi and with the charge of anarchy he brutally killed him after capturing. Then Krishna Manikya ascended the throne. But very soon a dispute broke in to Mir Qasim and Krishna Manikya over the issue of revenue.

During that period, British already have established the administrative setup at Chittagong on 8th November 1760. Hence, Mir Qasim asked for the military assistance from British and they provided the aid under the command of Lt. Mathews.

British became the authority of the plain fertile land i.e. Chakla roshanabad when Krishna Manikya surrendered to British instead of surrendering to the Nawab of Bengal. A treaty was signed between

British and Krishna Manikya in which British military asserted that they would not interfere in the internal affairs of Tripura, especially in the hill area. Thus British made their first foot step in the region of Tripura.

Though English Government said they would not interfere but as the time passed they forgot about their commitment and started interfering even in the hill administration. During the late 60s of 19th century they started to dominate over the hill portion of the then Tripura which was solely under the control of Maharaja of Tripura. At first the Lt. Governor of Bengal scrapped the independence of Triperrah by passing a resolution that from then onwards Triperrah wouldn't be mentioned as 'Swadhin Triperrah' or Independent Tripperah. Next they imposed 'Nazrana' rule on the Tripperah Kings. Lastly by appointing British Political agent in Tripperah during the reign of Birchandra Manikya they ultimately confiscated the independent status of the kings of Tripura.

It was really interesting that the same British Government who did not want to conquer the place in later stage they became very active in acquiring the same.

REVOLTS AGAINST THE MONARCHY BEFORE 19TH CENTURY

The historiography of Tripura Kingdom, 'Rajmala ba Tripurar Itihash' written by Kailash Chandra Singha, mentioned about a mythological description of uprising by the subjects in ancient period. According to Kailash Chandra Singha there was a very cruel King named Tripur. And he was the one who changed the name 'Kirata' to Tripura and also mentioned his subjects as 'Tripura Jati'. He was indulged into many illegal worldly pleasures along with expeditions. His cruelty made the lives of the people of the land unbearable. Naturally a fire of revolt started to evolve among the subjects and for the same reason they started to pray the Lord Shiva to rescue them from the torture. According to 'Rajmala' Lord Shiva was satisfied with the prayer of the people and he with his '*trishula*' killed the notorious king Tripur. After that when a crisis situation began in the state without a ruler then again the masses prayed Lord Shiva for a new king and ultimately with his blessings King Trilochan was born and all the sufferings of the subjects of the kingdom of Tripura came to an end. But this mythological tale does not have any historical evidence to prove it as fact.

According to 'Rajmala' instance of the first pragmatic and bonafide unrest against the royal dynasty occurred in the 16th century. During the reign of Debamanikya, dissatisfaction towards ruler emerged and it was basically against a Tantrik who was the ill-advisor of the King. After ascending the throne in year 1520, he acquired Noakhali and Chattogram. Lastly he lost Chattogram to Nasrat Shah, the then Sultan of Bengal. He only ruled for ten years and during the last days of his rule he faced multiple bad times and became a staunch believer of Tantrism by the influence of Tantrik Lakshmi Narayan. But when King sacrificed his army commander by the advice of Lakshmi Narayan, who already became a Chantai then by subduing him, people understood that was the high time to dethrone the king and his associate. When king realised everything it was too late and was killed by the assassins appointed by Chantai. Indra Manikya, son of Debmanikya, became the juvenile king of the region who was controlled by the Chantai. Finally, when public realised everything they brutally killed the Chantai. Daitya Narayan, who was the then commander of the dynasty, also killed Indra manikya. Thus the Tantrik-Raj came to an end with the mass upheaval.

During the reign of Bijay Manikya (1532) a discontent among the subjects again geared up. This time it was against the commander of the King, Daitya Naraya. Daitya Narayan was also Father-in Law of the king Bijay Manikya. Daitya Narayan after making Bijay Manikya a puppet king started to loot general

public even became indulged in other illegal works. Lastly, when the population of the region asked for the help from the king, Bijay Manikya planned and killed Daitya Narayan. Even Bijay Manikya himself wanted to be free from the clutch of him and rule independently.

An agent of the kings of Tripura named Gopi Prasad became commander in the court of Bijay Manikya. An opportunist Gopi Prasad married away his daughter to the prince Ananta Manikya. During the reign of Ananta Manikya (1564-66) he made him puppet king and started plundering the region. But he was not happy with that lastly he murdered his son-in-law and ascended the throne with the name Udai Manikya in the 16th century and transferred his capital to Rangamati and named it as Udaipur. For his unplanned chattogram expedition many soldiers got killed and a devastating famine initiated which given strike to the unrest. Again his ill attitude towards women also lit the fire of protest. Lastly he was poisoned and murdered.

During the second phase of Gobinda Manikya's (1660-1673) rule a Reang unrest was about to begin. Rani Gunabati, spouse of Gobinda Manikya, tactfully handled the situation and stopped that unrest. Reangs were dissatisfied with the oppression of the higher officials of the kingdom. Even during the period of his exile Gobinda Manikya took shelter in to the interior Reang village. He assumed that Reangs being loyal to his half-brother Chattra Manikya did not take good care of him, so he was not sympathetic towards the Reang community. Discontent towards the royal officials touched its zenith with an issue related to Ganga puja by the ruling family. Some of the leaders were imprisoned and taken to the capital, Udaipur. If Maharani Gunabati would not interfered the situation it would have taken a violent turn but the queen with her benevolence subdued the rebellion.

There were instances of numerous Kuki rebellions in the history of Tripura. Krishna Manikya during his tenure of ruling faced the 'Paitu' Kuki rebellion. Approximately twenty five thousand 'Paitu' kukis under their leader Shibuter refused to accept the subjugation of Krishna Manikya and declared their independence. However, the king oppressed this revolt brutally with the help of his army. Rjadhar Manikya (1785-1806), the successor of Krishna Manikya also faced kuki Uprising during his rule. Due to family feud, Ramchandra Thakur, son of Bijay Manikya II, allured the Kukis to attack the Kingdom as he had his eyes on the throne. Rajdhar Manikya successfully subdued this rebellion.

TRIBAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS DURING 19TH CENTURY

Tribal uprisings before 1860: After the death of Rajdhar Manikya in 1806 his successor also faced the risk of Kuki raids. Ramganaga Manikya during his second tenure of ruling had to fight against the upheaval of Kuki-Hamal communities. His opposition Sambhu Chandra Thakur prompted Kukis against the king. They were also had a hidden anger against the king and Sambhu Chandra also was very popular among them. The uprising continued since 1824-1826 AD. However, king was able to control the attacks of Kukis tactfully. Lastly when Sambhu Chandra attacked British they wanted to capture him by alluring local people with money but he was so popular among the general mass that he was never find out by the British government. Thus this rebellion came to an end.

Ishan Chandra Manikya became the King of Tripura after the demise of Krishna Kishore Manikya. Upendra Chandra, his brother, became Yubaraj. Ishan Chandra realised that clearing the debt of Chakla roshanabad which was eleven lakhs, was a herculean task for him. He appointed Balaram Hazari as his Dewan to find a solution of this fiscal problem. Maharaja made Balaram Hazari the authority to clear the debt of the Roshanabad region. On the other hand, he was in a good book of Upendra Chandra and to keep him pleased he had to fulfil his financial demand. Hence, Balaram and his brother Sridam started

oppression on the subjects and started to forcefully accumulate money for freeing the Chakla roshanabad from dues and also to supply monetary fund to Yubaraj. This led towards the 'Tipra Revolt' under the able leadership of Kriti and Parikshit. They rebelled against the king in the year 1850. As the leaders attacked the house of Balaram in the mid-night they had taken help from Tipra and Kuki tribes. Sridam was killed by Kriti but Balaram managed to escape. Eventually the revolt was subjugated by the king's army. Kriti was killed as he was charged for the conspiracy against Upendra Chandra and other rebels were imprisoned. Thus, the 'Tipra Revolt' came to an end.

The late 19th century of Tripura had seen the massive resistance movements by the general tribal mass of the kingdom. Most of these rebellions are against the oppression of King and his officials.

Kuki Revolt of 1860: Since 18th century Kuki community is revolting against the Kings of Tripura as they wanted to be independent from the rule of them. Again, in 1860 being dissatisfied with the repressive and obsolete rule by the rulers of Tripura they revolted to be free from clutch of the incapable rulers. However, not all sections of the Kuki community were against the monarchy. In 1860 under the leadership of Ratan Poea hundreds of Kukis attacked the villages of Chittagong near Fenny River. In this brutal attack many villagers died including British officials. Police failed to capture any of them as they disappeared in to the hills and forests. Ishan Chandra Manikya was such a weak ruler that he and his minister were failed to inspect the destruction in the villages. Lastly, the British Government managed to provide help in the effected villages of Chaklaroshanabad. In 1861 British troop was organised to control the Kuki menace. In the meantime Kukis along with Reangs attacked on the Chakmas of Udaipur and undergone a massive destruction of lives and wealth. In 1862 Ratan Poea again conducted a destructive attack in the Northern Tripura and Sylhet. This massacre was known as Adampur Massacre. Ishan Chandra Manikya, being incompetent couldn't stop all these extreme Kuki strikes on the innocent lives. Eventually, Birchandra Manikya started 'Vat' system, which was system of giving gifts to keep Kukis appeased.

Jamatia Revolt of 1863: Jamatias were serving as the military of the Tripura Kingdom since ancient period. During the reign of Birchandra Manikya Jamatias organised a mass uprising against 'Titun' system. According to 'Titun' system, hill dwellers had to carry the baggage of the royal officials without any charges. But Jamatias were exempted from this system as they were the warriors of the kingdom. When the Jamatia community's court representative Oakhirai went to survey about the taxation system in the Jamatia village he pressurised them to carry his belongings which enraged the community. After returning to the capital Oakhirai complained the King that Jamatias were planning for revolt against the kings and also forbade paying any tax. Birchandra Manikya without any investigation sent gunmen to Jamatia village. That began a fight between the two parties and two persons from Jamatia community were killed in that process. Thus under the leadership of Parikshit an armed revolt started against the monarchy. They attacked Birchandra Manikya at Udaipur. Birchandra in return sent military in Jamatia areas of Udaipur but they lost the battle with Jamatias. Then the king took help from the Kuki leaders Morchui Lala and Happui Lala. A massive fight was conducted between Kukis and Jamatias, Jamtias were under the leadership of Parikshit fought the battle. Unfortunately Jamtias lost the battle and Parikshit was captured and taken to the Capital, Agartala along with other rebels. Many Jamatia villages were set ablaze. Lastly, King Birchandra Manikya set them free after converting them in to Vaishnavism.

TRIBAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENT DURING 20TH CENTURY

Twentieth (20th) century Tripura had witnessed the biggest uprising ever against the ruthlessness of the royal officials. The Reang Uprising of 1942 was mainly against the regressive taxation system bestowed upon the Reang community and also against the torture of '*Choudhuries*'. The assistant Political agent of Tripura, Umakanta Das also given testimony that Reangs were over taxed. Hence, Reang Uprising under the able leadership of Ratanmoni was the consequence of all this unfair approaches by the kingship. This movement is an anti-feudal movement which was against the existing oppressive system of feudalism and also considered as socio-religious movement of Reang community.

Reang Uprising of 1942: Group of village headmen known as '*Choudhuries*' use to dominate the Reang villages. *Rai* was the head of the *Choudhuries*. *Choudhuries* were the socio-economic and political decision makers of the villages they used to lead. Tripura rulers were also under the influence of them and supported and enhanced the power and position of *Choudhuries*. This support system was favourable for the Maharajas of Tripura as they used them in collecting tax from common people and in return *Rais* and *Choudhuries* were barred from paying any kind of tax. Taking upper hand of their position and power they started to forcefully demanding money and kinds from the subjects and also indulged in to their selfish interests. Thus they started to suppress people. Again, there was an unequal system of paying tax among Tripuris, Reangs and Noatias. This system was known as 'Ghar Chukti'. Tripuris had to pay a minimal amount of tax where as Reangs and Noatias were paying maximum amount. This discrimination in taxation also triggered the fire of revolt in to the Reang community.

Finally oppressed Reang community requested Ratanmani to lead them. Ratanmani was basically from Chittagong but in 1937 he came to Tripura and settled in Amarpur. He became a socio-religious reformer and constructed an Ashram in Amarpur and had many disciples. He also used to teach Ramayana and Mahabharata to the Reangs. After the dispute broke between the *Choudhuries* and disciples of Ratanmani on the share of money of Tirthamukh Mela, Maharaja captured and imprisoned him. However, he successfully ran away from the clutch of the Maharaja. This incident increased his popularity among his disciples. When new disciples of Ratanmani, who were also the followers of ex-*Rai* Debi Singh, complained about the torture of new *Rai* Khagendra and his followers on them, king was inactive in taking any action against him. That also became a bone of contention between the monarchy and the followers of Ratanmani. Ratanmani was also a social worker. During Second World War there was hike in prices of essential commodities. Life of the village dwellers became miserable and a famine broke out in Udaipur, Amarpur, Sabroom and Belonia. Under the influence of Ratanmani his followers built up 'Dharmagola' in their own respective villages to feed the hungry villagers.

During the Second World War the then Maharaja of Tripura, Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, promised the British government supply of men power and money too. Thus the tax was increased. Attempt was taken to recruit Reang youths in the 'Tripura Rajya Raksha Bahini' by force. Maharaja got the message that the recruitment of the soldiers could not be implemented as the followers of Ratanmoni were protesting against it. There was also information about the ensuing revolt in the places like Amarpur, Belonia, Udaipur and also rebels started to plunder the houses of the *Choudhuries*. Eventually, the rebels who were the disciples of Ratanmoni could not stand in front of the organised army sent by the Maharaja to subjugate them. The royal force burnt down the reang villages, even imprisoned thousands of Reang men women and children and brought them to the capital, Agartala. The royals forcefully converted them to Vaishnavism as they were Shaiva. Finally, most of the imprisoned population was released on

the basis that they were all poor and famine stricken people who revolted against the subjugation of the *Choudhuries* and not against the Maharaja.

Ratanmani was killed and a criminal case was taken against the followers of him. They were charged as guilty for robbery and rioting. Lastly, Government withdrawn the case which brought a complete seize in to the Reang uprising of 1942.

CONCLUSION

From the late 18th century to early 20th century marked as the period of Renaissance in India. This period has seen different intellectual, social, cultural and artistic movements which shaped the dimension or idea of Nationalism in India. Indian's understood the values of their own heritage and culture and desperately initiated to take steps to immediate end of the British rule in India. Mainly people of India wanted to uproot the regressive and oppressive attitudes of the British raj towards Indians. Indigenous community like Munda was fighting against the manipulation of 'dikus' who were trying to plunder their habitation, lives and livelihood. Again, Indigo Revolt also had shown that subaltern class was fighting back against the privileged class.

In Tripura British were the advisors of the Kings of Tripura. And the advices of the British Political Agents developed the overall condition of the state. With the valuable advices of British Political Agents Kings of Tripura tactfully made useful developments in social and administrative structures. But the royals of Tripura always indulged in to family feuds, the nobles were highly disloyal and non-cooperative. All this reasons resulted in to miserable condition of the general tribal subjects who used to live in interior villages or in the hills of Tripura in the places like Udaipur, Amarpur etc. Hence all these tribal uprisings in Tripura during 18th and 19th centuries were nothing but protest against the anarchy in the region. Tribal communities of Tripura wanted to safeguard their own socio-political and cultural heritage from the draconian rule.

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