CHAPTER-I
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1. (a) TRIPURA OF THE PAST AND PRESENT — A BIRD’S EYE VIEW

Tripura is one of the eight north-eastern states of India. The states are: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Their languages, customs, traditions, history, folklore, festivals, religious rites and rituals, day-to-day life, sources of livelihood, and the like, differ in many respects. Culturally, North-east represents the Indian ethos of 'Unity in diversity' and 'Diversity in unity'. It is a mini-India where diverse ethnic and cultural groups of Aryans, Dravidians, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Tibetan and other races have lived together since time immemorial. In the present context we are concerned with Tripura only.

The Present Tripura State is bounded on the north, west, south and south-east by Bangladesh, having a common boundary with Assam and Mizoram in the east. The princely state of Tripura acceded to

The past history of Tripura, before the 13th century, lies in obscurity. No authentic data is available to draw a connected past history of Tripura. Only some legendary lores and mythology (viz. Bhagavadgita, Vishnupurana, Vayupurana, Markandeyapurana, Vishnuparva of the Mahabharata, Saktisangama Tantra, Raj Rajeswari Tantra, Rajamala and the like) cannot help us in drawing to some extent believable past history of Tripura\(^2\). Let us, therefore, start our history from the 13th century and onwards.

Tripura was ruled by a royal family of the Tripura or Tipra tribe. This royal family, originally residents of the Kapili valley of Assam, reached Cachar valley around the 13th century AD, from where they entered the northern part of the present Tripura. The Tripura kings claimed their descent from the Chandravamsa (Dynasty of the Moon or Lunar Dynasty)\(^3\), an ancient Kshatriya dynasty of Eastern India.

In the middle ages the rulers of Tripura assumed the title of Pha, meaning ‘father’. This title was first
adopted by Niladhwaja, the 73rd ruler and it remained so till the ‘Manikya’ appellation was conferred on Ratna Pha by Tughrol Khan in 1279 AD⁴. The legend goes that it was Ratna Pha, who having presented a coruscating ruby to Tughrol Khan got the hereditary title of ‘Manikya’ or jewel. Henceforth the surname of the kings of Tripura became “Manikya”.

**History of Tripura under Singhtung Pha to Ratna Pha:**

Singhtung Pha (Kirtidhar) ascended the throne in 1240 A.D. In the mean time the Mohammedans had already entered the scene of Bengal and Lakshman Sen had lost his capital of Nadiya to Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1201 A.D. Being instigated by a nobleman called Hiravanta Khan, the Nawab of Gaur attacked Tripura. Seeing the vast army of the Nawab the king wanted to surrender. But queen Tripura-Sundari, seeing the cowardly conduct of her husband, inspired the Tripurean soldiers to fight the enemy to the last. It is said that they won a glorious victory over the Pathans, when the army
was led by the queen. The sword used by the queen is still worshipped. Ratna Pha ascended the throne in 1279 A.D. with the help of Tughrol Khan, the then Mohammedan ruler of Bengal. It is said that in the year 1279 Ratna Pha assembled a big army and invaded the country of Jagenagar (=Tipperah). After having defeated the king of Jagenagar, he plundered the inhabitants and brought with him immense wealth and one hundred elephants. According to James Long, Ratna Pha with the aid of the Mohammedan troops conquered the kingdom of Jagenagar and beheaded his elder brothers. But the author of Rajamala, the great chronicle of Tripura, records that Ratna Pha got help from Samsuddin.

**History of Tripura from Dharma Manikya to Dhanya Manikya:**

Dharma Manikya (1430-1462) was one of the greatest rulers of Tripuras. He was a great patron of literature. Under his initiative the RAJAMALA was compiled by Baneswar and Sukreswar. Dharma Manikya was as pious as he was brave. The army
of Gaur was reduced by him and Sonargaon also was plundered by him. He defeated the king of Myanmar and had the Arakan king reinstated on the throne.

Dharma Manikya was succeeded by his son Dhanya Manikya (1463-1515), the greatest of the kings of Tripura. His conquest won for Tripura the neighbouring small principalities of Meherkul, Patikara, Ganga-Mandal, Bagasar, Bejura, Bhanugarh, Vishnujui and Langla. He also subjugated Khandal (=Noakhali). He also occupied the Kuki land in the East and extended his kingdom up to the border of Myanmar. He annexed Chattal (=Chittagong) and defeated the Pathan army of Hossain Shah (1494-1520) near Comilla A fresh invasion was mounted by the Pathans under Haiten Khan. Though initially victorious the Pathans were humbled through a stratagem master-minded by a woman named Balgama.

King Dhanya Manikya was a devout Hindu and many temples were got erected by him, the most famous being the Tripureshwari temple of Udaipur which was built in 1501 A.D.
History of Tripura from Vijaya Manikya to Amara Manikya:

Vijaya Manikya rules from 1528 to 1570. It was during his reign that Tripura kingdom reached its zenith. He defeated the Jayantia king and appointed Kalanazir as governor of Sylhet. The army of Sultan Sulaiman led by Mamarak Khan was mercilessly slaughtered by Vijaya Manikya and the commander was taken a prisoner. The Sultan ceded all the lands including Jatrapur in Dhaka up to the river Padma. It was a very crucial time in the history of India. With the advent of the Mughals in Delhi, the Pathans were gradually losing their hold in Bengal and Assam. Vijaya Manikya took the advantage of the situation prevailing then and campaigned the onslaught of his vast army through Sonargaon. Vikrampur and Sylhet even were not challenged by Daud Shah, the Nawab of Gaur.

Ananta Manikya succeeded to the throne by the help of his father-in-law. After reigning for one-year-and-half he was strangled to death at the instigation of his father-in-law, Gopiprasad by
name, who styled himself as Udaya Manikya. His rule lasted up to 1576⁹.

Amara Manikya ruled from 1584 to 1601. After Vijaya Manikya he retrieved the lost glory of Tripura. But he could not control the Maghs and lost his country south of Udaipur.

**History of Tripura from Yasodhara Manikya up to the present day:**

The disintegration of Tripura commenced from the region of Yasodhara Manikya (1613-1623) who was ultimately taken a prisoner to Imperial Delhi during the time of Jahangir. It is said that Raja could not appease the emperor by presenting elephants for which Tripura was famous. Yasodhara Manikya never returned and the history is silent about his fate in Delhi. According to the wish of Jahangir, Kalyana Manikya was accepted by the people as their king in 1625 and he ruled till 1660.

The subsequent history of the Tripura kingdom is a mere record of ruin and succeeding rulers were but puppets of the Mughals and later of the British. A century of struggle that followed, however, led to
the ultimate Mohammedan occupation of a portion of plains which finally came under British rule in 1765. The combined forces of the East India Company and the Nawab of Bengal forced the ruler of Tripura to register the Chakla-Roshnabad areas of his kingdom as a zamindari under the Nawab of Bengal. Tripura thus lost all its Bengal conquests, barring the zamindari of Chakla-Roshnabad and was reduced almost to its present size. Throughout the colonial period, the Raja of Tripura was treated as an independent ruler of the Tripura state and as the zamindar of the Chakla-Roshnabad Estate. Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya, who ruled Tripura for a considerable period since 1886, is popularly known as the father of Modern Tripura.

The princely state of Tripura acceded to the Indian Union in 1947 during Raja Bir Bikram Manikya, the 178th ruler of Tripura. Subsequently it became a state of the Indian Republic on 21st January, 1972.
1. (b) TRIPURA : LAND AND ENVIRONMENT

The territory of Tripura, as it stands now, is situated between 22.56 and 22.32 North longitude and between 91.10 and 92.20 East longitude with an area of 10451 Sq. Km. (length 183.5 Km. and width 112.7 Km.). 60% of the total area consists of hilly land while the remaining 40% constitute flat land.

Nature has made Tripura into a prominently hilly region. Six principal ranges of hills cover the entire Tripura. They are:

(i) Debtamura,
(ii) Baramura,
(iii) Atharamura,
(iv) Longthorai,
(v) Sakhan and
(vi) Jampui. The average distance between the 2 ranges is 18 Km. The altitudes of these hill ranges vary from 50 ft. to 3080 ft. above the sea level. The highest peak of 3200 ft. is the Betalang Shiv.
The numerous hillocks run in north-west to south-east direction and hence referred to by the British as Hill Tipperah. These hillocks have a deep forest cover, spreading almost throughout the state. The forest of Tripura has a luxurious growth of bamboos, creepers, trees and various other species of plants. These forests provide a habitat to a large number of elephants. The forest and the agricultural products constitute the main sources of the State Revenue.

But the very existence of Tripura in such an isolation brings enough difficulties and hardships for the people who live in this Frontier State with untold sufferings on one hand, and who are left with no rail communication and forced to avail of the costly air journey to maintain their link with the rest of the country. However, some years ago the railway line was extended from Patharkandi in Assam to Dharmanagar town, the Northern most sub-divisional Headquarters of the state.
1. (c) TRIPURA : RIVER AND SOIL SYSTEM

Smooth running of the life of man and nature of any country or state depends on her proper river-system and soil-system. In Tripura this is quite opposite. Because in this state both the rivers and the soil are uncompromising. It has net works of the rivers and small streams rising from the different hill ranges. They have peculiar character. In dry season, save and except Gumti and few other rivers, the rivers and streams are nothing but tame, narrow and shallow. But they become very turbulent and fierce during the Monsoon. Even a little more than ordinary rainfall in the hills is followed by a sudden rise of waters, which over-flows the banks and downs the country for miles around.\(^\text{13}\)

And so far as soil is concerned, we must say that it has got very little water absorption capacity. It is also deficient in nitrates, phosphorus and potash as well as minerals. The mineral deficiency thus created to affect health of plants, animals and men. This is true even in the forest areas because of the perpetual burning in the course of shifting (\(=\text{jhum}\))
cultivation. On the exposed up-land the combination of Tropical sun and torrential rains has leached minerals from the soil.

1. (d) TRIPURA : FLORA AND FAUNA

The following important vegetation are worth mentioning which are found in the forests of Tripura: viz. Bot, Bahera, Nim, Karoi, Piple, Sal, Siris and the like.

Besides these trees, various fruit trees also are found. Most important of them are: Bel, Jambura, Jalpai, Kalajam, Kanthal, Lichi, Kamala etc.

Due to quick clearing of the forest for various reasons, the animals have taken shelter in the reserve forests. In the reserve forests the following species are found: Tiger, Leopard, Bison, Elephant, Bear, Jungle-cat, Wild-dog, Wild-pig, Wild-buffalow, Wild-Goat and various types of deer. Various kinds of birds, snakes and other reptiles are also found. The river streams and other water sources contain various kinds of fishes, crabs and tortoises.
1. (e) TRIPURA : POPULATION

In Tripura majority of the population are Hindus (approx. 68.95%). Other than the Hindus, about 31.05% tribal peoples also live in Tripura. There are 19 different types of tribal communities, viz.

1. Tripuris,
2. Reang,
3. Jamatia,
4. Chakma,
5. Halam,
6. Noatia,
7. Magh,
8. Kuki,
9. Garo,
10. Munda,
11. Lushai,
12. Orang,
13. Santal,
14. Uchai,
15. Khasia,
Of the 19 hill tribes, the Tripuris are the largest (16%), while the Reangs who migrated from Chittagong Hill Tracts are the second largest (4%). Other important tribes of the state are the Chakmas and the Maghs, both Buddhists, and a few tea-garden tribes. All the 19 tribes of Tripura have been included in the list of the Scheduled Tribes of the Government of India.

1. (f) **TRIPURA : FESTIVALS AND FAIRS**

There was a time when some Brahmin people from the plains came to settle in some hilly regions of Tripura, for some unknown reasons. The Tripuri tribal people first of all became the victims of the Brahmanical rites and rituals and adopted Hinduism. But the majority of the tribes of Tripura did not follow the footsteps of the Tripuris and they maintained their own tribal traditions and religious
beliefs, which in all respects differ from those of
the caste Hindus. The main feature of festivals
among the tribal people is that all people — tribal
or non-tribal— will join it in a joyous mood and be
part and parcel of it.

(1) Kharchi Puja:

Of the many festivals current among the tribal
people of Tripura, the one that occupies the pride
of place is the worship of the 14 deities popularly
known as Kharchi Puja celebrated in July at old
Agartala. The week-long celebration is held in
the temple premises and is joined by thousands
of people, coming from different parts of Tripura.
There is also an advantage for the people to
participate because the first day of this week-
long festival is declared a holiday by the Govt. of
Tripura. The word ‘Kharchi’ is said to be a corrupt
form of ‘Khya’, meaning earth. Kharchi Puja is,
therefore, the worship of the mother earth — the
earth that sustains mankind with all her resources.
Sacrifice of goats and pigeons at the altar of gods
is a usual feature of the festival.
(2) Ker Puja:

In importance this is next to Kharchi. This is also a traditional tribal festival. This is celebrated two weeks after Kharchi. The guardian deity of Vastu Devata is Ker. A large piece of bamboo when bent in a particular fashion assumes the image of Ker. It is generally believed that the former rulers of Tripura used to perform this Puja for the general welfare of the people of the state. The literal meaning of Ker is boundary or specified area. Two age-old beliefs may lie behind the ritualistic incantation of a specified boundary for the Ker Puja. No person is allowed to enter or exit this specified boundary during the days of the Puja. So it seems that the Ker Puja was celebrated to safeguard the interest of the people from any calamitous misfortunes, diseases and destitution. The other purpose may be to save the people from any external aggression. Offering and sacrifices of animals and birds constitute an important aspect of Ker Puja.
(3) Garia Puja:

On the 7th day of the month of Baisakh (=April) the Garia Puja is held. This is another important festival for the tribal people of Tripura. The celebrations start from the last day of Chaitra i.e. last day of the Bengali year. Two deities, Garia and Kalia, are worshipped. The Puja is held to propitiate the deities for blessings. The Garia is a community festival. Sacrifice of cocks is an important feature of the Puja. Another equally important feature is dancing and rejoicing after the Puja. The Garia dance is very popular among the Tripuris and the Reangs. Symbolic of the worship of the deities as well as of the socio-economic activities of the households, these dances represent hunting, fishing, food-gathering and various other activities.

(4) Ganga Puja:

After Navanna, the festival of new rice, Ganga Puja is celebrated in March-April every year. This is another remarkable tribal festival. Ganga is
one of the 14 deities of the land. This is also a community festival. People gather by the streamside. Three pieces of bamboos are arranged into beautiful flowers. The villagers then build a temple with bamboos in the middle of the stream, and the ageless rituals take place amidst joy and splendour. The God Ganga is propitiated by the sacrifice of goats, buffaloes and ganders to save the people from epidemic.

(5) Durga Puja : Kali Puja :

Durga Puja and Dewali, although are renowned as the best autumnal festivals of the Hindus, still they are regarded as the community festivals in Tripura also. Durga Puja is generally held in the month of October and it has attained the status of being the greatest community festival in Bengal and Tripura. The four-day long Durga Puja comes to an end on the Vijaya Dashami day when the immersion of the deity takes place.

The Durga Puja offers a unique opportunity to see the organisational ability of the young men at its best. A very healthy competition develops among
different clubs or Para boys to exhibit the Para Puja in its best form. This Puja is also an occasion for a social get-together where even the people of other communities very gladly participate and enjoy.

**Kali Puja : Diwali** : About 20 days after the Durga Puja the Kali Puja is held when Diwali or Light Festival is observed. This is also a community festival very famous in Bengal and Tripura. On the occasion of Diwali each year a big fair is held near Matabari in the temple of Tripurasundari at Udaipur.

(6) **Hasam Bhojan** :

On the night of the Vijaya Dashami day, the ruling house of Tripura used to hold a great community dinner known as Hasam Bhojan. Two explanations are offered for this dinner entertainment. One is that this was an occasion to honour the soldiers of the soil. The other is that the phrase is concept form of Asama Bhoiana which means a community dinner of unequal.

During Hasam Bhojan the superior status of the Halam tribe is noticeable. The representative of the 17 important ‘Dafas’ or clans must be present
on the occasion. The ‘Hasam’ connotes soldiery. Hence the communal dinner given on the day of Vijaya Dashami is meant for the army personnel. The Halams claim themselves to serve the army of the ruling dynasty of Tripura and accepted the suzerainty of the kings of Tripura. The Hasam Bhojan had a political significance during those days when obedience of soldiers to their King was a great necessity connected with statecraft.

Other festivals of Tripura include Dol Jatra (=Holi), Pous Samkranti, Buddha Purnima, Id, Christmas and New Year.

The annual Ashokastami fair is held at Unakoti, 178 Km. from Agartala (located close to Kailasahar), each year in the months of March-April. During this time special celebrations are organised which become a delightful venue for the tourists.
1. **TRIPURA : A BIG SPOT FOR TOURIST ATTRACTION**

Tripura of the Past and Present has got a long historical, cultural and religious traditions. It has always been a spot of tourist attraction for its natural surroundings and heritage. Its historic royal palaces, stone sculptures, rock-cut carvings, Buddhist and Hindu holy places and the tribal people have attracted the tourists of any country in all the ages. Even today Tripura is a tourists’ paradise.

**Places of visit in Tripura**

1. **Agartala**
   
The present capital of Tripura. It has got beautiful palaces, gardens, hills, temples and lakes, waterfalls and the attractive bungalows in the plains as well as in the hill-slopes.

   The Ujjayanta palace located in Agartala is another place of attraction. It was constructed by Maharaja Radha Kishore Manikya in 1901. Having a two-storeyed mansion, its interiors and exteriors are embellished with magnificent architecture.
2. Mahamuni:

The famous Mahamuni Buddhist temple which houses the famous Mahamuni Buddha image lies at a distance of 150 Km. from Agartala. The Mahamuni temple is a historical place and so it attracts Buddhist pilgrims from India and abroad.

3. Jampui Hill:

The premier hill range in Tripura is situated at 3000 ft. above sea level. The Jampui Hill is famous for its charming landscape and pleasant climate. It is home to some exotic species of orchids, ornamental trees and fragrant orange groves. Now the Govt. of Tripura has started the celebration of the Orange Festival in November each year.

4. Kamalsagar Lake:

This is situated at 27 Km. from Agartala. Maharaja Kalyan Manikya had initiated the excavations of the lake and discovered a popular 16th century Kali temple on the edge of the lake. Pilgrims from various places visit this place annually in the
months of April and August to celebrate the Goddess Kali.

5. **Bhubaneswari**:

This is situated in Udaipur, the district headquarters of the South Tripura district. On the northern banks of the Gomati, a dilapidated palace of the Manikya kings is found, and the Bhubaneswari temple is found adjacent to the ruins of the palace.

6. **Neermahal Palace**:

Situated in the midst of Rudra-sagar Lake, this dream castle, a summer resort of Raja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur, was built by the king in 1930. This is located at a distance of 55 Km. from Agartala. The palace is 400 metres in length having 24 rooms to provide the members of the royal family as well as the king’s retinue of servants. To attract the tourists, a craft and heritage village has been set up here and a Boat Festival is held annually.
7. **Unakoti**:

It is located close to Kailasahar, the district headquarters of Northern Tripura. It is situated at 178 Km. from Agartala. Unakoti meaning ‘one less than a crore’ is a Shaiva pilgrimage site and dates back to the 7th-9th centuries. The remains of Unakoti, scattered over an extensive area, are carved on the rocky surface of a hillock, about 150 ft. high. The carvings at Unakoti relate to the Hindu pantheon. It is the largest bas-relief structure in India. A colossal head of Shiva, known as the Unakotiswara Kal Bhairava, 30 ft. high, is characteristic of Unakoti carvings.

8. **Sipahijala Lake**:

It is situated in a forest just 30 Km. south of Agartala. It covers a big area of 18.33 sq. Km. It is a home for more than 150 species of residential and migratory birds, as well as 56 species of animals. Despite its size, Sipahijala has been declared as a Large Zoo and ranks 17th out of 20 such Large zoos. The beauty of the dense forest,
a deep blue lake, dark trees covered with creepers and a beautiful timberlog lodge and tourist cottages nestled in the picturesque landscape, also add to the charm of Sipahijala and make it the most popular tourist spot in Tripura.

9. Pilak :

Pilak is a historical site of urban civilisation, located in Jolaibari (in Belonia, South Tripura). This is situated in a distance of 98 Km. from Agartala. It is a treasure house of Hindu and Buddhist sculptures dating back to the 8th and 9th centuries. The Pilak ruins bear resemblance to the school of Mainamati in Bangladesh. The relics of the temple discovered at Pilak may have belonged to a Surya temple or a Buddhist temple.

10. Matabari (= Tripurasundari) :

Matabari is one of the most important temple towns of Tripura. The ancient temple of Matabari or Tripurasundari is located on a hill top 3 Km. from Udaipur. It was constructed in 1501 AD. This is considered to be one of the 51 Pithas of Hindu
pilgrimage where different limbs of Mata Sati fell. It is believed that the right foot of Mata Sati fell at Matabari. Legends hold that Maharaja Dhana Manikya had received divine orders in his dream to build a temple at the present spot on the hill top and dedicate to Goddess Tripurasundari, an incarnation of Parvati.

11. The Dumboor Lake:

Measuring 41 sq. Km. the Damboor stands out majestically with its exceedingly charming beauty. The 48 islands dotting the lake are home to birds of varied species of residential and migratory birds. Facilities for water sports and a boat ride round the islands are an additional attraction for tourists.
1. (h) TRIPURA: A STATE OF THE INDIAN REPUBLIC SINCE 1972: BUT PROBLEMS OF THE TRIBAL PEOPLE NOT SOLVED YET

Tripura became a state of the Indian Republic since 21st January, 1972. But during this long period the problems of the tribal people of Tripura could not be solved by the Govt. of India. Due to the partition of India in 1947 and also due to the Bangladesh Independence war in 1971, a large number of peace-loving Chakmas and Maghs were compelled to leave their homeland and had to take their shelter in the neighbouring state of Tripura. As a result the tribal reserves set up earlier in Tripura came under tremendous pressure, forcing the original tribal population of the state to move to remote hilly interiors. They faced the crisis of a serious shortage of Jhumming land, the only resource of their livelihood. It resulted in a shortage of food supplies among the original tribal people as well as the refugee tribal people. Prices of essential commodities were increasing day-to-day, as a result the lives of the tribal people became miserable.
Several official attempts were made by the Govt. of India to find a peaceful solution of the Tripura problem. Negotiations culminated in the signing of a Peace Accord which gave no fruitful result than identifying and deporting the illegal immigrants. There is a big question mark — how many illegal immigrants have been detected and deported in the last so many years?
Notes and references to Chapter-I

3. Sheila Bora etc., Ibid. P. 335.
5. Ibid., p. 5.
10. Sheila Bora etc., Ibid., p. 336.
12. Ibid.,
15. Ibid., p. 338-345.

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