

The Contribution of Manikya Rulers in Pre-Colonial Tripura

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ABSTRACT

This research paper attempts to make an overall assessment of Manikya rulers of Tripura and their contribution in making Tripura a prosperous and strong state in Indian territory. The reign of Ratna Fa or Ratna Manikya saw the dawn of a new era in Tripura both socially and politically. Lots of innovative works were carried out by the early Manikya rulers. Such as :-Dharma Manikya, Dhanya Manikya, Vijay Manikya, Amar Manikya and others.

This research paper discusses in detail about the significance of Manikya rulers during the pre-colonial period. Let be the field of cultural or social improvement; either military preparedness or economic prosperity; either able administration or public welfare the Manikya rulers of Tripura glorified their unique political governance in a better manner.

This research paper evaluates the contribution of the great Manikya rulers, who ruled during the period of Pre-colonial Tripura and established their supremacy in all spheres of administration.

Keywords:- *Contribution; Manikya Rulers; Pre-Colonial Tripura; Assessment; Military Preparedness; Able Administration.*

Introduction

Tripura is a small state, which borders Bangladesh, Mizoram and Assam. It is surrounded by Bangladesh on its north, south and west. The glory of Tripura Kingdom is known from Puranic period and much before the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.¹ The early history of the present state of Tripura is still shrouded into obscurity. No records in the shape of documents or monuments of the Autochthons people of land belonging to the Pre-historic or proto-historic periods have survived.² The origin and history of Tripura is described in the 'Rajmala', which is the chronicles of Tripura. It is the oldest specimen of Bengali Composition extant. It is in verse and was in a detached form, but was collected and written in sequence by the Brahmin Officials of Raja Dharma Manikya. According to Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, "The historical account of Tripura begins from the 15 century, when King Dharme Manikya..."³ W.W. Hunter is also of the opinion, "The history relating to the period prior to the 15th century has been written on the basis of traditions recorded and unrecorded as well as imagination."⁴

If we look at the historical background of the rulers of Tripura, we find that the rulers of Tripura had not assumed the title 'Manikya' but were known by the Surname of 'Fa', which means 'Father'. Tripuri kings are said to have assumed

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the title of Manikya' from the accession of Ratna Fa, who was a contemporary of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban.⁵ In 1458 A.D., a land-grant through a Copper-plate was made by King Dharma Manikya marked the beginning of dated history⁶

History is the evidence of this fact that Raja Pha's brother and successor was Ratna Fa, who forcefully usurped the throne, of Tripura. It is stated that Ratna Fa's father had several queens and sons, the eldest prince was incompetent, while the youngest Ratna Fa was intelligent. According to the law of primogeniture, the eldest prince was due to succeed. But, as he was not a suitable successor, the old king decided to pass over them and raise Ratna to the throne. The administration was so centralized and small that it had little capacity to absorb the barons and boyars under such circumstances. Moreover, it became very difficult to conquer and annex, the surrounding territories for the installation of the boyars. So, the king divided the Kingdom and distributed it among the boyars, Keeping the central district and the throne reserved for the precocious prince Ratna. But, his will fizzled out and the princes fell out and a fatal intrigue arose after his death. The envious princes had driven out Ratna and installed the eldest prince on the throne. But his reign was cut short.⁷

It is said that Ratna Fa took shelter in the court of Bengal Sultan, took the help of the Sultan of Gaur to recover the throne of Tripura. He successfully invaded the state with the help of the Mohammedan troops and ascended the throne after beheading his brother. Ratna Fa presented the Sultan of Gaur a valuable, Ruby' (Mani) and 'One Hundred Elephants as token of gratitude. In return the Sultan conferred upon him the title Manikya'. Since then the title 'Manikya' has been associated with the rulers of Tripura.⁸

After Ratna Manikya, his son Pratap Manikya succeeded him. During his reign Sultan Sikandar Shah of Sonargaon attacked Tripura in quest of elephants. Again Pratap Manikya was defeated by Sultan Ilias shah, the ruler of Bengal. He also plundered his wealth and elephant of Tripura.⁹ After the death of Pratap Manikya, Dharma Manikya ruled Tripura. His Government was characterized by all-round peace and prosperity. The well-known tank 'Dharmasagar' of Comilla was excavated by him, while Nanua Dighi, another well know tank of that city was excavated by his queen Nanua.¹⁰

Dhanya Manikya is Considered to be one of the best rulers of Manikya dynasty, who had re-organised his Army and turned his attention towards the conquest of Bengal. He had also constructed the glorious temple of 'Mata Tripura Sundari' in 1501 A.D. After Dhanya Manikya, the note-worthy Manikya rulers were - Vijay Manikya, Amar Manikya and Govinda Manikya. Really, these Manikya rulers have contributed a lot to safeguard the prestige of Tripura State.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following books are written by the great writers, which helped me a lot to carry out my research paper. Of course, these books proved to be 'Secondary Sources' to complete my research paper. Though there are some literature gaps, which have been endeavored by me to fill-up the literature gaps.

- (1) 'A Constitutional History of Tripura', written by Dr. Jagadis Gan-Chaudhuri, is a very good secondary source to carry out my research paper. The detailed information about the administration of different Manikya rulers are mentioned in a chronological manner and the achievements of different Manikya rulers are mentioned.
- (2) 'Tripura Administration', written by the great author Bani Kantha Bhattacharyya, is a very nice secondary source to know about the Manikya dynasty. The administration of Manikya rulers have been discussed in this book. But, the achievements of earlier Manikya rulers is missing.
- (3) 'Progressive Tripura', written by A.C. Bhattacharyya also provides ample information on the historical significance of Manikya rulers. Really, this book proved to be very helpful in carrying out my research work.
- (4) 'Tripura Through the Ages', written by Nalini Ranjan Roychoudhury is one of the best secondary sources. I got lots of help from this book to carry out my research work. But the detailed information is limited in this book.
- (5) 'A Political History of Tripura', written by J. Gan-Chaudhuri, also provides ample information on the lives of Manikya rulers. I found this secondary source very helpful. Of course, facts are discussed in the book. Though, detailed information is missing.
- (6) The book 'Tripura', written by S.N. Guha Thakurta provides lots of knowledge about the history of medieval India, particularly on the topic of Manikya rulers. This book is very comprehensive and helping.

CONTRIBUTION OF MANIKYA RULERS OF TRIPURA

The history of Tripura is incomplete without knowing the contributions of Manikya Rulers. As we know that the title of 'Fa' was used by the kings of Tripura in a similar way like the Ahom rulers of Assam. The meaning of 'Fa' is 'father', who cared the welfare of the people in fatherly manner.

DAWN OF A NEW ERA : CONTRIBUTION OF RATNA MANIKYA

The reign of Ratna Fa or Ratna Manikya witnessed the dawn of a new era in Tripura both socially and politically. Many innovations were introduced in the country and the machinery of administration was reformed under the Mahomedan fashion. For the cultural improvement of the people and reconstruction of society on up-to-date ideals, he bought from Lakshanabati, the capital of Gour, some eminent Brahmins and Kayesthas to Tripura.¹¹ It was largely through the patronage granted by Ratna Manikya that Hinduism made a significant dent into the predominantly tribal society in Tripura. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji observes, "This led to the closer approximation of both the royal family and the rank and file of the Indo-Mongoloid people of Tripura State to the Bengalis, in religion and culture; and it means also the establishment of Bengali and Sanskrit as cultural and religious languages of the Tipra people."¹²

It is quite worthy that Ratna Manikya introduced certain administrative reforms, which were modelled on the pattern prevalent in Bengal. The Coins of Ratna Manikya follows most of the typical characteristics of the Muslim Pathan Coinage of Bengal.¹³

CONTRIBUTION OF DHARMA MANIKYA

Dharma Manikya's administrative capability was characterised by all round peace and prosperity. The well-known tank 'Dharma Sagar' of Comilla was excavated by him while 'Naruar Dighi', the well-known tank of that city was excavated by his queen Nanua. It is well-mentioned that when Mengchu Muang, the ruler of Arakan took refuge at the court of Tripura. Dharma Manikya helped him with men and money and get him reinstated.

Dharma Manikya was a great patron of arts and letters. It is generally believed that he engaged the historian and royal priest Durlabhendra and two Brahmins named Sukreswar and Baneswar to compile the 'Rajmala' or 'the Chronicles of the Kings of Tripura.' He settled large number of Brahmin in his realm and he was himself a staunch and devout Hindu.

CONTRIBUTION OF DHANYA MANIKYA.

Truly, Dhanya Manikya occupies the pivotal role in making Tripura state culturally advanced, military equipped and economically affluent. He ascended the throne of Tripura in the year of 1490 A.D. In the medieval period he may be regarded as the 'greatest ruler' of Tripura. He crushed the rebellious feudatories and many lords, who were making Tripura weak. In a true sense, he was a great annexationist. Having consolidated his power by bringing the army under his control, he attacked adjoining areas of the plain and occupied a vast tract of the plains up to Khandal. The coin of Saka 1428 (1506 A.D.) describing Dhanya Manikya as 'Vijayendra', was perhaps issued on the occasion of his grand victory over the Sultan of Bengal. He also occupied Chittagong for the first time in Saka 1435 (1513-14 A.D.) as is evident from the coin of Saka 1435 describing him as 'Chatigramam Vijay'.¹⁴

It is quite worthy to mention that Dhanya Manikya was one of the best rulers of Tripura, who crowned himself with the imperial titles of 'Tripurendra' and 'Vijayendra'. Actually, Dhanya Manikya, the greatest King of Tripura, made his mark in the history of Tripura as a great 'Conqueror' and 'Judicious' ruler. He was ably assisted by his Generals named as 'Ray Kachag' and 'Ray Kacham', he expanded the territorial area of Tripura well into eastern Bengal establishing control over entire Comilla district and parts of Sylhet, Noakhali and Chittagong districts of Bangladesh.

The military warfare and war techniques of Dhanya Manikya was superb. His greatest achievement lay in successfully thwarting Muslim invasions into Tripura by his military warfare. It is imperative to know that Hossain Shah, the Nawab of Bengal invaded Tripura thrice in the Years of 1512 A.D., 1513 A.D. and 1514 A.D. respectively, but on all these occasions Dhanya Manikya defeated the Nawab of Bengal.

It is said that Dhanya Manikya was a great devotee of Siva and built several temples. He built Chaturdas Devata (temples of 14 Gods). As a great Hindu devout and the patron of art and architecture he is believed to have built the historical famous temple of Mata Tripura Sundari at Udaipur in 1501 A.D. According to Sri Rajmala, the temple Tripura Sundari was erected by Dhanya Manikya in the Saka year 1423.¹⁵

Dhanya Manikya also built the Mahadeva temple at Udaipur. He is credited to have built a temple at Ratanpur for fourteen Gods and minted coins after visiting the shrine of the God Kramadiswara. He constructed a huge tank at Kasba (Kamla Sagar) to be named after his beloved and reputed queen Kamaladevi.¹⁶ He tried to abolish human sacrifices which used to be performed very frequently before his time. He was a great patron of art and literature and helped to spread Bengali language among the people by having some Sanskrit works translated into Bengali.

CONTRIBUTION OF VIJAY MANIKYA

Vijay Manikya, according to the Ain-i- Akbari, ascended the throne of Tripura before the close of the third decade of the sixteenth century and ruled for a considerable period up to about the third quarter of the century. Like his predecessor Dhanya Manikya, Vijay Manikya also had a powerful army consisting of Pathan soldiers, two hundred thousand footmen and a thousand elephants. The coins issued by him in Saka 1454, 1456, 1458, 1476, 1479 and 1482 suggest that he conquered adjoining Sylhet, Khasi, Jaintia. and Chittagong districts.¹⁷ Really, he was the best conqueror and defeated all his rival kings. It is said that the Afghan horse soldiers of Vijay Manikya revolted and killed Prachanda Narayan, the Uzir (Pay Master) at Meherkul.

Vijay Manikya was a contemporary of Emperor Akbar. The Ain-i-Akbari of Abul Fazl refers to his reign in the following words, "Adjoining Bhati is an extensive tract of territory inhabited by the Tipperah tribes. The name of the ruler is Vijay Manikya. Whoever obtains the Chieftainship bears the title of Manik after his name and the nobles that of Narayan. He has a force of two hundred thousand Footmen and a thousand elephants. Horses are scarce."¹⁸

According to the Rajmala he defeated the army sent by Sulaiman Karrani of Bengal under Mubarak Khan. In the battle Mubarak Khan had to surrender and he was beheaded at the temple of Chaturdasha Devata worshipped by the people of Tripura.¹⁹ It has been stated that in the beginning of 1554 A.D. Vijay Mankya captured Chittagong from the Arakanese. But, after a few months it was lost to Pathan ruler of Gaur in the same year.

The Pathans however, could not retain their hold for long time. Vijay Manikya sent fresh forces to recover Chittagong, but they failed. Thereupon, he sent his veteran Commander, 'Kala Nazir', who fell in a fight with the Pathans; but ultimately Tripura soldiers won the day and the Pathan General Mubarak Khan was taken prisoner and sacrificed before the Chaturdash Devata.²⁰

Vijay Manikya brought enormous treasures from Sonargao, Vikrampur and Dacca to Rangamati. He utilised the wealth thus gained to construct buildings in Tripura. Most of the buildings were administrative and secular in nature. At his orders, forts were built at many strategically important places; such as :- Sylhet, Kalakopa, Nasirabad, Bishalgarh, Meherkul, Bisgao, Susanga, Chittagong etc. Besides a few tanks were dug and a few temples were built at his orders.²¹ A series of military successes had given Vijay Manikya mastery over a considerable portion of land on the eastern Valley of the Meghna, but he could not consolidate his vast kingdom. He paid least attention to the formidable problem of influx of the foreigners. In the mid-sixteenth century the Tripura Empire reached the last limits of its expansion.²²

CONTRIBUTION OF AMAR MANIKYA

Amar Manikya occupies a significant place in the history of Manikya rulers of Tripura, who was the son of Dev Manikya and grandson of Dhanya Manikya. Like his grandfather he restored the prestige of the old dynasty of Tripura royal family. Of course, he was a very energetic ruler. Though he was an old man at the time of his accession, but he was full of new hope, valour and glory. He forced the ruler of Tarap to pay him tribute. He also defeated the ruler of Bhulua. According to Rajmala, Amar Manikya captured a large number of men and women from Bhulua and sold them as slaves in Tripura and Sylhet. His son Rajdhar Manikya invaded Sylhet and defeated its ruler Fateh Khan, who promised Amar Manikya to give fifty horses annually as tribute. The coin of Amar Manikya issued in the 1581 A.D. on the occasion of his victory over Sylhet has been discovered.²³

It was due to his greatness that Amarpur town is named after him. Since his coronation as the king of Tripura in 1577 A.D., his first and foremost task was to set in order the chaotic administration of the kingdom. He made friendly alliances with the Bhuyas of Bengal, defeated small feudatories of Bakla, Sarial etc, and offered asylum to Isa Khan, the Zamindar of Sarail when it was overrun by the Mughal army.²⁴ He transferred his capital from Udaipur to Amarpur in the face of violent Mogh raids.²⁵

Amar Manikya constructed a big tank known as 'Amar Sagar' in which task he secured the assistance of several zamindars of Bengal. As per his order an old man named as Ranacatur Narayan resumed the writing of the Tripura Chronicle 'Rajmala'. Ranacatur Narayan and a few other court poets compiled the second volume of the chronicle. More than one hundred year back, Dharma Manikya (1431-1462 D.A) did the pioneering work by commissioning the writing of history of Tripura. After a long period of interruption, Amar Manikya took up the task again. It was his second important work, which was undertaken early in 1578 A.D. ²⁶

According to Rajmala, Amar Manikya conquered Chittagong and invaded Arakan with the help of some Portuguese adventurers. But, Sikander Shah (Meng Phalaung), the King of Arakan defeated him and occupied Chittagong. In a hard contesting battle Jujha Singha, the son of Amar Manikya was killed. Sikandar Shah demanded the surrender of Adam Shah, a fugitive of Arakan, who took shelter in the Court of Amar Manikya. But, Amar Manikya refused to surrender him. This is why, Sikandar Shah invaded Tripura with a larger army and reached Udaipur in the year 1584 A.D. In this manner, the Arakan forces plundered Udaipur and committed massacre. The King of Tripura left Udaipur in time and took shelter in the forest of Tetaiya on the bank of the river Manu. But, there also he could not live in peace. Chhatra Nazir, a brother-in-law of Amar Manikya collected some Kukis and revolted against him. Amar Manikya, however, was able to suppress this revolt. Being mentally depressed, Amar Manikya committed suicide by taking poison. ²⁷

CONCLUSION

Thus, on the basis of historical facts, it can be said that the reign of 'Ratna Fa' or 'Ratna Manikya' saw the down of a new era in the history of Tripura. Lots of innovations were introduced by the Manikya Kings of Tripura by which Tripura marched on the path of peace, development and modernization, 'Sri Rajmala' or the 'chronicles of the kings' of Tripura was written by Durlabhendra and two Brahmin scholars Sukreswar and Baneswar.

Dhanya Manikya, constructed the historical 'Tripura Sundari Temple' at Udaipur in 1501 A.D, which shows the cultural development and starting of Sanskritization in Tripura. Of course, he defeated Hussain Shah, the Nawab of Bengal on several occasions and took up the title 'Vijayendra' and 'Tripurendra'.

In all the spheres of social, political, religious, cultural, military and economic life - we find the great influence of the Manikya rulers. Starting from Ratna Manikya, Dharma Manikya, Dhanya Manikya, Vijay Manikya and Amar Manikya - all the prominent rulers of Tripura had contributed significantly in the all-round development of pre-colonial Tripura. Lots of temples were constructed, many tanks were excavated, coins were issued and overall the boundary of the state was preserved by the patriot kings of Manikya rulers. Even Amar Manikya sacrificed his life for the safety and security of Pre-colonial Tripura.

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