CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING THE NATIVE STATE OF TRIPURA

Section I: Geographical location of the State

A tiny mass, a slender strip of earth resembling the shape of a cashewnut in the south-west extremity of Assam, flanked by Mizoram on the east and bounded on three sides by the alien Bangladesh territory, the present State of Tripura has been carved out of the princely State of Tippera, and a tract of a few square kilometres of Chakla Roshnabad, once forming an indivisible appanage of the State in the contiguous British districts. It is situated between latitudes 22°56' N and 24°32' N and between longitudes 91°10' E and 92°21' E. The State shares a very long international boundary with Bangladesh (about 839 Km.). Its boundary with Assam and Mizoram is 53 and 109 kilometres respectively. The State embraces an area of 10,491.69 square kilometres according to the State Department of Land Records and Settlement.  

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1 Anglicized transliteration of Tripura. Previous to 1866 the State was known as Independent Tippera, and Hill Tippera till 1920. Since then, it came to be officially designated as Tripura. Tippera is historical no doubt, but for general reference and use, Tripura is preferred.  

Tripura presents undulating hills and dales, interspersed with plains, marshy lands and jungles. The terrain of the State is mostly hilly. Before Independence the native State of Tripura was known as "Parbatya Tripura" (Hill Tippera) in British political parlance while the adjoining plains district in East Bengal had carried the name of Tippera. About 70 per cent of the area constitute hills and small hillocks, the latter being known as "tills" in local language. And the rest of the area are situated in the river basins, and in the narrow strips of low-lying lands between the "tillas" locally known as "lunga land".

Properly speaking, there are no mountains in the State, but several of the peaks in the eastern ranges of hills reach a height of more than six hundred metres—Betling Sib (938 metres), Sakan (782 metres) Banshurun (713 metres) Khantlang (681 metres) and Behliang Sib (675 metres) —to cite a few of them. There are six principal hill ranges running from north to south parallel with each other, each successive range towards the east being a little higher than the previous one. Beginning from the east, the hill ranges run through the State in the following order: The Jamouri (34), the Sakan Tlang (58), the

1 Figures in the parenthesis indicate approximate length of the hill ranges in kilometres.
Langtarai (48), the Athara Mura (106), the Bara Mura (47) and the Deota Mura (85). These ranges rise in altitudes southwards from the plains of Sylhet and northwards from Chittagong district in Bangladesh. The hills are constituted with narrow ridges, sharply tapered off at the top, covered with forest, "thinner along with the edges of the ridges and spurs, but close and tangled, and often impenetrable in the ravines and valleys."¹ The most parts of the hills are covered with bamboo jungles while the low land abounds with lush green, cane brakes, swamps and savanna. This backdrop of Tripura hills provides an ideal abode for wild denizens.

The hills form a watershed from which the drainage pours down west into the Meghna (in Bangladesh) by the rivers Juri, Manu, Dolai, Haora, Langai and Cumti, and south-east into the Bay of Bengal. A number of Chhadas or small hilly streams empties water into these rivers. During rainy season, the rivers swell to be dangerously torrential while in other seasons they remain practically dried up, except in some sectors. Tripura, having no access to coastal waters, grows to be a land-locked State and its rivers and streams, mostly unfordable, harden its position.

The plains of the State is often broken by intermittent hills. The low-lying lands in the north-western and

southern boundaries are comparatively fertile and hence
The plains densely populated. Certain parts of the 
western boundary are criss-crossed with 
hillocks and marshy valleys.

The climate of Tripura is generally dry and humid 
with plenty of rains. The State lies within the South-west 
Monsoon belt and rainfall is quite moderate. 
The annual temperature ranges 10° to 35°.

The soil of Tripura is mainly laterite in hills and 
hillocks, and alluvial in flat lands. Because of the exposure 
Soils to the tropical sun and torrential rains, 
the soil in the tillas or high lands is very 
deficient in organic matters and plant nutrients. The tilla 
soil is generally sandy loam, acidic and devoid of humus.

The soil in the valley lands constitutes with trans­ 
ported soil from the tillas. It is relatively richer in 
organic matters. The soil of the plains or what is known as 'ngal' (arable) lands can be classified as loamy with less sand 
content than tilla soils. The Lunga soil is generally acidic 
and of sandy loam type.  

Phytogeographically, the State of Tripura is divided 
into two broad regions covered by (a) ever-green forests with 

1 World Agricultural Census, op.cit., pp.11-12.
intermediate characteristics and (b) moist deciduous forests.

Forests

The swamp vegetation, riverain forests, bamboo and cane brakes, Garjan forests and grassland are all seral and edaphic scattered all over the State wherever favourable situation occurs for their growth. These forests were mostly natural grown forests till the importance of organised forestry was realised by the State in the late thirties. Grasslands, swamp vegetation and under-growths once provided good pastures for cattle population of the adjoining British districts.

The impact of these physical features is no doubt great upon the present economy of the State, but it was much greater in the past. During the princely regime the sources of the State revenue were principally agrarian and forest-based which included settlement of waste lands, tea cultivation, pasturage, elephant-catching, export of Jhum and forest produce. The practices in the revenue administration as well were considerably conditioned by the topography and terrain of the State. The detailed treatment of these aspects will be made in the relevant chapters to follow.

With this physical profile we now propose to examine the boundaries of the State by which Tripura could be designated with political distinctiveness in ancient times. The history of Tripura prior to the establishment of the Muslim rule in Bengal is completely shrouded in darkness. The principal
source for the construction of the earlier history of the Tripura royal house is the Rajamala, the State Chronicles in Bengali verse extant in different compositions. Mists of legends and traditions obscure the Rajamala so far as the ancient period is concerned and it demands further verification of materials from other sources. But most of the inscriptions and coins that have been discovered till the recent years belong to the Muslim period, and their numbers are also very limited. The inscriptions of the ancient period found in Tripura and in its neighbouring districts in Bangladesh did not throw any light upon the history of the earliest Tripura rulers. Interestingly enough, no coins of the Tripura ruling house have so far been unearthed prior to the Muslim period. Keeping this in view, the political boundaries of Tripura must be judged in the light of materials gleaned from the Rajamala.

According to the Rajamala, the boundaries of the State in the ancient period lay between the river Brahmaputra in the north and Achrang to the southern part contiguous with

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Udaipur, from the kingdom of Manipur on the east to the Koch kingdom and Bengal on the west. According to one of the readings of the Rajamala, the southern boundary of ancient Tripura even extended to Rashang (Arakan).

It is impossible to define the limits of the ancient kingdom of Tripura at any particular point of time. But it is reasonable to suggest that at various times throughout the course of history, the ancient kings or chiefs carried their armies in victorious march through the enemy kingdoms and gained conquests and possessions. It is also possible that their march was contained or the extent of the ancient kingdom of Tripura was contracted by the powerful onslaughts of superior arms. We propose to examine in depth the claims of the Rajamala as to the extent of ancient kingdom of Tripura in the next section and evaluate other evidences to show how far these claims are justified.

Tripura emerged as a recognised political power in the south-eastern part of Bengal in the sixteenth century with a gestation period over centuries. In the period of consolidation its rulers were involved in active conflict with the neighbouring powers, not only in the hills but also in the plains and sometime across the Meghna. Tripura made conquests and gained or regained possessions at varying

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period of medieval times, which extended its territories from Chittagong and Bhulua in the south-east to the river Meghna on the west, and to Thanangchi province lying on the east of Tripura, and west of the Lushai Hills bordering Burmah. It was not till the beginning of the 17th century that the Mughals could obtain a footing in Tripura. A further century of strife followed in bringing it to the Mughal fold. Tripura, which had once extended to the Meghna, was contracted on the western side and practically bagged down in the hills in the later Mughal period. Being cut to size, Tripura was converted into a simple zamindari under the Mughals. The position thus emerged was that the hill sections of the kingdom remained undisturbed as a State while the western plains spreading over British districts of Tippera, Noakhali and Sylhet, then designated as Chakla Roshnabad, continued to be held by the rulers as a Zamindari going with the State.

The territorial accretions and contractures that had transformed the boundaries of Tripura during the medieval period will be dwelt at some length in the Section II in the light of other explicit evidences.

The connection of the British with the State of Tripura commenced through the Zamindari of Roshnabad as the English East India Company came to be in possession of Chakla Chittagong under a grant from Mir Qasim, which was ultimately
included and confirmed in the imperial Farman of Dawani granted to the Company by Emperor Shah Alam in 1765. Thus the civil authority passed to the British over this tract along with the rest of Bengal. Until then the hills and plains were considered one and indivisible, but what passed then was simply the assessment of the Zamindari, not of the hills. The Mughals did not trouble themselves about the tract beyond the plains, as it was not remunerative; their settlements had been really for the plains. So the British settled with the Rajah for the plains only, and it was ultimately the Zamindari of the plains which was permanently settled. Practically the Zamindari formed the nucleus of the British district of Tippera which was later laid down by the arbitrators as the western boundary between the State of Hill Tripura and the British district irrespective of their possessions.

The northern boundary of the Tripura Raj, outskirting the British district of Sylhet was a source of continual disputes. Partly to protect the plains from the predatory raids of the savage tribes living in the north and south of the Sylhet valley and partly to secure potential tea-land for the mercantile interests, the Britishers in 1821 arbitrarily lopped off hundred of square miles and deprived the Raj of the revenues and rents worth crores of rupees.  

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1 Sandys, E.F., History of Tripura, pp.35-36.
The slicing off of its territory did not stop there. With the newly acquired district of Cachar in the Company's dominion in 1830, the eastern frontier of Tripura got contracted from the traditional confines of Burmah to Tipai Mwh and then to the river Dhaleswari till it was provisionally located at the river Longai or about 48 miles further west of Tipai Mwh. It was the Lushai Expedition in 1871-72 which, coupled with defence and political considerations, needed rectification of Tripura's eastern frontier. The provisional "inner line" of defence fixed in 1874 unilaterally to be the Longai river came to stay as a permanent measure.¹

The Durbar repeatedly moved the British Government for the restitution of the whole area cut off by the Longai line till 1927 A.D., but ineffectually.² Thus the successful conclusion of the Lushai Expedition culminated in robbing the Tripura Raj of a large tract of territory along its eastern frontier and reduced the State practically to one-half of its earlier territorial area.

If this geo-political outline introduces Tripura in a general way, an historical overview of the Manikya Dynasty will provide us an extended background to understand

¹ Tripura State Memorandum For The Indian States Enquiry Committee (Financial), No. 2, Exhibit B, Appendix IX.
² Ibid, Exhibit B, Appendix XXV; Exhibit C, Appendices II-III, VII.
the events that aided or affected the growth of Tripura as a political power along the south-eastern part of Bengal.

Section II: An historical overview of the Manikya Dynasty

The Rajahs of Tripura, according to the Rajamala, claim their descent from Yayati, a scion of the lunar dynasty. Legendary and ancient period Daitya, one of his descendants is said to have come to Kirata-desha and established his kingdom in Tribega in the present Nowgong district of Assam. Tripur, the son and heir of Daitya was succeeded by his son Trilochan. He married the daughter of the neighbouring Rajah of Hirimba (Cachar). Being adopted by the childless king of Cachar, Trilochan's eldest son inherited his kingdom.

After Trilochan's death, Dakshin, one among his eleven sons, became the Rajah of Tribega. A fratricidal war broke out and Dakshin was forced to quit Tribega. He established a new kingdom on the upper stretch of the river Barbakra (Barak) with headquarters at Kholonga in the Cachar Hills. After several generations, the Rajah Pratit picked a quarrel with the king of Cachar which ended in a decisive victory for the latter. Pratit had to quit Kholonga and move farther south to reach Dharmenagar. On the bank of the river Juri he built his capital there. Jujarpha, one of the descendants of Pratit, is said to have annexed Rangamati.
Being encouraged by this initial victory Jujarpha wanted to extend his conquest into Bengal. Bishalgarh and neighbouring areas had come under his sway. The Rajamala further states that one Cheonpha alias Chetungpha carried his invasion into Meherkul in the district of Comilla and in one of the readings of the Rajamala Meherkul was annexed to Tripura.1 Dangarpha, one of the latter descendants of Chetungpha, is said to have divided his kingdom among 17 of his sons, depriving the youngest one of his rightful share of the territory. All the place-names identified by Sen suggest that the limits of the ancient Tripura lay extensively in the hilly region of the north-east part of Tripura and Cachar.2

The above accounts given by the Rajamala are mixed with mythologies and legends which need verification from other sources. James Long considered the first part of the Rajamala a literary work of the early 15th century. But the Rajamala is not as old as it was believed by Long. In the opinion of Dr. D. C. Sarkar, the Rajamala was not composed before the close of the eighteenth century. In regard to the earlier part, Sarkar holds, the compilers must have relied on traditions, recorded or unrecorded, and their own imaginations.3

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1 Rajamala (Education Directorate Ed.), op.cit., p.18.
3 Sarkar, D.C.: Some Epigraphic Records Of The Medieval Period From Eastern India, p.89.
The epigraphic evidences in the Tripura-Chittagong-Sylhet region prove beyond doubt the existence of some powerful ruling dynasties. Besides the rule of the Later Guptas by Vainyagupta, and Gopachandra, Dharmaditya and Samacharadeva in their independent posture during the sixth century, the Khadgas and the Devas ruled in the Tripura region from about the middle of the seventh to the middle of the eighth century. The seat of administration of the Chandra dynasty who ruled in East Bengal from about 875 to 1035 A.D. is identified in the region of Lalmai Hills near Comilla. The Mainamati plate of Hariikaladeva-Ranavankamalla dated Saka 1141 confirms the existence of the kingdom of Pattikera in the 13th century. The Chittagong plate of Damodar dated in Saka 1166 proves the existence of another powerful ruling house. Damodara's kingdom comprised the modern districts of Tippera, Noakhali and Chittagong. The existence of still another powerful lineage of kings is evidenced by the Bhatera copper-plates. Keshavadeva of this dynasty extended his sway over the southern part of the district of Sylhet, portions of Cseher and possibly portions of Tripura also.

3 Majumder, R.C., History of Ancient Bengal, pp.200, 214(f.n.4).
5 Gupta, K.K., Copper-plates of Sylhet, Vol.1, p.194.
These epigraphic evidences do not throw any light upon the relation of Tripura royal family with any of the ancient ruling houses that rose in the Tippera—Chittagong—Sylhet area. It is very probable that the early members of the family were the tribal leaders, and the partitioning of the territory by Dangarpha among his 17 sons strongly suggests to the tribal tradition of making chiefs. They became gradually powerful and extended their political influence upon the adjoining plains. In the light of the existence of these ancient kingdoms in the neighbourhood, the claim of the Rajamala about the ancient rulers of Tripura can hardly be substantiated. The rise of the Tripura royal house must be at a later date when the Muslim invasion into Bengal towards the beginning of the 13th century continually eroded the power structure, and it was the political vacuum that provided the grounds for scramble.¹

If the brocade of imagination covers the truth, the Rajamala does not entirely conceal the groundwork of truth. The earlier part of the Rajamala is more of the history of the Tipra tribe than that of the Tripura royal family. Though it is difficult to extricate the myths and legends from the generic history of the Tipra tribe, yet the description of the Rajamala generally confirms their ethnic movement.²

¹ Sarkar, D.C., op.cit., p.95.
ethnic migration from Tribega to Kholongma and then to the
bank of Barabakra in Cachar and finally to Dharmanagar in
the present State of Tripura may be instanced in point.

In the Rajamala Ratnamanikya is credited to have
inaugurated the Manikya Dynasty in the ruling house of Tripura.

Historical period
and the Manikya
Dynasty

But Ratnamanikya's coins issued
between Saka 1386 and 1389 show
that he was on the throne at least
in 1464 to 1468 A.D. The Rajamala itself speaks of a royal
charter issued by Dhramamanikya, son of Mahamanikya, in Saka
1380 (1458 A.D.). On the basis of these evidences it would be
proper to suggest that the historical period of the Manikya
dynasty of Tripura has begun from the reign of Dhramamanikya,
and not from that of Ratnamanikya, as has been believed on
the sole evidence of the Rajamala. The genealogy of kings of
this period given in the Rajamala has been proved to be wrong
by numismatic evidences. 1

Like the enterprising Mongoloid Ahoms in their bid
to establish a kingdom in Assam in the first quarter of the
thirteenth century, the Indo-Mongoloids or the Kiratas in
their ethnic swarm skirted the eastern fringe of south-eastern

1 Rajamala (Education Directorate Ed.), op. cit., p. 21.
2 Sarkar, D.C., op. cit., pp. 91-92.
Bengal and at last founded a state in Tripura. This event does not appear to be much later than the Muslim conquest of Bengal about the early part of the thirteenth century. The name of Tripura is apparently a Sanskritized form of the tribal word Tipra borne by the hill tribes to which the royal family of Tripura belonged. The claim of the family to be the scion of the lunar dynasty of epic fame is almost similar to the claim of the foreign Gurjara-Pratiharas to be descended from the solar dynasty of Ayodhya. The claim of remote ancestry by the Mleccha (Mech) of Salstembhas of Assam from the lineage of Bhagadatta known in the Mahabharata, and by the Dravidian Calukyas sometimes from the sun and sometimes from the moon is materially of the same kind. This type of preference for identifying the ruling houses with the dynasties of epic fame may be regarded as an indicator for the process of Hinduisation. The Thai-Shan word pha (king), suffixed to the names of the Ahom kings, also formed the latter part of the names of the early kings of Tripura. It later gave way to the Sanskrit word "Manikya". This replacement of the tribal word pha by the Sanskrit one suggests to Hinduisation taking firm roots in Tripura.

The appointment of Brahmin scholars by Dhammamanikya to record the past glories of the royal house in a verse

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1 Sarkar, D.C., op.cit., pp.95-96.
form (which finally took the shape of the Rajamala) on the basis of facts retrieved and narrated by the Chantai, (the presiding tribal priest at the royal pantheon of Fourteen gods), the earliest known epigraphic record of Dhamamaniyaka in Sanskrit and, above all, the use of Saka Era in dating the earliest coins\footnote{No dated coins in the Tripura Era have yet been discovered.} may be cited in support of our view. The founding of the Manikya dynasty is indicative of the historic decision for Hinduism in preference to the tribal traditions. This departure is very much in keeping with the ambition of a rising power in order to make it acceptable to the Hindu population of the neighbouring areas on the border of south-eastern Bengal already riven under Muslim blows. The dictates of the same faith would certainly prove strategic in their aspiring bid for territorial expansion which could hardly materialise without flexing muscles with the superior arms of the Muslim power in Eastern Bengal.

King Dhamamaniyaka is the first king whose date is known with some amount of certainty. On the basis of his copper-plate dated in Saka 1380 and the \textit{Tripura Vamsabali} (manuscript) Sen fixes his period of reign from 841 to 872 of the Tripura era corresponding to 1431-1462 A.D.\footnote{Sen, K.P., \textit{Shri-Rajamala, IInd Lahar}, p.196.} It seems nearly certain that it is from his time onward that we have
Tradition has it that sometime during the period before Dharmamanikya, the Sultans of Bengal invaded Tripura and occupied some portions thereof and that Dharmamanikya recovered those lost territories. But its authenticity is open to question. With the Muslim power entrenched in East Bengal during the first quarter of the 14th century, and Sonargaon growing as a spring-board of operations, Tripura came closer the perimeter of the Muslim shots. Attempts to occupy and retain Chittagong, Bhulua (Noakali) had intensified the encounter between the Muslim rulers of Bengal and the rising power of Tripura during the 14th century and the later period. These two places had the strategic importance as commanding the route to and from Arakan. It may be pointed out that Shams-ud-din Firuz Shah (1301-22) annexed Mymensingh, Sylhet and other territories to his kingdom; Fakhr-ud-din Mubarak Shah (1338-1350) retained his conquest of Chittagong during his reign while Shams-ud-din Illiyas Shah (1342-58) occupied Sonargaon and some tracts of Kamrup. As testified to by coins, some part of Tripura had come under the territorial possession of Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Shah (1418-32), at least for a short period.

It is quite possible that other Sultans also conquered portions of the kingdom of Tripura. But during the 22 years (1433-55) intervening between the death of Jalal-ud-din...
Muhammad Shah and the commencement of the rule of Barbak Shah (1455-76), the Sultans of Bengal were not as enterprising as their predecessors, and internal troubles eroded their virility. It is likely that Dharmamanikya took advantage of the situation and succeeded in recovering some of the last territorial possessions. He was probably succeeded by Ratnamanikya.

The Rajamala gives a detailed account of Ratnamanikya, whose coins are dated 1386 and 1389 Saka (1467 A.D.). Ratnamanikya was the contemporary of Barbak Shah (1455-76), the Sultan of Gauda. The reign of Ratnamanikya is important from the cultural point of view. It was during his time that a close contact came to be established between Bengal and Tripura.

The copper-plate inscription at the time of Vijayamanikya I in Saka 1410 (1488 A.D.) confirms the account of the Rajamala that about this time the army got upper hand and became the king-maker. It also refers the inclusion of the present Comilla district in the dominion of Tripura. King Dhanyamanikya (1490-1520) brought the army under control. Having consolidated his position at home, Dhanyamanikya led an expedition into Bengal which culminated in the occupation of

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1 Majumder, R.C., History Of Medieval Bengal, pp. 163-64.
2 Singh, K.C., op. cit., pp. 31-34.
3 Sarkar, D.C., op. cit., pp. 92, 88.
Chittagong in 1513. Husain Shah, Sultan of Bengal, took no
time to retaliate it. Thus the war that began was a prolonged
one with alternate success and reverse: on both sides. On the
whole, though both armies penetrated far into the enemy terri-
tory, there was no conspicuous territorial gain on either side.
During the war Chittagong came into possession of both sides,
till it was conquered by Arakan. The Kookieland (Thanangch)
lying east of his kingdom was annexed. During the reign of
Dhanyamanikya Tripura became a force to be reckoned with in
the south-eastern part of Bengal.

Devamanikya succeeded Dhanyamanikya as confirmed by
his issue of coin dated Saka 1442 (1520 A.D.). He, too, was
a very powerful king of the Tripura royal house. The 'Dhurasa-
basudha' coin issued in Saka 1442 testifies to the account of
the Bajamala that Devamanikya conquered Bhulua (Noakhali) and
extended his sway farther to Dhurasa on the sea-shore. Two
coins dated Saka 1450 (1528 A.D.) and 1452 (1530 A.D.) depicted
him as the victor of Suvarnagram.

The next king worthy of mention after Devamanikya is
Vijayamanikya (1432-1563). He was contemporary of Akbar. The

2 Tripura District Gazetteers, p.78.
3 Ibid, p.78.
4 Ibid, p.79.
Ain-i-Akbari refers to him as an independent king of Tripura. The contemporary numismatic evidences lend support to the account of the Rajamala that Vijayamanikya II conquered Sylhet, Khasia, Jayantia, sent expeditionary forces to Chittagong and Sonargaon, and advanced upto banks of the river Padma. This also indicates the Afghan-Tripura contest over the territorial possessions. During this period Chittagong was occupied (in 1539) by Sher Shah's deputy named Nogazil (Nawazish?). Shamsuddin Mahamad Sur Gazi, Sur Viceroy of Bengal (1553-55) declared independence and raided Arakan, which suggests that Chittagong formed the rear in the expedition.

The next celebrated king of Tripura was Udaimanikya (1567) who was not born of royal parents. He usurped the throne after murdering Anantamanikya (1564-67). Udaimanikya changed the name of the capital, Rangamati, to Udaipur after his name. He engaged the Pathan army in a fierce battle over the control of Chittagong and was finally defeated.

Udaimanikya was succeeded by his son Jayamanikya. The latter was murdered by Amaramanikya (1577-86), the brother of

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1 Abul Fazl, Ain-i-Akbari, Vol.II, Translated and edited by Jerret, H.S., p.130.
5 Rajamala (Education Directorate Ed.), op.cit., p.45.
Vijayamanikya, in a palace coup and the throne was occupied. Thus the old royal dynasty to the throne of Tripura was restored. Amaramanikya was perhaps the last flash of the military vigour shown by the Tripura ruling house. The Rajamala reports that Amaramanikya invaded Bhulua and defeated the small feudatories of Bakla, Sarail and Sylhet. The victory over Sylhet is confirmed by his issue of the coin dated in Saka 1503 (1581). His march to Chittagong and Arakan suggests that he had already established a hegemony over a good portion of the south-eastern part of Bengal, at least temporarily.

During his lifetime a serious struggle for succession among his sons broke out and eroded the State power. And Sikandar Shah (1571-1593), the king of Arakan, took no time to avail of this opportunity. Udaipur, the capital of Tripura, was attacked and ransacked. Sad at heart, Amaramanikya ended his life by taking poison.

The de jure annexation of Bengal to Akbar's empire was completed by the 1575 A.D., but the de facto rule of the Mughals was not felt in Bengal till its capital was established at Dacca in the later century (1612 A.D.). During the reign of Yasodharamanikya (1600-18) the downward stage in the history of Tripura reached its nadir.

1 Ibid, pp.48-50.
3 Majumder, R.C., op.cit., p.165.
The local formidable Afghan chiefs had lost their virility to be any potential danger to the Mughals. It was about this time that Ibrahim Khan, the Subahdar (Viceroy) of Bengal, planned an expedition to Arakan. The conquest of Tripura was possibly a part of the grand plan to facilitate the expedition. After a contested battle on land and water, Tripura was finally conquered by superior Mughal arms in 1618. Udaipur was made the seat of Thanah (garrison) and placed in charge of Mirza Nurullah.

The peculiar physical configuration of Tripura, damp and moist climate hardly proved conducive to the Mughal garrison at Udaipur. They had to shift the army establishment to Meherkul in the plains. The direct sway over the hill territory got slackened in the sequel, yet the vast tracts of land in the western plains over which the kings of Tripura had once exercised territorial control were integrated into the Mughal dominion under the name of Sarkar Udaipur in the rent roll. An annual Jama of Rs 99,860 was fixed for the Sarkar (Revenue Division). It is in all likelihood that the Mughals had not led their victorious march beyond Udaipur. The statement in the Rajamala about the establishment of a petty tribal kingdom

1 Loc. cit.
3 Rajamala (Education Directorate ed.), op.cit., p.69.
4 Singh, K.C., op.cit., p.77.
at Achrang to north-east of Udaipur in the hills points to it.¹

The next important king was Kalyanamanikya (1628-60) who, according to the Rajamala, belonged to the collateral branch of the Tripura royal house. He appears to have recovered the lost glory to some extent. His rent-free land grants in the mouza of Meherkul and Noornagar lend support to it.² During his reign Tripura was invaded by the Bengal Subahdar Shah Shuja. But no significant success was achieved even after labouring for one year. The district of Mirzapur was made the frontier of the imperial dominion.³ It is interesting to note that in the revenue records of Bengal Subah revised at the time of Shah Shuja in 1658, Sarkar Udaipur was recorded as a revenue paying centre.⁴ The mention of Sarkar Udaipur in all his land grants is indicative of the Mughal allegiance, real or nominal, particularly for the western plains.

On Kalyanamanikya's death his eldest son Govinda-manikya ascended the throne (1660). He was soon ousted by

¹ Ibid, p.77.
⁴ Singh, K.C., op.cit., p.84.
his younger brother Nakshatra Ray with the help of the Subahdar of Bengal in 1661. He assumed the name of Chhatramanikya (1661-67). Govindamanikya was back on the throne after the death of Chhatramanikya in 1667. He was succeeded by his son Ramadevamanikya (1676-85). Possibly in 1682 Ramadevamanikya led an expedition to Sylhet which was retaliated by Shaista Khan, the Subahdar of Bengal for the second term (1680-88).  

Ramadevamanikya was succeeded by his son Ratnamanikya II during his minority. He was ousted by Narendramanikya (1692-95). But three years later Ratnamanikya was replaced on the throne by the Mughal Subahdar. But for his powerful Dewan (later Juvaraj) Champak Ray, he could not assume the sceptre of real power. Champak Ray was decimated by the Mughals and Ghanashyam was sent as a hostage to the Mughal court. In 1712 Prince Jahandar, a representative of Emperor Shah Alam I, made peace with Ratnamanikya II. This suggests that Ratnamanikya II succeeded in shaking off the Mughal yoke at least temporarily during the close of his reign. Rajah Swargadeva Rudra Singh of Assam had sent diplomatic missions to the Court of Tripura in order to secure the support for building a confederacy of

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2 Majumder, R.C., op.cit., p.166.
the Hindu rulers against the Mughals. He reciprocated the gesture. It is reasonable to hold that Ratnamaniyka II had considerably retrieved his position to prove an ally to the king of Assam. Ratnamaniyka was murdered by his step-brother Ganashyam in a palace coup, who ascended the throne in 1712 A.D. under the name of Mahendramaniyka. He was succeeded by his brother Dharmamaniyka II (1714).

In the wake of the Mughal conquest of Tripura by 1618 A.D., a train of Mughal zamindars was found in possession of vast tracts in the plains. Mirza Nurrullah, the Thanahdar of Udaipur, had become the zamindar of Noomagar Parganas. Loss of control of the Manikya kings over the plains and its integration with the Mughal empire This process continued during the reign of Dharmamaniyka II and his successors. Murad Beg was a powerful zamindar of Noornagar who re-christened it after his name as Muradnagar. Amir Mirza Humayun, son of Prince Jahandar Shah, was granted the zamindari of Homnabad in 1722-23. Aqa Sadiq was a formidable zamindar who governed Bardakat. Noor Mohammad had been in possession of Sarail Parganas. The location of all these Mughal pleni-potentiaries in the populous plains, west of Hill Tripura, played a buffer in hemming the Rajah's territory mostly in the hills.

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The palace wrangle only gave grist to the imperial designs at the hands of Bengal Subahdars, when Jagatray, descendant of Chhatramanikya, wanted to oust Dhammanikya from the throne and to that end he sought the help of Mir Habib, Naib-Nazim (deputy governor) of Dacca. Mir Habib made a three-pronged attack against Tripura from Dacca, Chittagong and Jayantia and occupied the capital in 1729 A.D. after a series of serious engagements.1

The whole of the kingdom of Tripura, barring the hilly tracts, was annexed by the Mughals. Jagatray got himself installed as king of the hilly region of Tripura and ruled over this kingdom under the name of Jagatmanikya, supported by a Mughal Foujdar as a Resident posted at the capital. He got in zamindari right of Chakla Roshanabad, recently carved out of the kingdom of Tripura in the plains. The newly created zamindari constituted about three-eighth of the territory of Tripura. Thus the greed of Jagatray led to the integration of the plains of Tripura with the Mughal empire on a permanent basis, and being the Mughal nominee, he lost his grip over the hills in no time.

Dhammanikya was re-instated by Shuja-ud-din, the Nawab of Bengal, in 1732 in the place of Jagatmanikya. But

no further change was made in respect of other measures adopted earlier by Dacca.

Two kings named Jayamanikya and Indramanikya II are known to have ruled respectively in 1739 and 1744, as evidenced by their coins. The political history of Tripura twenty years hence (1740-60) is but a tale of tedious and interminable palace wrangle over the question of succession, in the troubled waters of which the Nawabs of Bengal always tried to fish. The frantic bid of the contestants to buy imperial support for their cause provided the Mughals with a ready tool to pull behind the wires. And these rapacious umpires lost no time in cashing in on the situation to their advantages. Given extra privileges to make and unmake the Rajahs they quietly acquired a prescriptive right to regulate the line of succession, overriding the customary law, if necessary. Thus a practice that grew over years required not only the succession to the Zamindari in the plains but also to the Raj in the hills to be attested by the Mughals under one Sanad. The Mughals intended to control the succession to the Raj in order to be assured of the revenue for the Zamindari and tribute of elephants to Delhi, which had unwittingly converted the Raj into a simple zamindari. The control of the Raj via the Zamindari was only later introduction by the Britishers to whom the money-paying plains

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were more important than the elephant-catching hills.

These interminable wrangles over succession had brought in de-stabilization in the State. Utter lawlessness prevailed everywhere and refractory local chiefs and self-seekers defied the authority. In such chaotic conditions the falling into arrears of revenue was a foregone conclusion and the Mughals rarely had any compromise with the defaulter. Vijayamanikya III, the Rajah of Tripura, was taken as a prisoner to Decca for his erratic payment. ¹ During the interregnum Yuvaraj (heir-apparent) Krishnamani, the brother of Indramanikya II, appeared on the scene to assert his rightful claim to the throne which was challenged by the sword of Samser Gazi, an upstart zamindar in the Pargana of Dakshinsik. Samser stopped paying revenue to the Tripura Raj and declared himself the ruler of Boshnabad. ² But at the same time he remitted revenue to Alivardi Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, who needed the money sorely for his engagement with the Bargis (Maratha guerillas). Samser plundered Udaipur and forced the Yuvaraj to retreat from the capital in 1748 and set up a dummy Rajah under the title of Lakshmanmanikya. Later he began to rule Tripura in his name. The cruelties and oppressions of Samser became so great, and his remittance to the imperial coffer

so uncertain that the Nawab of Bengal had him arrested and punished him by means of a violent death in 1760 A.D.¹

Yuvaraj Krishnamani was recognised as the ruler of Tripura by Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Murshidabad, and he ascended the throne under the title of Krishnamaniya. The Dewani Senad was accordingly granted in his favour in 1167 B.S. (1760 A.D.).² In the wake of Samsar's usurpation the plains of Tripura in which the Zamindari was held had been in the grip of anarchy and confusion. As a result, the cultivation was seriously affected and revenue dwindled substantially. The Rajah consequently fell in arrears.³ This default in the payment of revenue was considered ill and refractory behaviour of the Rajah. It gave sufficient grist to the Foujdar and Dewan,⁴ Mohamed Reza Khan who lost no time to undertake punitive expedition against the ill-fated Rajah.

At this juncture the English East India Company appeared on the scene. By article of a treaty dated the 27th

² Procs. of Judicial Department, Judicial (Criminal) dated 27 December 1838, No.74, para 10.
³ Ibid, para 9 (Letter from Marriott to Council of Islamabad dated 15 April, 1761).
⁴ In certain frontier areas of the Mughal dominion Foujddars were also assigned Dewani functions; see Sinha N.K. - The Economic History of Bengal: From Plassey to the Permanent Settlement, Vol.II (reprint), p.6.
September, 1760, concluded with Mir Qasim Ali, the three districts of Burdwan, Midnapur and Chittagong were ceded to the Company. The outlying and remote position of Chittagong led the Company to give a strong local government to Islama­bad (Chittagong). On the 8th November, 1760 Mr. Verelst was appointed the Chief of Chittagong, and together with a Council he managed Company’s affairs on the spot. With the cession of these three districts the Company had acquired a taste for the territory. The hostility between the Rajah and the Foujdar provided a ready-made opportunity to the Company officials in Calcutta who were extremely keen to exploit the situation to the advantage of the local government of Islamabad. They planned to embark upon the conquest of Tripura, which, according to their calculations, would prove a valuable acquisition to their masters at a small expense.

The plan was immediately acted upon. A detachment under the command of Lt. Mathews left Chittagong on the 20th February, 1761. Mohamed Reza Khan had already engaged the Rajah to take to the hills and got possession of every fort in the plains. With the march of the Company’s army to Tripura, Reza Khan threw up his command of armies operating there and they were all disbanded. The official residence in Numagar Conquest but no annexation of Tripura being hemmed in, the Rajah readily put himself in the hands of the
Marriott was sent to Tripura to settle with the Rajah the revenue of the plains land and demand the expenses of the detachment under the English, and the charge of the former troops under the command of Reza Khan. Terms of settlement were dictated to the Rajah and he had no option but to agree.

In the name of assisting the Nawab's troops the English Company interfered with the affairs of Tripura apparently to chastize the Rajah, but had a well-calculated design to acquire a valuable territory for its masters at a small expense. The Rajah was reduced to his due state of obedience to the Company, and not to the Nawab for whose cause the Company was drawn to the vortex of native politics. While the English Company took possession of the plains of Tripura in 1761 and commenced administering revenues on its behalf, curiously enough, the territory in the hills held independently by the Rajah was left apart. No treaty was enacted after the conquest of Tripura, nor was any contractual obligation stipulated.

Why the English did not take the possession of the hill territory cannot precisely be known to-day, it can

1 Ibid, para 6 (Letter from Council of Islamabad to the Committee of New Lands dated 17 March, 1761).
2 Ibid, para 5 (Despatch from Fort William to Islamabad dated 20 January, 1761).
reasonably be supposed that they refrained, partly in order to conciliate the Rajah or from generosity to a fallen foe in their power, and partly because the hill territory was not worth-taking from commercial point of view. The terms of settlement were dictated to the Rajah, overriding the overall economic situation in the plains of Tripura. The Rajah's request for some remissions in the revenues was turned down and two companies of sepoys were kept ready at hand to have the kists compiled. All these facts could not be construed to signify generosity to a fallen foe. There had been no extenuating circumstances to conciliate the Rajah who was too weak to challenge the English arms. Mackenzie reflected the contemporary English minds when he said that the Company sought rupees, not elephant and so the hills were left to their native rulers.

Section III: Position of the State under British administration

Tripura's position among the princely states was a unique one in the sense that it was conquered but not annexed, nor any treaty was concluded between the State and the English authority in India tobrace the former in the status of protected ally. On the other hand, the State enjoyed, at least technically, an independent status in the Hills. The State was

1Mackenzie, A., History Of The Relations Of The Government With The Hill Tribes Of The Northern-East Frontier Of Bengal, p. 272.
recognised as 'Independent Tipperah' in official parlance in so far as the Hill territory was concerned. The authoritative version of Aitchison's "A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads" underwent many changes in its successive editions, the last editions being in 1929, particularly in connection with the social status of the Tripura ruling family. But the independent status of Hill territory remained practically same as in the first edition of 1862. The Memoranda on the Indian States published under the authority of the Imperial Government in 1940 recognised the sovereign status of the State in the following words, "The British on assuming charge in 1765, took settlement of these Zamindaries (styled Roshnabad) leaving the hills independent." This admission in the authoritative version of the Government merely implies the theoretical basis which the Government could hardly refuse to recognise. But it is the practical status that determines the theoretical one, and not vice versa.

In 1866 the word 'Independent' was scrapped off without making any reference to the Durbar and 'Hill' was substituted.

2 Memoranda on the Indian States, p.104.
for it. Thus the State came to be known as Hill Tippera till 1920. Only after an exchange of protest notes over years, the Raj could salvage the ancient name of 'Tripura' as the official title of the State. Yet, the appellation of 'Independent Tipperah' appeared in the official correspondences with the Government, though sparingly, in the reign of Birachandra upto 1882, and also in successive reigns. The Robkaries, (royal proclamation) appointing the Yuvaraj bear testimony to it. If 'Independent Tipperah' was practically dropped in official correspondences with the Government, it occupied its rightful place in all State papers. Of course it was no compensation for what was lost in the curb imposed upon the Raj by the appointment of the Political Agent to the State in 1871 and conferment of the title 'Maharajah' in the Imperial Durbar of 1877.

A brief survey of events will provide us a proper perspective to judge the unique position of the State vis-a-vis the roughshods of the Britishers over it.

In 1761 the British appeared on the scene of Tripura. They also made and unmade kings like the Mughals, sometimes

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1 Tripura State Memorandum, No. 2, op. cit., Exhibit B, Appendices X, XII and XXIV.
through their underhand machinations, and sometimes in their law courts when rival claimants of the royal family would start litigation over the Gadi (royal cushion-throne). If Balarama Manikya and Krishna Manikya fell under the former category, the cases of Durga Manikya, Ranganga-Manikya and Birachandra Manikya came under the latter.

In 1782 as Krishna Manikya refused to appear to make a settlement for a term of years for the lands in the plains, the British Resident Ralph Leeke under instruction from the Fort William took the zamindari into Khas management. During the regency of Janhavi Devi, the Queen of late Krishna-Manikya, Warren Hastings had to decide the question of succession in favour of Rajadhara Thakur (later Rajadhara-Manikya). As he was the brain behind Krishna Manikya's defiance to make a settlement for the lands in the plains according to the dictation of the British, Rajadhara Thakur was deported to Chittagong on a trumped up charge of sheltering dacoits. Subsequently his innocence was proved and he was set free. Subjecting Rajadhara to great sufferings and humiliation, the Company transformed him completely to their advantage. No resistance was now offered in 1793 to permanently settle Chakla Roshnabad with the Company. The absolute prerogative

1 Sandys, E.F., op.cit., pp. 28-29.

2 Ibid, pp.29-30.
to nominate any heir-apparent by the Rajah of Tripura was thus curbed. The sanction of the Company would hence be required in all matters of succession to the Raj in the Hills as a hereditary zamindar in the plains. A further curb was laid upon the Raj. In 1785 a Sanad of investiture was made out under orders of the British authorities in favour of Rajadhara Manikya and since then every time a ruler was required to be invested by the British authorities to give validity to the Rajah's right to rule.

Ramganga, son of Rajadhara Manikya, was in possession of the revenue-yielding Zamindari of Chakla Roshnabad at the time of his late father's reign. It was easier for him to seize the throne, overriding the rightful claim of the rightful heir, the Yuvaraj. The regular remittance to the Company's coffer secured him the official backing and in 1804 he was acknowledged as the de facto Rajah. When a civil war was looming large with a threat to drop in the revenue of Roshnabad from which the main income of the Raj was derived, the Company persuaded Durgamani to bring a civil suit to establish his claim to the Zamindari, promising to recognise him as Rajah, if the court declared him to be the legal revenue-paying person for the Chakla as the rightful Rajah. Durgamani perforce had to acquiesce in this gesture while

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1 Progs. of Judicial Department, Judicial (Criminal), op. cit., para 13 (Ralph Leeke's letter to the Collector of Chittagong dated 22 June, 1785).
Ramaganga still remained in possession of Chakla Roshnabad. Thus the succession to the Raj via Zamindari entered into the legal arena for the first time.

On the 24th March 1829 the Sadar Dewani Adalat gave judgment in Durgamani's favour, declaring the Zamindari of Chakla Roshnabad to be an integral portion of an impartible Raj. The Company accordingly invested him with insignia of kingship as regards to the Hill territory while the Civil Court gave him possession of the lands in the plains. But this time the Company attached a string to the investiture process. Since the time of Durgamanikya every successive Rajah had been required to pay the nazar or tribute fixed by the Britishers on his succession. The Court verdict gave a strong ground to the Company to assume the paramount position which the application for recognition on the payment of the nazar had virtually recognised, and the Raj and the Zamindari being treated as impartible, the Company might well have decided at once whom it would accept as heir. But the pecuniary consideration had overriding force upon the mercantile minds in recognising Ramaganga (1821) and Bira-chandra (1862) as de facto Rajah since they readily proved as a source of producing money because of their possession of the Zamindari in the plains.

The dualism of the Raj that arose over the succession
tangles at times was marked out in the sharp relief when the

tenders to farm the Hills made by Chandra Narayan Chaudhuri
(1800) and Sambhu Chandra Thakur (1827) were rejected by the

Company. \(^1\) It was emphatically pointed out by the Collector of

British Tippera, that the Hills of Tripura were not included

in the 'Kabuliyat' of the Permanent Settlement and they were

understood to be the Rajah's property. The Hills had been so

long unassessed, and had become to be looked upon as independ­

dent territory. This is how the British Company, caught in

the web of their own legal niceties, was pushed to a position

from where it was no longer possible for them to reject the

prescriptive rights of the Rajah over the Hills of Tripura.

The final official acceptance came in 1838 when the

controversial question arose as to whether or not the Rajah of

Tripura could levy transit duties on hill produce at the border

of the State. The Government held the view that the Rajah

could not claim the right to levy duties on hill produce and

yet at the same time enjoy remission on revenue dues on account

of Roshnabad as a result of abolition of *sariat* duties. But

this decision of Lord Auckland was reversed by the Lieutenant

Governor of Bengal. It was conceded that "the Raja has an

independent hill territory: ....... that the Raja has a full

\(^1\) Board of Revenue (Lower Provinces) Proceedings, (Misc)

Revenue Department dated 29th August, 1800, No. 31 A;

Progs. of Board of Revenue (Lower Provinces) Misc. Vol. 758

dated 20th to 27th April, 1827, Nos. 99-100.
Thus the independent status of the Rajah of Tripura was accepted. Taken together with the Zamindari, the Rajah's independent status was however qualified by his acceptance of and submission to the British authorities as the paramount power. Independent though he was in exercising the internal sovereignty in the Hill territory, the Rajah was a subject zamindar of Roshnabad which fell in the jurisdiction of the British Courts. Thus Rajah had two distinctive capacities, one as a subject and the zamindar of the British Government, the other as an independent Rajah in the Hills. But as the succession to the latter was to depend upon the succession to the former capacity, he was to receive investiture and do homage at one and the same time and in one or both capacities, to the ruling and paramount Government.

These apart, Chakla Roshnabad had an unique status among zamindaries. Its proprietorship was hereditary, but not just heritable like ordinary zamindaries which had entered into the Permanent Settlement. An engagement had been made with each individual Rajah from Rajadhara Manikya (1785-1804) to Ishanachandra Manikya (1845-1862) to pay the revenue. But no such or similar contract had been entered into by the last four Rajahs. An ordinary zamindari could be sold to pay the revenue.

1 Progs. of Judicial Department, Judicial (Criminal), op.cit., No.75, para 71.
2 Sandys, E.F., op.cit., p.63.
due to the Government or debts owed to the money lenders, private persons and the like. Such sale was not legally possible since the Zamindari of Chakla Roshnabad and the Raj was impartible.

Thus interwoven with the fate of each successive Rajah of Tripura, Chakla Roshnabad held an unique position. Being located in the British jurisdiction it provided a strong leverage to the Britishers to meddle in the affairs of the Tripura Raj. Only in 1904 the Succession Sanad granted by the Government of India broke down the age-old dichotomy between the succession to the Raj and the ownership of the Zamindari, and unified the succession under one bracket. The Sanad unequivocally declared the Raj and its appanage hereditary in the Deb Barman family of Tripura. But every succession to the Raj and Zamindari would require the recognition of the imperial Government. The Sanad would remain operative till the Rajah was loyal to the Crown and faithful to the Government of India.

Although the Company did not initially look beyond the paying part of the plains, it had nothing to lament later. The Court verdict gave the Company a long rope to exercise political control over the Hill territory via Chakla Roshnabad.

1 Text of the Succession Sanad dated 21 June, 1904 quoted by Sandys, E.F., op.cit., pp.94-95.
This tentacle had its outgrowth to twine round the Hill territory further in the absence of any treaty obligation. The nibbling at the borders on the pretext of its rectifications and the systematic fleecing off the Raj right up to the barren Hills bear this fact out.

In 1822 the Sylhet-Tripura Frontier was unilaterally rectified on the basis of the Fisher Report. As discussed earlier, the Raj was lopped off the hundreds of square miles of most valuable agricultural and fine tea lands lying far south of the Kusiyara river. During the reign of Kashi Chandra Manikya (1826-1830) the triple boundaries of Tripura, Sylhet and Cachar were delimited and several hundred square miles of hills and valleys, as also some more agricultural and potential tea lands were nibbled off the Tripura Raj, practically by the logic of the strong over the weak and finally annexed to Cachar. The Lushai Expedition, as shown in foregoing pages, culminated in its territorial size being reduced to one-half of what Tripura was in 1781.\footnote{Tripura State Memorandum, op.cit., Exhibit B, p.11.} The eastern boundary of the State was unilaterally pushed to the Longai river on the west. Although this new line of demarcation was given to understand to be a provisional line for defence and administrations purposes, the British Government did never budge an inch to restore this large tract of land to the Raj,
despite its prayer and petition for more than half a century. The interests of tea planters and missionary factor made its restoration nearly impossible. It is irony that the provisional line had become a permanent line when the purpose for which it was drawn had no longer existed. As a result of those boundary rectifications the Hill Tripura was fleeced right up to the barren hills which now began to prove remunerative with expanding tea interests.

The independent status of Tripura in the Hills, though unrestrained by the absence of treaty obligation, and given an added meaning by the momentous decision of 1838, had hardly been immune from the roughsheds of the Britishers. The destabilisation created by the ruling clique resulted in the appointment of the Assistant Political Agent as the State Minister. The subsequent dismissal of the Minister by the Rajah gave the Government a ruse to intervene in the State affairs. The Comilla Durbar was shrewdly organised to wring concessions and to bring the State to a position hardly tenable with the concept of independent status.†

All these facts taken together, either in the Hills or in the plains, can hardly be construed to signify that the Rajah of Tripura really enjoyed an independent status under the

1 The Indian Mirror dated 1 July, 1894; The Englishman dated 5 February, 1894.
British administration. The overriding compulsions of the war expediency (1939-45) upon the State only lend added support to the point. At the footstep of political roughshodds the economic strangulation crept in under the Indian Tea Control Acts of 1933 and 1938, which, restricting the export quota, not only lay curb upon the expanding tea revenue of the State, but also curtailed the Rajah's political right to lease out land for tea cultivation even within his own territory.

No doubt the occasional pin-pricks from the Political Department or of the masterful British Residents had encroached upon the sovereignty of the State, yet because of the historical position and prescriptive rights, the internal sovereignty of the Tripura State could not be impaired, like most other native States of comparable description. Unlike some of the rulers of smaller States which had little more than minor judicial powers and immunity from British taxation, the Rajah of Tripura exercised the maximum of power in the internal affairs of State, transcending the limitation of its size, resource and importance.

The internal sovereignty of the State stood recognised with full powers of legislation and unqualified judicial powers extending to the right to exercise capital punishment.¹

¹ Tripura State Memorandum, op.cit., p.3.
No previous or later sanction of the Government of India was required for any kind of legislation. In most cases the legislation was the adaption or adoption of the enactments of the British India which tactfully eliminated the probable high-handedness of the Britishers in the Rajah's prerogative on the matter of legislation. The State had its own revenue and judicial stamps. The Rajahs had too the right to strike their own coins to commemorate their succession to the Gadi.

The extradition between the State and British India was controlled by the general legal principles. In normal times the requisitions, both of the Tripura and of the British authorities, extended to all classes of criminals, sometimes British subjects were surrendered on the Rajah's requisition for extradition warrants, and at other British Courts were

Extradition controlled by general legal principles directed by the Government to enquire into the cases beyond the border when it was doubtful whether either of the parties were British subjects.¹ The principle of the extradition were generally applied in the dealings with the Rajah on such legal issues. Late in 1871 the demands for extradition warrants were issued to the Political Agent. But in a matter of disputes which vitally affected each other, the independent advice in the arbitration was generally allowed. The right to refer the matter of disputes between the State and the British

¹ Mackenzie, A., op. cit., p. 280.
Government to a Court of Arbitration was of course officially recognised under the provisions of the Government of India Resolution No. 427 R dated 29 October, 1920.

All these facts taken together, it can be said that the internal sovereignty of the Tripura State was legally beyond doubt; nor was it a fact that this sovereignty had been impaired by occasional pin-pricks from the Political Department or the British Residents. The absolute sovereignty according to the Austinian theory of politics is more or less a metaphysical conception which cannot be found in the practical field even in respect of the States. The construction that sovereignty is divisible has its inherent contradictions, yet this has been the case with the sphere of inter-dependence between the States being increasingly recognised. The sovereignty enjoyed by Tripura was of the nature of that of the Federal States of America. The supervisory jurisdiction of the imperial Government was constituted by the partial surrender of sovereign right by the constituent States. And this surrender was, of course, not always voluntary. The Rajah, on the whole, enjoyed the independence of action in the spheres of internal administration of the State. The right of the Tripura as an internally independent unit of the Empire under the umbrella of the paramount power had unquestionably been recognised during the British rule in India.
The rule of Birachandra Manikya (1862-96) is epochal in importance. The modern period in the history of Tripura may aptly be said to have begun from his time. The period indicates a transition from the primitive form of administration to the modern one. Though extremely limited in number, the State departments had been more of the nature of a family organisation than that of a business contract. Certain offices of dignity were hereditary and managed by the royal blood. Nearly all high officials, if not all, were closely connected with the Rajah and more or less in the same way, the system filtered downward. A hierarchical bond of allegiance stood in the way of growing an impersonal character of administration. The Rajah's word was law and his sanction was required for numberless contingencies, however petty and trifling. The form of the Government that had prevailed in Tripura may be called despotic and patriarchal. ¹

Imbibed by the spirit of renaissance of Bengal and salutary effects of British administration in India, Birachandra planned to reshape the administration of the State on the British model. The departure from the traditional past was no easy task, yet he made pioneering attempts to introduce modern usages and idoms into the State administration. In a

short time the administration started pulsating with new life and vigour. The pace of improvement was quickened with the appointment of Nilmani Das, seeded British-bred officer, to the post of Dewan in 1873.

Birachandra introduced many important reforms in the executive and judicial administration of the State. The judiciary was overhauled, the primitive system of administering justice on the basis of equity and good conscience was replaced by the regular judicial procedure. He abolished the practice of placing all judicial matters before the Rajah for final disposal. The task was now delegated to a supreme judicial body, Khas Appeal Adalat, presided by two judges. The indigenous Pahari Adalat was also abolished to bring tribal subjects under the jurisdiction of a single judiciary. The period after 1873 witnessed a number of legislation passed in the State. Most of them were adapted after the similar enactments passed by the Indian Legislative Council. Mention may be made of the Criminal Procedure Code, Civil Procedure Code, Police Guide, Jail Code, Limitation Act, Stamps Act, Excise Act, Municipal Act, Tenancy Act, Pounds Act, and the Act relating to the protection of properties of miners. In an attempt to broaden all matters of administration a Council of Administration was formed by the Rajah. It was consultative and advisory in character.

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1 Rajgi, op.cit., p.378.
2 Ibid, Editor's Note, p.VII.
The executive branch of administration had undergone radical changes. A hierarchy of operational levels was established with a Minister at the top of the control. Accountable to the Rajah, he was assisted by the Heads of Departments. In order to manage the business of the State efficiently, the Ministerial office was composed of several departments. During his time the Departments of Excise, Stamps and Registration were opened. In 1866 the number of departments rose to 15 including the Department of Royal Household, and competent hands were chosen to man them. Orders and circulars issued or practices in vogue during earlier regime, and not repugnant to the Acts passed, were maintained to ensure continuity in the administration. The whole territory was sub-divided for convenience of administration. The Bibhaga or Division which, to all intents and purposes, resembled like a modern district, formed the basic unit of administration. The administrative Divisions were Uttara Bibhaga (Northern Division), Madhya Bibhaga (Interior Division) and Dakshina Bibhaga (Southern Division) with their respective headquarters at Kailashahar, Agartala and Udaipur (later at Sonamura).

The budgetary system was another innovative practice introduced during this period. Being absolute within his
territory nothing could restrain the Rajah's demands upon the people, nor limit his own expenditure. The salutary effect of the introduction of the budget was that the Rajah was made to ascertain the limit within which he must confine his expenditure and also to feel that any excess over the budgetary estimates would involve an additional tax upon his people. Heads of the Departments were often instructed to limit the expenditure within the budgetary provisions of their departments. Thus Tripura was poised for modernisation in administration during the reign of Birachandra Manikya.

The tempo of administrative reforms generated during Birachandra's time was continued to the reign of his illustrious son Radhakishore Manikya (1897-1909). Basically the structure remaining the same, the contents and methods of administration got considerably enlarged and diversified.

At the beginning of his rule Radhakishore re-organised the administrative departments, and the separate entity of public works, treasury and jail departments was the immediate outcome of the effort. In 1897 Thakur Dhananjaya Debvarma submitted a report on the administration of the departments put under his charge. Though planned under bureaucratic initiative and limited in its ambit, the report

1 Hunter, W.W., op.cit., p.462.
2 Ibid, op.cit., p.117.
3 Ibid, pp.192-200.
really took the place of findings of the one-man "Administrative Reforms Commission" in its bearing and effect upon the administration of accounts, public works, judicial, medical, jail and municipal departments. The Rajah ungrudgingly incorporated his well-meaning suggestions as far as these were implementable in the State administration. This democratic spirit permeated through the administration of Radhakishora. The formation of the Executive Council and Legislative Council is a pointer to it. While the Executive Council collectively decided the policies relating to revenue, forest, police administration for formal approvals of the Rajah, the Legislative Council functioned as a law-making body for the State. The Council was given powers not only to amend the Act or Acts, but to codify the administrative orders, circulars, practices or usages acquiring the force of law as well.¹ The Executive Council had the preponderance of officials; on the other hand the Legislative Council had both official and non-official representations.² No Act could be put in force without the assent of the Rajah. It was his prerogative to put his assent or to withhold it on the Act passed by the Council. If the Executive Council resembled somewhat a cabinet of ministers, the Legislative Council assumed the character of an assembly of members, of course not represented on the basis of electorates. To further

¹ Ibid, p.393.
systematise the administration and ensure efficiency, it was necessary to split the Revenue Department, the biggest department of the State, on the basis of independent items of administration, namely survey, settlement and revenue appeal.¹ With the separation of Police Department from its revenue counterpart, Revenue officers were relieved of police duties and Tehsil circles were separated from the Thana.² New departments of agriculture, industry and geological survey were opened during the period. Territorial areas were newly marked off for administrative purposes. Earlier Bibhagas or Divisions were further divided to form six new Divisions which mostly resembled a modern subdivisions.³ Differently demarcated and re-organised albeit, the nomenclature of Division was still retained.

During the rule of Radhakishora, the judiciary had been made two-tier — high court and lower court—which was further re-organised on the basis of magisterial and judicial powers.⁴ To maintain judicial fairness, the executive and judicial functions had been separated.⁵

As in the previous reign, the chief control of departmental administration lay with the State Minister accountable

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¹ Ibid, pp.120-22.
² Bhattacharya, A.C., Progressive Tripura, p.51.
⁴ Rajgi, op.cit., pp.405-6.
⁵ Ibid, p.398.
to the Rajah alone. But his power was, to some extent, restrained by the Executive and Legislative Councils. Though the royal blood and their family connections were largely associated with the administration, yet the draft of capable administrators outside the State was encouraged to give the administration an impersonal character.

The State budget also saw much improvement during his rule. It was prepared in two parts — one personal and the other political. These well-defined divisions in the budget could keep the Rajah and his Minister posted beforehand with the wealth and resources they had at their disposal. Radhakishora introduced a system of control and monitoring over the budget as well. A quarterly report had to reflect not only the income and expenditure during the quarter, but its deviation from the budget also. Thus the contents and methods of administration were fairly enlarged and diversified during the reign of Radhakishora Manikya and the administration of the State was placed on a sound footing.

The lead was well taken by his son Birendrakishora (1909-23), who not only consolidated the gains of administrative reforms but broke new grounds as well.

With the reins of the State in his hand the first administrative measure Birendrakishora had initiated was the re-constitution of the Amatya Sabha (Advisory Council) with himself as President. All the prominent princes and officials
of proven administrative ability were associated as members of the Sabha. It was given powers, among other things, to legislate or amend or annul Acts, to pass the budget estimates and to farm out the Taluka. The Amatva Sabha was re-organised in 1915 and re-christened as the State Council. It was preponderant with the official representation, and a sprinkling of non-official members from the landed class was there to give a democratic look. The powers delegated to the Council comprised of all important matters relating to the State and the Zamindari, legislation and also matters of judicial significance. The orders issued by the State Council had been deemed to be the order of the Raj itself. The order was made non-appealable in order to provide administrative immunity to the work of the Council. In 1918 an Executive Council was formed as a branch of the State Council. It was an attempt to provide collective leadership on the matters of administration requiring prompt disposal.

Another important measure that had been taken by the Rajah for improved administration was the constitution of the State Civil Service with graded scale of salaries. The Service envisaged four grades with the avenues of promotion, depending upon seniority, efficiency and the passing of...
departmental examination. The regular audit system was introduced during this period for better financial management and control. To diffuse the benefits of the streamlined administration the whole territory was now divided into 12 administrative Divisions.

The reign of Birendrakishora witnessed further improvement in the administration of judiciary. Besides the appointment of legal experts, the judiciary was remodelled in imitation of the Federal Court of India. The Privy Council was established as the highest appellate authority in the State.

In order to put an end to the age-old family feud, and to associate members of the Raj family with the State administration, Birendrakishora appointed many of them to the high positions of the administration. But in no way this step partook the character of family arrangement of feudal administration. Although the Rajah held the last word on all important aspects of administration, yet he delegated sufficient powers to the State Council in order to enable the Council to adopt somewhat portfolio system of administration and divide the control of the departments among its members.

2 Rajgi, op.cit., p.255-56.
3 Census of India, 1961, op.cit., p.7.
Birabikramakishora Manikya (1923-47) was the last eminence of the Manikya Dynasty. And with him the rule of the Later Manikyas (1862-47) under review came to an end.

Previous to the rule of Birabikramakishora, the modern administration on the model of British India was, by and large, taking roots in Tripura. What was conspicuously missing was the mass base in so far as it was practicable within the feudal and patriarchal form of Government.

As a result of popular demand for self-determination, the constitutional changes that were taking place in British India had their tremendous effects upon the State administration. The period under Birabikramakishora Manikya saw not only the democratisation of the State administration but the emergence of Tripura as a welfare state as well.

Assuming himself the charge of the State in 1927, the first task of the Rajah was to appoint the Mantrana Sabha (Advisory Council). The primary business of the Sabha was to advise the Rajah on all important affairs of the State. The Sabha was also invested with temporary, and sometimes with permanent powers to deal with and discuss certain matters, and also give final decisions on the same.¹

Soon after Bya basthanaka Sabha or the Legislative

¹ Ibid, pp. 139-41.
Council was constituted on the 3rd September, 1927. It was practically all official in composition. The co-option of the legal experts from outside the State could partly give it a democratic character. The function of the Sabha was to consider or approve or reject Bills drafted by the executive departments and forward their final decision to the Rajah for approval.

A third Council known as the Mantri Parishad (Executive Council) was constituted in the same year. It was formed with the object of rendering help and co-operation to the Rajah in the execution of all matters concerning the welfare of the State and the Zamindari, except only in respect of the Privy Purse. It was a 5-member Council of astute administrators. While the president and vice-president were relieved of their routine administrative functions in order to ensure their undivided attention to broad policy matters, the other three members were assigned the charges of the State departments. With the adoption of the portfolio system, the Mantri Parishad attained the character of a mini-cabinet. Twelve years later a Cabinet of Ministers was formed with J.C. Sen as the Prime Minister of the State. Though not representative in character, it was a limited attempt to give a trial in democratic form of Government. The supportive secretariat

1 Progressive Tripura, op.cit., p. 88.
2 Ibid, pp. 84-85.
3 Rajgi, op.cit., p. 150.
service was re-organised, specifying hierarchy, powers and functions. The constitution of all these Councils generated a spirit of decentralisation basic to democratisation of administration. Possessed of great foresight and dynamism Birebikrama wanted to give a new shape to the State. During late twenties a State Improvement Committee was set up by the Rajah with the high officials to draw up a comprehensive scheme concerning the welfare of the people. The scheme envisaged an expenditure of Rs 52,00,000/- to be spent over a period of 19 years on the items of railways, water supply, state bank, roadways, electric supply, besides many other welfare items. This kind of perspective planning was a new element introduced for the first time in the State administration. The State lacked in resources and it was not easy to mobilise scarce resources for such ambitious project. It was, therefore, necessary to explore the resource potentials, to slash the administrative cost and to stop wasteful expenditure. With this end in view a Committee was appointed. Besides, the Area Improvement Committees and Public Road Improvement Committees at different Divisions were appointed with people's representatives at the instance of the Rajah. While people's donation and the token State contribution formed the initial fund for the Area Improvement Committees, the Roads Improvement Committees drew its resources from the road cess levied

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1 Ibid, pp.154-63.
2 Progressive Tripura, op.cit., pp.87-88.
3 Ibid, p.87.
by the State. It was a unique attempt to associate people with the works of their own concern, particularly in the context of the limited resources of the State.

The Compulsory Primary Education Act and its experimental introduction in the municipal area of Agartala in 1932 may be regarded as one of the most significant events in the educational history of Tripura. A model scheme of education called Vidyapattan envisaged the establishment of educational complex, consisting of college of arts, science, technology, agriculture, medicine and a rural university. But for the Rajah's sudden death the dream could not have come true.

The Tripura State Income Tax Act of 1944 and the Act to constitute the Tripura State Bank in 1929 are two important pieces of legislation, having far-reaching consequences for the State. The Department of Industry and Commerce was separated from the General Administration to make it truly a State trading organisation. With the schemes of reserved forests, plantation and afforestation the Department of Forest had been broadbased.

The crowning of all these welfare acts and reforms during this period was the grant of a written constitution to the people in 1941 on the basis of a policy of their increased association with the State Government. The constitutional

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1 Progressive Tripura, op. cit., p.93.
2 Rajgi, op. cit., p.316.
changes it envisaged include: (a) the establishment of (i) a Raj Sabha as an Advisory Body in respect of executive and judicial matters, consisting of experienced and noted persons, official and non-officials; (ii) an improved and re-organised high court; (iii) a council of ministers; (iv) a legislative assembly of 54 members with elective majority; (v) village Mandalis — rural basic administrative and electoral units; (vi) municipalities on elective basis; and (b) improvement of the financial management and audit with a complete separation of the Rajah's personal budget from the State budget, on an allocation to the former ten per cent of the annual income of the State.¹

It had not been possible for the State to implement the policy fully owing to the war situation, but even then, the work substantially progressed. The Government of Tripura Act as well as the Village Mandali Act was passed, and necessary electorate election rules for the Legislative Assembly were promulgated. The Chief Court was raised to a statutory High Court. The Council of Ministers was formed with J.C. Sen as the Prime Minister of the State. As many as 142 village Mandalis were formed. Within the four years of time the


Note of the Political Minister, Tripura State, dated 9.11.36.
Ra.sabha was appointed and inaugurated. The Ruler's personal budget was also completely separated from the State budget.¹ With the rapid changes of political scene of the country, and the premature death of Birabikramakshora Manikya in 1947, the representative form of Government to the princely State of Tripura could not have come true when the stage was set for it. Yet it may be said that the Rajah seriously tried to democratise the State administration as far as it compatible within its feudal framework.

To sum up the administration of the Later Manikyas, it can be said that there were persistent drives to shed the despotic and feudal character of their rule. The British model that was cradled in the indigenous system of administration could not always deliver goods because of its inherent contradiction. The form can be copied but the substance requires gestation period to absorb the alien tradition, and the standard comes much later. Thus in most items of administration the British model provided a similarity of form, and not always of standards. The State Civil Service is not the solitary instance. As all powers emanate from a patriarch, the Rajah, it is he who makes or mars the State. The weaknesses consisted in the personal character of the rule, the whole process of reforms being dependent upon the personality of the ruler. The Minister or Dewan could merely provide the fiddle to the music of his masters.

¹ Note of the Political Minister, Tripura State, prepared in connection with the British Cabinet Mission (Printed) dated 19.1.46. pp.6-7.