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INITIATIVES OF MAHARAJA BIR CHANDRA MANIKYA IN MODERNIZING TRIPURA

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Abstract

Tripura is situated in the north-eastern corner of India. *Sri Rajmala*, the multi-volume official chronicle of Tripura, edited by Kaliprasanna Sen, has drawn a long list of (184) Tripura kings¹ deriving ancestral relations with the famous *Lunar* dynasty of the *Mahabharat*. Tripuri dynasty ruled over Tripura for centuries and at last wisely handed over the administration of the kingdom to the government of India in 1949. According to *Sri Rajmala*, Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya (1862-1896 AD) was the 181st king of Tripura. In July 1871, Mr. A. W. B. Power was appointed as first political agent in Hill Tripura. With the influence and proposal of the British political agent and High officials, Maharaja Bir Chandra initiated several reformative steps in different facet of administration, law, and education etc. Establishment of Agartala Municipality in 1871, establishment of schools, hospitals, post office; abolition of slavery system and practice of ‘Sati dah’ were few remarkable reformative initiatives among others taken by Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya.

Key words: Manikya Dynasty, Reformation, Initiatives, Tripura, British Rule.

Introduction:

Tripura is situated in the north-eastern corner of India. Sen (2020), has drawn a long list of (184) Tripura kings deriving ancestral relations with the famous *Lunar* dynasty of the *Mahabharat*. Tripuri dynasty ruled over Tripura for centuries (642-1949) and at last wisely handed over the administration of the kingdom to the government of India in 1949. According to *Sri Rajmala*, Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya (1862-1896 AD) was the 181st king of Tripura (Sen, 2020).

Bir Chandra Manikya was son of Maharaja Krishnakishor Manikya (1830-1849) and brother of Maharaja Isanchandra Manikya (1848-1862). After death of Ishanchandra, on fourth day, Birchandra came out with a proclamation as if Isanchandra ordered it on his deathbed and the sick king nominated Birchandra to be the Yubaraj and next successor. But, three step brothers of Birchandra filed suits in the British Court of Law against him as they considered the ‘Will’ is false. The British Lieutenant - Governor recognised Bir Chandra, uterine brother of the late Maharaja as the de facto Raja of Tripura. After long battle of law, on 15 March 1869, the Privy Council of England announced verdict in favour of Bir Chandra. Bir Chandra’s formal coronation took place on 9th March 1870 (Goswami and Chakraborty, Edi. 2019) and on 28 November, 1877 the British government conferred on him the title of Maharaja.

During the reign of Maharaja Birchandra Manikya, several revolts took place against the king, because of political uncertainty, besides, quarrels among the princes on succession. In 1863, Jamatia revolt, in 1867, Kooki raid, in 1871, Lushai raid etc. occurred. So, the British Govt. decided to appoint a Political Agent in Hill Tripura for the first time. Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya expressed his unwillingness for appointment of any political agent in his kingdom (Gan Chaudhuri 2004). The British government assured the King that political agent would not affect the king’s power in the kingdom. In July 1871, Mr. A. W. B. Power was appointed as first political agent in Hill Tripura (Gan Chaudhuri 2004) and he took up duties on 1st August 1871. The British Govt. also appointed three efficient officials in Hill Tripura to help the Maharaja. Baboo Durgaprasad Gupta, formerly civil court Amin of Brahmanbaria (of Maharaja’s Zamindari jurisdiction) was appointed to the post of Deputy Superintendent of Kailasahar; Baboo Nilmani Das, formerly Sub-Registrar of Comilla (of Maharaja’s Zamindari jurisdiction), appointed to the post of Dewan; and Dr. Stock, Medical Officer of Comilla, appointed as Medical Officer of Hill Tripura.

On 26th September 1866, the British government made a historic decision regarding the constitutional and legal status of Tripura (Chaudhuri, 1999). Since a few years back it became a fashion to designate Tripura as independent Tripura, now the word ‘Independent’ was replaced by the word ‘Hill’. So the kingdom came to be known as “Hill Tripura” (Gan Chaudhuri 2004).



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With the influence and proposal of the British political agent and High officials, Maharaja Bir Chandra initiated several reformative steps in different facet of administration, law, and education etc.

Literature Review:

Literature on administrative reforms during Manikya Regime in Tripura is inadequate, and the available books are of varying degrees of usefulness. The author had to collect facts from a number of books.

Sen (1926), edited 'Sri Rajmala' the multi-volume official chronicle of Tripura is like an encyclopaedia of Tripura History.

Gan-Chaudhuri (Edt.) (1980) presented a vast panorama of the land and its people while dealing with their polity, economy, social structure and social customs.

Gan-Chaudhuri (1985) mentioned that having being ruled by centuries by native princes, Tripura merged with the Union of India in 1949 and attained in January 1972, the status of full-fledged state. His book contains nine chapters which present physical background of Tripura; its mythological rulers; immigrations of Mongolian tribes from China and their settlement in the north-east and how the Tripuri Tribe who settled in Tripura came to be known as Tripas; conflicts and wars for lands and elephants from 1240 to 1765 with the Manikya dynasty of Tripura and how the invaders influenced Tripura in several ways; period of peace under British rule and reforms of enlightened native princes till 1947.

Chaudhuri (1991) has traced the origin of the problem of the Chakma Tribe in Chitagong Hill Tract right from the East India Company rule.

Deb, Devvarman and Dr. Gan-Chaudhuri (1997) have compiled some historical documents of Agartala Municipality.

Dr. Sur (2010) said that Tripura-British relations constitute one of the vital factors that brought the people and the rulers of Tripura in direct contact with the mainstream of Indian life.

Gan-Chaudhuri (2004) surveyed fairly long period of thirteen hundred years (642 to 1949) of Manikya Dynasty ruled over Tripura. He opined that during this period Tripura witnessed a kaleidoscope of such major events as the rise, reform and decline of the dynasty.

Roy (2017) described different aspects of administration of Manikya Dynasty in modernizing Tripura.

Method: Materials and methods:

This paper is analytical in nature. The information for this study has been collected from secondary sources of knowledge, such as books, newspapers, articles, journals, internet, achieves etc.

Historical background of administration of Tripura:

The history of administration in Tripura has its moorings in an ancient past, though the various accounts of administrative control found in ancient chronicles and mainly based on myths and legends can hardly stand the test of scientific scrutiny today. A stable kingdom based on an efficient government came into being for the first time in the beginning of the fifteenth century during the reign of Ratna Manikya. In ancient times, there was no powerful monarchy with effective command over the entire tract. Various tribes had migrated to this land in successive waves in past and they found their domicile in different parts of the hilly region (Bhattacharya, 1979).

These tribes were sometimes independent and sometimes subjugated by one another. Each community had its own elementary social and administrative organisation starting from the village level and going up to the chieftainship of the whole tribe. These were old-age systems, the remnants of which may be found even today. During the reigns of the earlier Tripuri *Rajas*, the tribes enjoyed their traditional freedom based on the concept of self-administration; the relation between the king and the subject tribes was maintained through the tribal Chiefs or *Sardars*. This relation was also limited and in most cases it was confined to paying and collecting of taxes and occasional *Nazranas*. The tribal self-governing institution differed from tribe to tribe.

In medieval period the hierarchy of administration may be represented as follows:

Maharaja of Tripura

Missip or the Liaison officer

Roy or Headman of the Tribe



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Sardar or Chief of the Village

The Individual Tribal people (Bhattacharya, 1979).

Administrative reforms initiated by Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya to modernize Tripura:

Tripura entered in the modern era during the reign of Bir Chandra Manikya. The administrative, academic and social reformative efforts initiated by Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya are arranged chronologically as follows:-

1871: Introduction of Municipality in the capital city Agartala. A.W.B. Power was appointed as Chairman of Agartala Municipality.

1872: There were two schools in Hill Tripura, one was at Agartala and one School was established at Kailasahar (Nov. 1872). With the establishment of the school, Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya had taken the responsibility of education of his subjects.

Establishment of Khas Appeal Adalat (Royal Court of Appeal) for final Judgement of civil and criminal cases in 1872.

1873: In May, 1873 two hospitals were opened in Hill Tripura: one at Agartala and another at Kailasahar.

After joining of Dewan Baboo Nilmani Das in 1873 in Hill Tripura, initiative was taken for administrative decentralization. The Hill Tripura was divided into three divisions, namely, Agartala Sadar Division, Kailasahar Division and Udaipur Division. The plain Tripura, i.e. Chakla Rosnabad- the Zamindari jurisdiction of Tripura king was divided into Feni Division, Comilla Division and Moghra Division.

Abkari Act and Cattle Trespass Act were passed in November 1873.

Budget system was introduced for the first time in 1873 in Hill Tripura.

1874: A stringent order was issued prohibiting the setting of booby traps for killing wild animal like deer, as it was dangerous for human being.

A memorandum was issued in May 1874 to use precise Bengali Language in Courts.

In 1874 the eastern boundary of Hill Tripura was demarcated by the government of Bengal and the river Longai was fixed as the eastern boundary. The Maharaja was disagreed with this demarcation.

1875: On 1st October 1875, one Post Office was opened at Agartala, which was the first post office of Hill Tripura.

1878: In March 1878, uniform system of weekly holiday on every Sunday was introduced in Hill Tripura.

In July 1878, the age-old practice of slavery was abolished by a judicial order.

1879: On the suggestion of Assistant political Agent, Baboo Umakanta Das, the Maharaja took steps to abolish petty taxes on parrots, spinning, honey, mustered oil, garjan oil and lime.

An important step of 1879 was the abolition of Pahari Adalat (Hill Court) and amalgamation with the general civil and criminal court.

1881: The first attempt of modern census operation was done in Hill Tripura, according to the direction of the British Indian government. The total number of population of Hill Tripura was found to be 95,637 persons.

1882: A small magisterial office was opened at Blonia.

A Council of Regency was constituted by the Maharaja for smooth functioning of administrative work in his temporary absence period. The Council of Regency was of five members headed by Jubaraj Radhakisore.

A considerable portion of the Balishira Hills, in Sylhet with the Zamindari, was leased out to Messrs Finlay, Muir and Company of Calcutta, who wanted the land for cultivation of tea, to meet financial crisis.

1883: With recommendation of the Assistant Political Agent, the highest administrative post of Prime Minister was created and Dhananjay Thakur was appointed as first Prime Minister of Hill Tripura.

1885: In 1885 a Town Hall and a Library were constituted in Comilla with financial assistance from the government of Hill Tripura. In the same year the library was renamed after Birchandra Manikya. In the royal palace one library was established by the Maharaja. In 1896, English books were kept in palace and vernacular book sections sifted out of the palace and the library was opened for public and it was named as 'Bir Chandra Library' by his son and next Maharaja Radhakisor Manikya.

1886: In November and December 1886, three Acts were passed by the king relating to the police, the excise and the landlords and tenants, on the recommendation of the new Prime Minister.

1887: In 1887, two roads, one from Sonamura to Comilla, and another from Kailasahar to Dharmanagar were made.



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1889: In 1889 the year-old practice of 'Sati' was abolished in Hill Tripura on the recommendation of Mr. D.R. Lyall, the Commissioner of Chittagong.

1890: 'Agartala HE School' was founded, later, which was developed and re-named by Radhakishor Manikya as Umakanta Academy.

1892: One big school for girls was established at Agartala. It was named as 'Bijoy Kumar Girls School' after Dewan Bijoy Kumar Sen.

1894: In 1894 another big school for girls was established at Agartala. The school was named after Tulsibati, the Manipuri queen of Jubaraj Radhakishor.

The Maharaja organised a Byabasthapak Sabha (Legislative Council) to decide on state policy as he was declining in health.

1895: In 1895, two more sub-divisions namely Dharmanagar and Khowai were opened for smooth implementation of administrative policies.

1896: The Maharaja purchased a big plot of land in Calcutta for constructing a palace there.

In October, 1896 the ailing Maharaja went to Karshiang for rest. This time the great poet Rabindranath Tagore accompanied the king. His son Samarendra looked after the king in Karshiang and Calcutta; while Jubaraj Radhakishor looked after the administration of the Hill Tripura at Agartala. When Bir Chandra Manikya's illness became daily more serious, the king was shifted from Karshiang to Calcutta. At last, on 11th December 1896, Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya expired in Calcutta. The dead body was cremated at Keoratala, inside the specious and private crematorium of the Raja of Mysore.

The relations between Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya and the British government was one of co-operation, conflict and conciliation. It was friendly conflict between tradition represented by Birchandra and transition represented by the British Political agents. Out of the conflict, a process of multiple reforms started working. In 1876 the British Parliament passed the Imperial Titles Act, authorising Queen Victoria to assume the title of Empress of India. On 1st January 1877 a great Imperial Assembly was organised at Delhi. In response to a request from the Government of India, the king of Hill Tripura convened a grand durbar at Agartala and duly made formal announcement of Her Majesty's assumption of the imperial title. The British administrators, imbued with the reformative enthusiasm of the Victorian age and utilitarian philosophy of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), repeatedly pressed for good governance. During the Prime minister-ship of Gladstone, England witnessed different reforms. All these factors left an impact on the administration of India and of Hill Tripura. Never before had the earlier kings of Hill Tripura been subject to such concerted pressure to change their traditional style of administration. Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya's reign with the warmth of the Victorian age and Gladstonean dynamism, embarked on the path of legislation, reformation and administrative decentralization unlike previous regimes (Gan Chaudhuri 2004).

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