

Tripura during the Second World War

Debabrata Goswami

When the Second World War began in 1939, Tripura proved itself fully loyal to the British. Though a native state, it could hardly afford to displease the British Empire. Hence the Maharaja of Tripura placed the services of his men in all eagerness at the disposal of the British rulers of India. His eagerness to help the allied powers was so great that he was prepared to starve his people to supply the allied armies with food and other provisions.

A resolution of the then State Council categorically mentioned: "as his Majesty's Government is at war with Germany it is hereby ordered that any potential hostile foreigners entering into or living in Tripura state be arrested at once and kept in custody pending orders of the political department"¹. An order of the Maharaja was issued on the 20th June, 1942 in connection with the measures to be taken in the event of hostilities within India². Moreover, "The entire resources of the state and personal service of the Ruler have been placed at the disposal of the Crown"³.

The 1st Tripura Bir Bikram Manikya Rifles left the state for British India for training 'on about the 1st December 1941'⁴.

The Maharaja also raised an additional battalion by conscription on the tribal youths. An internal security scheme was also drawn up. Defence of India Ordinance and similar legal measures were adopted⁵.

It needs be mentioned here that the conscription on the tribal youths and collection of food grains for war purposes just at the times when Tripura was seized by famine set the stage ready to trigger off the Reang Unrest (1942-43) in Tripura, but even at the risk of it the Maharaja of Tripura gave an evidence of his great devotion to the British.

On the night of 3rd August, 1940, a printed Bengali leaflets entitled 'Asanna Biplab' (impending

revolution) appeared in Agartala⁶. Besides, the distribution of other printed Bengali leaflets, e.g. 'Lal Nisan', Ingrazer Yuddhey Na Ek Bhai, Na Ek Pai' which appealed to the people not to participate in the World War II created comotion in Tripura in 1940. In Bengal and Punjab also that type of slogan had already been raised by the left and democratic groups in 1939. In Tripura the slogan 'not a Pie, not a man', had a deep impact particularly on the tribals in the hills.

The economic impact of this great war was very serious in Tripura. The amount of donation made by the state to the various war Funds totalled Rs. 57,000/- and by the employees Rs. 14,000/- Defence Bonds purchased by the state amounted to Rs. 1,75,000/- and by the public through the state Rs. 44,000/-. The state had promised an annual donation of Rs. 50,000/- to the war purpose Fund and the employees Rs. 7,000/-. The total amount of expenditure incurred on Armed Forces was above Rs. 5,00,000/-⁸.

An acute discontent among the people was marked as the prices of essential goods had suddenly gone up very high, although an order subsequently was issued for controlling prices and preventing hoarding. To overcome the difficulties caused by the great war, all people in the state were also asked to increase the production of food-crops by intensive cultivation. These orders to check price rise and prevent hoarding and to increase production were simple attempts to divert the attention of the people from Maharaja's generous offer of help beyond the state's means to the British Empire which had already earned wide-spread discontent among the people.

Thus during the World War II, the economic scene in Tripura was undergoing an acute crisis and was proving very exacting to the people in general. Moreover, for the creation of War Fund by the Maharaja, some special taxes were imposed on the people. The agony and suffering of both the tribals and non-tribals knew no bounds. But

the Maharaja of Tripura was found always to act in favour of British interest ignoring the miseries of the people of the State and it is perhaps in recognition of this loyal service of his that the Maharaja was presented 'a saluting gun' by the Commander-in-Chief of India.

Notes & References

1. Resolution No. 1 of the 8th sitting of the State Council, dated the 18th Bhadra, 1349 T.E. (1939) : Cf. **Tripura State Gazette Sankalan**, p.155.
2. B.No.19/S.20/F.II-103/1942. Govt. of Tripura, Political Deptt., Secret No, 1962, Dated Agartala, the 23rd August, 1942, Secretariate Archives, (Unpublished).
3. War Supplement to the **Tripura State Gazette**, dated the 14th January, 1942. Cf. **Tripura State Gazette Sankalan**, p.415.
4. Letter from the Secretary. East States, Calcutta, to the Chief Minister, Tripura State, Agartala, No.F. 1 (2) C/41-1034, dated hastings House, Alipore, Calcutta, the 24th Nove. 1941, Secy. Archives, Agartala; B.No.6/S.6/F. No. XIV-15/1941-42. Secy. Archives, Govt.of Tripura, Agartala, (Unpublished).
5. War Supplement to the **Tripura State Gazette**, dated the 14th January, 1942. Cf. **Tripura State Gazette Sankalan**, p.415.
6. Chief Ministers Bahadur's Memo No. 252-C, Dt. 9-8-1940, letter of A. Choudhury, SID/C.CID, Agartala, No. 377/11-4-1940, to the Chief Minister Bahadur, (TSAR), Cf. Mahadev Chakravarti, Communist Activities in Tripura: 1939-42, **Proceedings of North East India History Association**, Sixth Session, Agartala, 1985.
7. Mahadev Chakravarti, *Ibid.*, p. 365.

8. Tripura State Gazette Sankalan, Govt. of Tripura, 1971, p. 415.
9. Ibid., P. 417.
10. Ibid., P. 307.
11. Ibid., P. 311.