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SOCIO-POLITICAL
MOVEMENTS
IN INDIA



RANJIT KUMAR DE

The author, after ten year's strenuous research at the grass-root level unravels the untold chapter of Tripura during the period from 1905 to 1952. This is a transitional phase and the book is a connected, comprehensive and illuminating analysis of the growth and development of socio-political movements and conflict within the matrix of pan-Indian historical tradition and change. It integrates the anti-feudalistic and anti-imperialistic struggles by examining their economic roots. It is an analytical, interpretative and comparative study which takes into account the important historical interpretations and some of their models for their proper placement.

The socio-political movements in Tripura were very much influenced by the political barometer of the neighbouring undivided Bengal. The book introduces Tripura to the outside world with its peculiar nature of relations with the British, demographic revolution and tribal situation. The influence of Bengal since the anti-partition agitation of 1905 is discernible. Three dimensions of national movements of 1919-22, 1930-34, 1942-43 served as a turning point in the lives of many people in the State. Besides, the effects of the commercial depression of 1930s, economic effects of the two World Wars as roots of political unrest are analysed.

The emergence and activities of the socio-political parties are traced and examined in their proper perspective. Attempt is also made to establish the fact that the policy of "armed confrontation" can be substituted by a constitutional electoral battle if people so demanded. For, people are the true judges of real uninterrupted historical processes.

The author has collected all possible sources of information and exploited a vast mass of primary and secondary data to write freedom and autonomy movements against the background of national liberation struggles and happenings. Annual Administration Reports, Gazetteers, Memorandum and

[contd...]

Statistics, contemporary local and national newspapers, handbills, leaflets, pamphlets, popular tales etc. are consulted and utilized. Sometimes interviews were conducted to verify the official records. The author has also made an enormous use of published and unpublished records of Tripura Secretariat Archival Record Room, besides consulting records available in the National Archives of India and the West Bengal State Archives. The book is a new addition to national freedom struggle also.

Rs. 595

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To

The loving memory of
my parents

RAMAN CHANDRA DE
AND
SAUDAMINI DE

FOREWORD

The modernisation process in Tripura started in its beginning of the century through a series of socio-political movements which continued till Tripura became a State in the Indian Union in the post-independence political system. These movements had a twin approach: first, to pressurise the royal administration of Tripura to infuse liberal democratisation in the structure and functioning of princely State, and secondly, to join the masses in rest of India in a common nationalist movement against British imperialism. The roots of radicalism in Tripura's politics in the years of transition (1905-52) and after, can be noticed in these anti-feudal and anti-imperialistic struggles that the people in the princely State impressively participated. They braved the feudal imperialist challenges, suffered all the gallows and relentlessly continued one phase of struggle after another. In fact, Tripura was one of the princely States where all the major nationalist movements and trends like *Swadeshi*, Revolutionary, Non-Cooperation and Khilafat, Civil Disobedience and Quit India evoked spontaneous response of the people as in neighbouring Bengal. The wanted revolutionaries of Bengal found natural refuge in green-clad Tripura, and their ideology and methods made indelible and lasting impact on the programmes and strategies of the local activists. On the other hand, the peculiar socio-political problems of Tripura provoked autonomous uprisings and emergence of political parties and activities, including the armed struggles of the radicalised local left.

It was indeed my pleasure to go through the draft of Dr. Ranjit Kumar De's *Socio-Political Movements in India (1905-1952): A Historical Study in Tripura*. It is a historical analysis of an emerging socio-political order where the struggling masses proved themselves to be the driving force of change and development. The author has painstakingly gathered all possible sources of information and competently handled a vast mass of primary and secondary data. Besides of official archival documents and contemporary reports,

he interviewed some of the prominent leaders of the movements and collected non-official records and once out-lawed literature as well. The select bibliography, tables and appendices have further authenticated and illustrated the rigorously documented statements of facts and objectively outlined points of view. The objectivity in historical research has been the keyword in his approach and formulations.

I am sure, the book will find wide readership both in India and abroad and inspire further research in liberal and democratic movements in the countries which emerged from colonial stranglehold in the post-World War II period.

Prof. J.B. Bhattacharjee

Vice-Chancellor

Assam University, Silchar

PREFACE

Tripura is situated in extreme eastern part of India. It was a tiny princely State and one with a high antiquity.

The book is partly an outcome of my Ph.D. dissertation of the Tripura University, Agartala.

The book is also an attempt at writing contemporary history of Tripura. This is the transitional period of Tripura which witnessed an emergence of changed socio-economic-political life with gradual radicalization of politics. As the title of the book indicates, its main foci remain to synthesize the anti-feudalistic and anti-imperialistic struggles and place them within the totality of socio-economic-political developments in the State during the period, 1905-1952. There are a number of research works on various aspects of Tripura. Most of these are products of erudite research on revenue, administrative, political history, the British relation with the State up to 1947 and also the tribal uprisings in the nineteenth century etc. But the socio-political movements, 1905-1952 did not so long receive any systematic in-depth historical study. Being a son of the soil I have special interest in this study of movements.

While major considerations for taking up of this project are told, the importance of both the commencing and closing dates remain also to be mentioned. The dates are landmarks in the history of Tripura. The *Swadeshi* Movement of 1905, though started in Bengal, soon became the national struggle of all-India character, had its repercussions on this princely State. The mass struggles of the period under review culminated in 1952 with the parties joining the parliamentary processes.

An analytical, interpretative and sometimes comparative study method is followed in this work.

To write this regional history of Tripura, important interpretations of history (e.g. Cambridge, Marxist, Subaltern schools) and some of their models are also taken into account.

Records of National Archives, New Delhi and West Bengal Archives both at College Street and Writers' Building, and also

Intelligence Branch (Lord Sinha Road) in Calcutta are consulted but not found very helpful to this study.

Hence, all possible sources available in Tripura are explored. The work is mainly based on the Tripura Secretariat Archival materials (e.g. weekly and fortnightly secret police reports, confidential letters, notes, enquiry reports of officials etc.).

The important Government publications such as census reports of Tripura from 1901 to 1951, *Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, *Annual Plans 1983-84, 1984-85*, *District Gazetteers*, *Gazette Sankalan* (in Bengali), *Rajgi Tripurar Sarkari Bangla* (in Bengali), *Annual Administration Reports*, Tripura State since 1896 to 1946 (publication was held up from 1947 to 1952), Fortnightly and Monthly *Tripura State Gazette* (in Bengali and English), *Memorandum and Statistics Relating to Agriculture, Forests, Exports and Imports*, etc. are found very useful.

The contemporary local newspapers, e.g. *Tripura Rajye Congress Karmider Katha*, *Chiniha*, *Naba Jagaran*, *Abhyudaya*, *Chunta Prakash*, *Tripura Rajyer Katha*, *Jana Kalyan* (in Bengali) and *Tippera Guide* (in English), national newspapers, e.g. *Statesman*, *Weekly Chronicle* (Sylhet), *Eastern Bengal and Assam Era*, *Bengal Times* (in English) and *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Swadhinata*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (in Bengali), and *Swaraj*, *Ittehad* etc. (in Bengali) as available in the National Library, Calcutta and at the offices of local newspaper including Ramaprasad *Gabeshanagar* and in the possession of private individuals at Agartala were thoroughly consulted.

Handbills, leaflets reflect the ideas, slogans, programmes etc. of any movement. I have collected from different sources such important documents connected with the contemporary movements and incorporated some of these documents in the Appendices.

Official records, police reports etc. sometimes represent one-sided view. As some of the leaders of the movements of the period under study, are still alive, it has become possible to verify the official versions with oral testimony and in this respect oral-history is of great help. Hence, interviews have been conducted with a large number of old people since 1982. Sometimes questionnaire has to be prepared to get view of the old people living in distant places.

Popular tales, folk-lore and songs of the movements are studied with care and some of these, as collected from the grass-roots are included in the Appendices.

Besides, some important books of contemporary individuals who recorded their eye-witness accounts, e.g. Somendra Chandra Debburma's *Census Bibarani*, 1931 (in Bengali), and Divisional Officer, Brajendra Chandra Datta's *Tripura Rajye Trish Bachhar*, six divisions in six volumes (in Bengali), are of great help.

Some rare relevant books of important libraries e.g., National Library and its two wings, annexed building (official records), Esplanade East (newspapers section), Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta, and Tripura University Library, Bir Bikram Evening College Library, Tourism Departmental Library, Agartala Museum Library, Education Publication Library, Ramaprasad *Gabeshanagar*, at Agartala, are consulted and found useful.

The history of the attached *Chakla Roshanabad Zamindaris* (now in Bangladesh) and other Bengal districts is written on the basis of whatever archival and other source materials are available in Tripura, Calcutta and New Delhi. As the central focus of the present book is on princely Tripura, the important events of the Zamindaries are analyzed very precisely only to record their influences over the people of the State. The writ of the king of Tripura was inoperative in the Zamindaries.

I am fortunate enough to go through almost all the research works on Tripura history both published and unpublished.

In the topical rather than chronological study, repetition and overlapping occur when comparison becomes necessary specifically since 1930s. The major hurdle that I have faced and also prolonging its completion are due to the fact that the 80 per cent of the source-materials are found to be written in Bengali. These are to be translated into English with much caution. Search for relevant materials has to be undertaken for proper assessment of the events. For, many witnesses are will present with their reactions. Besides, the nature of the work compels as far as practicable of a grass-root level study.

A glossary, an abbreviation, and a summary of the non-English appendices (Sl. Nos. 3-7, 9-10, 15, 23-31, 38) in English are given for better understanding of the subject. Index provided at the end of the book will give some particular information to the readers.

Now, chapter-wise elaboration of main points requires to have real entry into the work. Two distinct phases are discernible in this study. Chapters two and three examine the influences of Bengal including the adjoining zamindaris and national movements in

Tripura, while chapters fourth, fifth, and sixth deal with some local initiatives.

Chapter 1 is just to introduce Tripura to the outside world with peculiar nature of relations of the British with Tripura *Durbar*, population profile from 1901-1951, demographic revolution and tribal situation.

The actual work starts with Chapter 2. It deals with the influence of Bengal since the anti-partition agitation of 1905. The extent and nature of responses from Tripura in the 1905 movement was determined by various regional and local factors. Some materials have been explored to analyze the activities of Bengal's various secret *Samiti* branches in Tripura in its early phase.

Chapter 3 analyzes the effect of commercial depression of the 1930s, two World Wars as the root of socio-political unrest. It also contains the influences of all-India national movements in princely Tripura; the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements, the Civil Disobedience Movement and the revolutionary activities of 1930s; ideological differences and the Quit India Movement. Though the influences of the above all-India movements were restricted to certain pockets only due to Tripura's peculiar geo-political situation, still, it was not negligible and attempts have been made in this chapter to record all the events in this respect.

An attempt is made in Chapter 4 to analyze the politics of parties—their emergence and achievements. The prince acquired a virtual veto on constitutional advance and responsible Government. Rather, his communal awards generated tension and became responsible for polarization of politics. It examines how the Progressive-Left combine tackle the situation in the crucial period between 1947 and 1949.

Chapter 5 traces the position of the Communist Party in Tripura and the controversial "armed struggles" of the Communist. The Communists of Tripura through their mask organization, the "Mukti Parishad" fought against the rule of Dewans and Chief Commissioner squarely during 1949-51.

Chapter 6 or the conclusion chapter sums up the major rays of the spectrum, the results of investigation in the above six chapters.

The encouragement for undertaking this project came from the discussions by various scholars in many sessions of the North-East India History Association in which I presented a number of papers.

The guidance of Prof. Mahadev Chakraborty and free discussion with him help me immensely. Prof. Chakraborty has taken a continuing interest in the project over a long period of time. I am thankful to him formally. Besides, a large number of octogenarians connected with different types of socio-political movements in Tripura illuminated me with some new information and handed over their valuable possessions to write the history of the movements. Of them, late Manimaya Debburma, late Mohan Chowdhury, late Biren Datta, Sri Sachindralal Singha, Sri Sachindra Chandra Datta, Sri Tarit Mohan Dasgupta, Sri Debaprasad Sen, Sri Rajkumar Kamaljit Singha of Agartala, are to be mentioned. My thanks are due to them, mentioned or not mentioned along with others including the staff of the libraries named above. Thanks are also due to H.L. Debnath of Agartala for typing the manuscript and Dr. P.N. Bhattacharjee, Tribal Research Officer, Agartala, Tripura, for looking into the type-process of this work. I would like to record my gratitude to Professor J.B. Bhattacharjee, Vice-Chancellor, Assam University, Silchar, to write a foreword for this book.

Finally, my thanks go to the family members, Hena (wife), Barnali, Kakali (daughters) for cheerfully enduring the frequent hardships as a result of occasional dislocation of normal life caused for undertaking this project.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BE	Bengali Era (A.D. is counted by adding 593 years)
CPI	Communist Party of India
GENL MISCE	General Miscellaneous
Judl. Deptt.	Judicial Department
MP	Mukti Parishad
NAD	National Archives, Delhi
NEIHA	North East India History Association
n d	no date
n p	no place
Poll. Deptt.	Political Department
TAR	Tripura Administration Report
TE	Tripura Era (A.D. is counted by adding 590 years)
TRGP	Tripura Rajya Ganaparishad
TRPM	Tripura Rajya Prajamandal
TSAR	Tripura Secretariat Archival Record
WBSA	West Bengal State's Archives

GLOSSARY

<i>Abwabs</i>	—	Illegal cesses paid to revenue collectors.
<i>Achai</i>	—	A tribal priest.
<i>Adda Kar</i>	—	Chowkidari tax collected from villagers.
<i>Agrahayan</i>	—	Eighth month of Bengali Calendar (Mid-November to mid-December).
<i>Along</i>	—	A special prison-house inside the royal palace.
<i>Andolan</i>	—	Movement.
<i>Anjuman</i>	—	An association of the Muslims.
<i>Asrama</i>	—	Hermitage.
<i>Baishakh</i>	—	First month of Bengali Calendar (Mid-April to mid-May).
<i>Bankamla</i>	—	Forest labourer.
<i>Begar</i>	—	Forced labour.
<i>Bibhag</i>	—	Division.
<i>Brindia</i>	—	Prince's regular armed soldiers stationed at Agartala and recruited only from the Tripura Community.
<i>Chaitra</i>	—	The last month of Bengali Calendar (Mid-March to mid-April).
<i>Chakla</i>	—	A circle.
<i>Charka</i>	—	Spinning-wheel.
<i>Chowkidari Tax</i>	—	A local tax realised from permanently settled areas for maintaining peace and order.
<i>Chowdhuri</i>	—	A village or a tribal chief.
<i>Cheng Crak</i>	—	A palanquin-bearer or umbrella-bearer of Tripura prince or a boxer or a hero.
<i>Dadan</i>	—	An advance money.
<i>Dafas</i>	—	Sub-groups among the tribes of Tripura.
<i>Darbur</i>	—	A royal court.
<i>Dharmagola</i>	—	Store-house.
<i>Dharmavatar</i>	—	Virtue or justice incarnate.
<i>Dewan</i>	—	The Chief minister of a princely State.
<i>Ektara</i>	—	One-stringed musical instrument.

<i>Foujdar</i>	—	A commander.
<i>Ghar-chukti Kar</i>	—	Every tribal family under one kitchen had to pay an annual tax for doing shifting cultivation.
<i>Ghasuri Kar</i>	—	Grazing tax collected from bordering villages of British districts for grazing cattle in Tripura.
<i>Hasam-bhojan</i>	—	A grand community dinner arranged by princes of Tripura during the Durga Puja festival each year.
<i>Hat</i>	—	A market.
<i>Hitosadhini Sabha</i>	—	A welfare association.
<i>Hudda</i>	—	Title.
<i>Ijara</i>	—	Lease.
<i>Jamai Khata</i>	—	The custom of apprenticeship of the son-in-law in his would-be father-in-law's house.
<i>Jatiya Sarkar</i>	—	A national government.
<i>Jhoom/Jhooming/</i> <i>Jhum/Jhuming</i>	—	Slash and burn cultivation.
<i>Jotedar</i>	—	A proprietor of agricultural farm.
<i>Kachari</i>	—	A judge's court.
<i>Kali Kala</i>	—	Present or fourth age of the world according to Hindu scriptures.
<i>Kaziana</i>	—	A special cess collected from Muslim tenants by Tripura princes at the time of marriage ceremonies in royal or tenant family.
<i>Khatiyān</i>	—	An account-book.
<i>Kiar</i>	—	One-third acre.
<i>Lalloop</i>	—	Forced labour imposed on the villagers by princely regime of Manipur.
<i>Langarkhana</i>	—	Alms-house distributing cooked food.
<i>Mahajan</i>	—	A money-lender.
<i>Majlish</i>	—	An association.
<i>Mandir</i>	—	A temple.
<i>Manikya</i>	—	The majestic title of the princes of Tripura.
<i>Maund</i>	—	An Indian measure of weight equivalent to a little more than 82.1 lbs.
<i>Musti-bhiksha</i>	—	A handful of rice or other cereals given as alms.

<i>Missip</i>	—	A liaison officer between prince and tribal head.
<i>Mouja</i>	—	Unit of a group of villages for land revenue realization purpose.
<i>Na ek pai na ek bhai</i>	--	Neither a pence (as contribution in war) nor a man (as army in war).
<i>Nankar</i>	—	A land allowed to some for service instead of wage.
<i>Nazar</i>	—	Extra payment to a superior individual on exceptional occasion.
<i>Pothang</i>	—	Menial service from tribal Kuki tribe in Manipur.
<i>Praja</i>	—	Tenant, ryot.
<i>Priti Sangrakshini Samiti</i>	—	Communal harmony preservation association.
<i>Purtma Bartma Kar Samiti</i>	—	No tax against public works of government.
<i>Razakar</i>	—	Fifth columnist activity of some people.
<i>Roshnabad</i>	—	A land of light including Comilla, Sylhet, Noakhali.
<i>Saheb</i>	—	European.
<i>Sanad</i>	—	A royal charter.
<i>Sardar</i>	—	A chief of tribal people.
<i>Sayarat</i>	—	Non taxable land just made human settlement out of jungles.
<i>Sheristadar</i>	—	Office Superintendent.
<i>Shinga</i>	—	A pipe made of buffalo horn, trumpet.
<i>Swadhin</i>	—	Independent.
<i>Takkal</i>	—	A chopper.
<i>Taitun</i>	—	Forced labour from tribes for princely officials on tour in hills.
<i>Tarpan</i>	—	Offering of water to the dead kins.
<i>Tehsildar</i>	—	Revenue collector.
<i>Til</i>	—	Sesame.
<i>Tol</i>	—	A sanskrit school.
<i>Tong-ghar</i>	—	A bamboo made hut of the tribal people in hills at a height of five or six feet generally.
<i>Uthra</i>	—	A dry food from paddy prepared with molasses.



Fig. 1: Tripura in India



Fig. 3: Tripura in North-Eastern India

THE STATE AND THE PEOPLE

I. THE RULING HOUSE OF TRIPURA PRIOR TO 1905: A BRIEF SKETCH

There is hardly any Ruling House in India which can claim the same privilege of a long years of uninterrupted rule as the Manikyas of Tripura. This State has witnessed the ravages of times, shocks of wars, intrigues and revolutions. Sometimes it tried to keep intact the age-old traditions, sometimes it also tried to adjust with modernism as evident since the days of Birchandra. In this change, sometimes British pressure played its role.

The Rajas of Tripura claimed descent from Druhja, son of Jajati of the Lunar race¹. They had adopted the surname "Deb Barman" (or Deb Barma) meaning "Armour", and appellation distinctive of the *Kshatriya* caste.² Rev. James Long established their link with the chivalrous *Kshatriyas* of Rajputana.³ The distinctive family title of "Manikya" (*Manik* or jewel) was first bestowed on Raja Ratna Fa (father) in 1279 A.D. by the ruler of Gour, Tughril Khan. Ratna Fa on this occasion presented *Manik* to the latter who in return assisted him in overthrowing his elder brother. Since then the rulers of Tripura had been addressed by the designation *Manikya Bahadur* for centuries.⁴ But there is a controversy as to whether the "Manikya dynasty" had begun from Ratna Fa or Dharma Manikya.

Besides this controversy the titles of *Maharaja*, *Manikya* by the rulers of Tripura had some complexities and the documents show that the British had some objections in this regard. Alexander Mackenzie, Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal, in a letter to the Political Agent said that the proper title of the Hill Tippera Chief was 'Rajah' not 'Maharajah'. In support of his view,

he referred the suits of the old *Sadar Dewani Adalat* of 1809 and 1814.⁵ A.W.B. Power, the Political Agent thought it fit to designate Tripura as a Feudatory State.⁶ Nilmani Das, the Dewan of Tripura, also pointed out that we have no such reports as to establish our case that the 'Rajah' of Tripura were the 'Maharajahs'.⁷ The British Government did not take into cognizance even all the arguments put forward by Birchandra Barman for conferring higher title like the 'Rajah'.⁸ It appears from all records that only in 1884, the Government of India decided to address the Maharaja of Tripura as "His Highness" in all official correspondences.⁹ The settlement of these 'Maharaja' and 'Manikya' titles sometimes created dissatisfaction in the minds of the kings of Tripura as established norms were violated often.

The title 'Manikya' had always been used by the rulers of Tripura since 1279. Ampthill, the Viceroy and Governor, in his famous *Sanad* of June 1904, addressed the king Radhakishore with 'Manikya' title. However, a controversy arose in 1918, when the Political-Agent questioned the use of the title 'Manikya'.¹⁰ But the title was freely used at the time of the previous visit of Lord Carmichael, the Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, at Agartala in February 1913. A ban on this only meant humiliation and loss of dignity of the rulers of Tripura. Their contention was that it was within their rights to use them in any form sanctioned by custom. To Radhakishore these titles were of little significance as his subjects called him *Dharmabatar* (an incarnation of justice).¹¹ Birendra Kishore and Bir Bikram Kishore placed their services both in men and money at the disposal of the British crown during the World Wars. So Mahadev Chakraborty writes that the changed attitude of the British Raj was particularly noticeable after the First World War in respect of raising no objection against, the use of the titles 'Maharaja' and 'Manikya' by the rulers of Tripura.¹² The collaboration of the British Government with the ruling princes became necessary also to curb the growing tree of Indian nationalism.

The 'Maharaja' of Tripura was entitled to a salute of 13 guns. He was allowed to visit the Viceroy and had his visit returned. The Tripura State had been placed in direct political relations with the Government of India with effect from 15 November, 1922. The Government of Bengal in Council acted as Agent to the Governor General of India for Tripura State.¹³ B.P. Barua main-

tains that the importance of Hill Tripura as a "Native" State lies in the fact that it offers a striking example as to how a sovereign State was reduced to a subordinate State through the exercise of mere political pressure.¹⁴ (See a letter of A.B. Chatterjee, Dewan, Tripura State in Appendix 39, and also Appendix 2 in this connection).

The traditional history of the Tripura Raj family is recorded in the *Rajmala* or State chronicle in Bengali said to be one of the oldest composition in that language in existence.¹⁵ But the authenticity of the *Rajmala* as a historical source has been doubted. The early history of the so-called *Swadhin* or "Independent" Tripura is shrouded in mystery. The British authorities later on stopped the use of the word *Swadhin* or 'Independent' Tripura as evident from various documents, used "Hill Tippera" till 1920 when the name was changed to "Tripura" at the request of the Tripura kings.¹⁶ In fact, the question of sovereignty was a complicated one; sometimes Tripura enjoyed *de jure* sovereignty and not *de facto* and sometimes the reverse. The British Government had no treaty with Tripura nor did it receive any tribute. (See a note in Appendix 1 as to the status of Tripura.)

During the days of the Mughals, the 'Rajahs' of Tripura paid tributes to the Mughal *Subedars* of Bengal. The English flag was hoisted over the plains of Tripura within four years of their acceptance of the *Dewani* of Bengal. The king, Krishna Manikya was defeated in February 1761 by A.D. Mathews, the British officer commanding in Chittagong. The British took settlement of the plains of *Roshnabad* which was parcelled out among the Muslim nobles to place in the rent-roll. Hill was left 'Independent' under the kings of Tripura. In 1792, king Rajdhar Manikya was made the settlement-holder of *Roshnabad*.¹⁷ It situated in the plains of the districts of Tippera (Comilla), Noakhali, and Sylhet. The *Chakla* covered an area of 570 square miles and now in Bangladesh.¹⁸ These two tracts—Hill and plain—had been declared to be an 'Impartible Raj'. So the independence was nothing but a myth and the interference in many matters of the kings by the British became a regular feature. This type of position of kings can also be seen in cases of other kings of India. To Buckland, Commissioner of Chittagong (1860), there was nothing in Hill Tippera for the British Government that desired annexation because it was hill with insignificant population and the total revenue would not meet the

expenses of the administration even.¹⁹ However, the possessions of Hill and plain arose the dualism of the Hill Tippera Raj; he was both an 'Independent' ruler and a British Indian Zamindar. As a Zamindar, he was liable to the jurisdiction of British courts, and as a ruler of the hill territories, he was independent in exercising his powers over the life and death of his subjects.²⁰ His position was unique among Indian princes.

So the financial foundation of the Tripura Raj was to be searched in the *zamindari*. The income from it was much more than it came from Tripura State proper.

Now we like to mention the names of the Tripura kings since Ratna Fa to Radhakishore chronologically on the basis of discovery of recent coins, inscriptions and evidences gathered from Tripura and its adjoining areas.²¹ Further, the mentioning of some important events of this period will reveal their direct or indirect impact on the socio-political movements of later days. But it is not the aim of the present chapter of recording royal history which is already written in other works.

A clear picture emerges only since the invasion of Tripura by Tughril Khan, the then ruler of Bengal in 1278 A.D. The accession date of Ratna Manikya is controversial. The recent discovery of coins puts its as 1465-67 A.D. The list of the Manikya rulers can be seen as follows:²²

List of Manikya Rulers

Name of Ruler	A.D.
1. Ratna Manikya	1465-67
2. Bijoy Manikya I	1488
3. Mukut Manikya	1489
4. Pratap Manikya	1490
5. Dhanya Manikya	1490-1520
6. Dev Manikya	1520-1530
7. Indra Manikya	—
8. Bijoy Manikya II	1532-1563
9. Ananta Manikya	1565
10. Udaya Manikya	1567
11. Jay Manikya	1573
12. Amar Manikya	1577-1586
13. Rajdhar Manikya	1586-1599
14. Iswar Manikya	1600
15. Jasa Manikya	1600
16. Kalyan Manikya	1626-1656
17. Gobinda Manikya	1689-95 ic

	Name of Ruler	A.D.
18.	Chhatra Manikya	1661-1666
19.	Ram Manikya	1673
20.	Ratna Manikya II	1685-1712
21.	Mahendra Manikya	1712
22.	Dharma Manikya	1714
23.	Mukunda Manikya	1729-1739
24.	Indra Manikya	1744-1746
25.	Jay Manikya	—
26.	Bijoy Manikya III	—
27.	Krishna Manikya	1730-1783
28.	Jahanavidevi	1783-1785
29.	Rajdhar Manikya	1785-1804
30.	Durga Manikya	1809-1813
31.	Ramganga Manikya	1813-1826
32.	Kasichandra Manikya	1826-1829
33.	Krishna Kishore Manikya	1829-1849
34.	Isanchandra Manikya	1849-1862
35.	Birchandra Manikya	1862-1896

The period since 1905, i.e., the period covered in the present study, witnessed the reigns of the following kings of Tripura:

- | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|-----------|
| (1) | Radhakishore Manikya | 1896-1909 |
| (2) | Birendrakishore Manikya | 1909-1923 |
| (3) | Bir Bikramkishore Manikya | 1923-1947 |

During eighteenth and nineteenth centuries some revolts and movements took place in Tripura which had their indirect effects upon the people in later time.

The years in between the rule of two kings, Bijoy Manikya III and Krishna Manikya seemed to be the darkest period in political history of Tripura. In the face of utter lawlessness, the local chief and self-seekers defied the authority. Shamsar Gazi, a peasant, first revolted against the local chief and he then virtually ruled over Tripura for seven years in 1760s. He introduced certain reforms in revenue and administrative system. He granted tax-free land to the Hindu and Muslim inhabitants.²³

During the reign of Krishnakishore Manikya, about 25 thousand *Paitu* Kukis residing in the hills to the east and north of Tripura, rose in revolt. The king did not assist the British when

the Kukis under their leader, Lal Chokla massacred a large number of Manipuris. At last Captain Blackwood led a military expedition against Lal Chokla and the latter had to surrender.²⁴

Isanchandra Manikya's reign was marked by some important events like the question of giving shelter to the mutineers of the Great Revolt of 1857 (popularly termed as the 'First War of Independence').²⁵ In 1860 an armed Kuki incursion took place at the village of Chhagalnaya. They had to retreat as resistance was put by a local sardar, Gunagazi.²⁶ The rebel Kukis were the followers of Ratan Puiya. The Reangs of this place also in 1861 joined in a rebellion with him. They failed to return the loan taken from the *mahajans* as a result of crops' failure. They looted a bazar near Udaipur.²⁷ To prevent such occurrences, some measures were being taken by the Hill Superintendent of Tripura in consultation with the king.²⁸

Isanchandra's death plunged Tripura afresh in quarrels of succession. Birchandra, the younger brother of Isanchandra, who seized power in 1861, was actually installed on 9 March 1870. Lord Mayo, the Governor-General of India appointed a Political Agent in Tripura for the first time in 1871 for the suppression of the Kukis in the Lushai Hills. The District Magistrate of Tripura was being appointed the ex-officio Political Agent from 1878 A.D. That curbed the autonomy of the king in what way the new development is analysed. There took place a revolt during Birchandra's reign. The Jamatias as a protest of exploitation of Wakhi Rai, the Hazari, participated in it. The revolt had to be pacified only with the help of the two Kuki Chiefs, Murchhai and Happui.²⁹ Some important administrative changes took place during his reign. Slavery and *Sati* systems were abolished at the instruction of the British. Durbar-based cultural improvement also marked the reign.³⁰

Birchandra was succeeded by his eldest son Radhakishore Manikya and our study of Tripura begins with the accession of the latter to the throne.

II. THE POPULATION

Profile

To evaluate properly the socio-political movements, let us first have a look at the population profile of princely Tripura since

1872 (1871). True, the growth of population becomes sometimes sign of an underlying prosperity, but sometimes, as according to Malthusian theory, it leads to scarcity of food and land and necessarily generates tension in the society. In spite of frequent epidemics like the Lushai famine, 1881-82, cholera, influenza, dysentery, malaria etc. and irregular emigration (date of which available since 1890s) from the State, Tripura census from 1871 to 1901,³¹ as evident from Table 1.1, show some sort of slow growth of population. The reasons for such slow growth were perhaps due to the jungly nature of land, lack of medical and educational facilities, political instability leading to internal feuds by various claimants to the throne, occasional raids by the different hill people etc.

Table 1.1: Population of Tripura from 1871 to 1901

Year	Total Population	Tribal Population	Percentage of Tribal to Total Population
1871*	74,242	41,854	64
1881	95,637	49,915	55
1891	1,37,325	70,292	51.09
1901	1,73,325	91,679	52.89

*The population figure of 1872-73 is presumed to be same in 1871.

Source: *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XIII, Oxford, 1908, p. 118; *Annual Plan 1983-84*, Government of Tripura, Agartala, p. 1; Judicial Political branch, File 181, *Proceedings*, B. 32-35, November 1876, WBSA.

Population Profile, 1921-51

The population in 1901 was 1,73,325 and if the total area of the State is taken into consideration, then the density of population was 42 persons per square mile. The increase of 26 per cent, in 1901 was due mainly to the growing immigration from the neighbouring British districts. Of the total population in 1901, Hindus both tribal and Bengali formed 69 per cent, Muslims 26 per cent, Buddhists 3 per cent and Animists less than 2 per cent. Ninety-one per cent of the population depended on agriculture for their livelihood, 3 per cent only on village industries and 6 per cent on various services and professions.³²

Population Growth—After 1921

The growth of population was not so much a matter of anxiety in Tripura till 1901. Initially princely patronage and religious zeal inspired the Bengalis of the adjacent British districts to come to settle in Tripura. Bengali settlements in land increased the revenue of the State by speeding up agricultural activities. The rapid change of the demographic profile began to affect the socio-economic structure of Tripura to a great extent. Tribal people's fear increased as their majority status came down gradually from 56.37 per cent in 1921 to 50.09 per cent in 1941 and since then they were in minority being 31.53 per cent in 1961.³³ Tables 1.2 and 1.3 will prove this condition. The increase of population of Tripura was phenomenal in comparison with India and even Bengal. The population growth in India and Bengal in 1931-41, was 14.2 per cent³⁴ and 10.37 per cent³⁵ respectively whereas in Tripura it was 34.14 per cent in this decade and 78.71 in Tripura³⁶ and 41.33 in North-East India in 1951-61.³⁷

Table 1.2: Population of Tripura (1911-1961)

Year	Population	Variation in %
1911	2,29,613	32.48
1921	3,04,437	32.59
1931	3,82,450	25.63
1941	5,13,010	34.14
1951	6,39,029	24.56
1961	11,42,005	78.71

Source: *Census of India, 1961, Vol. 1, Paper No. 1 of 1962, pp. 8-9; Statistical Abstract, Tripura, 1965, Agartala (Statistical Department), pp. 3-4.*

Migration Problem

This whopping landslides of immigrant population was a cause of tension in the socio-economic life of the State. The immigration caused mainly to economic compulsions arising out of the two World Wars, commercial depression in the *zamindari* and the search for land by the land-hungry peasants. There was abundant cultivable and waste land in Tripura. Many rural population of adjoining British districts who were destined for share cropping

and wage labour entered the State in great number in the post-World-War period.³⁸ Besides, the partition of the country and communal riots of 1940s and 50s faced the people of erstwhile East Pakistan to come in Tripura for shelter.³⁹ It was also the standing policy of the Tripura kings to invite the Bengali people into the vacant lands in Tripura.

Table 1.3: Tribal and Non-Tribal Population of Tripura

Year	Total population	Tribal population	Percentage of Tribal to total population
1911	2,29,613	1,11,303	48.47
1921	3,04,437	1,71,610	56.37
1931	3,82,450	1,92,249	50.26
1941	5,13,010	2,56,991	50.09
1951	6,45,707	2,37,953	36.85
1961	11,42,005	3,60,070	31.53

Source: *Annual Plan 1983-84*, Government of Tripura, Agartala, (State Planning Machinery), p. 1; B.K. Roy Burman (ed.), *Demographic and Socio-economic Profiles of Hill Areas of North-East India*, New Delhi, 1970, Appendix X.

Since Tripura is surrounded on three sides by the present Bangladesh, migration from Chittagong, Noakhali, Comilla and Sylhet districts became easy. At least three communal riots, namely, Raypur, Dacca riot of 1942, Noakhali and Chandpur riot in response to the 'Direct Action Day' of the Muslim League in Calcutta on 16 August 1946 and riot in almost all districts of erstwhile East Pakistan in 1950, forced the minority community to enter into Tripura. The first two communal riots took place at the time of Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya and a few thousand migrated to the State. But with the merger of Tripura with the Indian Union, the influx of displaced persons started on a large scale.⁴⁰ The figure was rather heavy during February 1950-1952 as is evident from Table 1.4. The census reports of Tripura, 1941 and 1951 are not very much dependable and the enumeration of citizens and non-citizens may not be properly reflected in those reports.

Demographic Revolution—Its Effect

With the continuous immigration of non-tribal people from outside, the problem of land alienation took a new dimension, Excessive pressure of population had a severe impact on socio-

economic-politico-cultural life of the people. Out of the total area of 4,116 square miles, only about 2,580 square kilometres of land was cultivable and out of this only 7 per cent cultivable land was irrigable. Then land alienation had become the order of the day.⁴¹ The so-long exploitation by a few Thakurs was going to be replaced by the exploitation by the *mahajans* came from the adjoining British districts. The impact of the above situation and the expansion of communication with the outside world and the question of tribal identity etc. are discussed in detail in Chapter 5. What we should simply point out in this context was the clash between the traditional "elites" who were the products of modern education. The small group of traditional urban elites known as Thakurs (a few) kept their closeness with the princes and safe-distance from the masses, although they wanted to be the bosses of the common people. They tried to solve the emergent econo-political situation of the tribal poor through traditional methods and tactics by organizing the *Thakur Samiti*, the *Kshatriya Mandal*, the *Parbatya Upajati Seva Samiti*, the *Tripur Sangha*, the *Bir Bikram Tripur Sangha*, *Cheng Crak* etc. But the emergent literate rural and urban middle class, i.e. the "new elites" in cooperation with other progressive forces organized the tribal masses through the *Janamangal Samiti*, the *Janasiksha Samiti*, the *Prajamandal* and Leftist organizations like the *Forward Bloc* and the Communist Party etc. The poor tribal people in association with the "new elites" became aware of their econo-political right. The problems of tribal isolation, frustration and self-identity etc. were now found new expression.

Table 1.4: Families and Persons who took shelter in Tripura as Refugees

Year	Families	Persons
1950	36,200	1,84,000
1951	6,000	23,300
1952	16,000	80,000

Source: *Census of India*, 1961, Vol. XXVI, Tripura Part 1(1), Statement XI-39, p. 990.

Nineteen Tribes of Tripura

According to the order of the President of India, 1956, there are nineteen Scheduled Tribes in Tripura (Table 1.5).

Table 1.5: Scheduled Tribes in Tripura

Tribe	Number in 1961
1. Lushai	2,988
2. Mog	10,524
3. Kuki	5,531
4. Chakma	22,386
5. Garo	5,484
6. Chaimal	50
7. Hallam	16,298
8. Khasia	349
9. Bhutia	7
10. Munda	4,409
11. Oraon	2,875
12. Lepcha	7
13. Santhal	1,562
14. Bhil	69
15. Tripura	1,89,799
16. Jamatia	24,359
17. Noatia	16,010
18. Reang	56,597
19. Uchai	766

Source: *Census of India, 1961, XXVI, Tripura, Part-V-A-*, Table—Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Table 1.6 shows the distribution of some of the *jhoomia* tribes between 1931 and 1961. The census of 1941 and 1951 are not so much reliable and some political parties objected to its enumeration which was done in the midst of troubled state of affairs then prevailing.

Table 1.6 : Increase and Decrease of Some Important Tribal Population between 1931 and 1961

Tribe	1931	1961	Growth Rate in %
1. Lushai-Kuki-Hallam	16,146	24,867	+1.80
2. Chakma	8,613	22,386	+5.33
3. Mog	5,697	10,524	+2.82
4. Noatia	27,624	16,010	-1.40
5. Jamatia	11,090	24,359	+3.99
6. Reang	35,881	56,597	+1.92
7. Tripura	79,074	1,89,799	+4.67

Source: *Census Biharani, 1931*, pp. 64-65; *Census of India 1961, Vol. XXVI Tripura, Part V-A.*

To sum up, towards the beginning of the twentieth century (according to the census of 1901), the total population of Tripura was 1,73,325. Of them tribal and non-tribal population was counted respectively as 91,679 (52.89%) and 81,646. Hindus including tribals constituted 1,19,192 (68.77%) Muslims 45,323 (26.15%), Buddhists 5,999 (3.46%) and other 2,811 (1.62%).⁴²

Tripura—the original land of the tribal people—is also the house of the non-tribals and people of different religious faiths. Beginning from the anti-partition movement of Bengal in 1905, the people of this erstwhile princely State - being inspired by various influences—participated in different types of anti-imperialist and anti-feudalist movements and created new chapters in history.

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6

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we may say that the socio-political movements in Tripura were both stimulus and response of the movements of the neighbouring undivided Bengal. The British policy of isolating one part of India from the rest of the country did not succeed. However, the nature, timing and intensity of the struggles in Tripura were not always the same with the struggle of a British province. But the aim or motivation of all these struggles was to drive out the imperial domination and feudal oppression. Whatever may be the similar and dissimilar trends or limitations, ultimately this tiny nationalism of tiny Tripura like a tiny tributary merged itself into the broad stream of India's national struggle for freedom.

Three dimensions of national movements of 1919-22, 1930-34, and 1942-43, served as a turning-point in the lives of many people. These movements both in the State and in the attached zamindaris were loosely coordinated by the "modernist elites" partly from villages and partly from urban centres in collaboration sometimes with the so-called Gandhian followers.

The *Swadeshi* movement in princely Tripura, like other parts of India, was not an end in itself. It was rather the beginning of an end of the British empire. The movement gradually extended its scope. Gandhi, unknown in Indian politics, in 1905 rightly prophesied that the partition of Bengal led to the partition of the British empire. (*Hind Swaraja*, 1946, p. 15 in R. C. Majumdar's *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1988, p.3).

The socio-political parties since the late 1930s sought to clarify their position in peasant struggles, prescribed revolts against the existing political structure. Hence, the demand for a responsible Government was raised and earlier slogan "under the aegis of king" became irrelevant since 1946. Politics of parties took a new turn. Communal feeling ran high. Conspiracy against Tripura's

merger with Indian Union was hatched. But the clumsy situation was brought under control by the united action of the people belonging to different socio-political associations.

The violent movements of the rural poor and tribal *jhoomias* originated from the local roots and developed during the economic bankruptcy and political instability in between 1949 and 1951. Tripura stumbled from one crisis to another. Tribal peasantry were not ready at that time to submit before administrative and economic misdeeds of the Government. A new chapter opened when confrontation became inevitable, and the Communist help was readily available in that critical phase.

Out of this historical study, a few conclusions can be drawn:

First, it has dispelled the notion that until the coming of nationalism from British India in the 1930s there was no political activities in this princely State. *Tabula rasa* of previous age gave way to "new nationalism" since 1905.

Secondly, it added a page in revolutionary fervour to the glorious chapter entitled "Revolutionary Activities" in India's freedom struggle both in early and later phases.

Thirdly, a long partnership of the tribal and non-tribal people in Tripura laid nationalism on solid foundation. This adjustment enabled them to fight the imperialist and feudal forces successfully for common socio-political emancipation. The collaborationist attitude of this type is to be found rarely in other parts of India.

Fourthly, Tripura group of tribal people by their unchallenged supremacy, both numerically and socio-economically, ushered in a nationalism with patriotism. This may be termed as "tribal nationalism" very much related to All-India *Swaraj*, but was not contradictory at all. This has its parallel in the Tana Bhagats (though a depressed class) of Bihar. The "Tripura tribal nationalism" drew its strength from vast masses and was able to create a line of leadership provided and supported by the masses.

Fifthly, as a challenge to the established authority, separate administrative arrangements were being made by the tribal people to be ruled by themselves. This self-rule initiated the

task of enforcement of laws and collection of taxes and the trend continued since the days of the Reang uprising. This vindicates a proof of their ability to rule and belief in the age-old democracy which in the long run contributed towards Tripura's autonomy movements and foundation of the A.D.C. in later days. The manifestation of sub-nationalism was thus giving way to All-India nationalism. (Irfan Habib, *Interpreting Indian History*, Shillong, n.d., p. 59). This parallel can be found not only in other contemporary peasant movements in India but in the peasant Taiping rebellion (1850-64) in China and backward tribes in Africa also.

Sixthly, women both tribal and non-tribal did not lag behind men in their ardour for change. Sometimes they remained in the vanguard of demonstration and gave shelter to absconders.

Finally, the period of the thesis is extended up to 1952 when the political parties of Tripura took part in the first general election. Attempt was made to establish the fact that a long-followed doctrinaire, "adventurist line" or a policy of "armed confrontation" could be substituted by a constitutional electoral battle if people so demanded. For, people are the true judges of real uninterrupted historical processes.

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