

## Cursory Glance on the Early Historical Perspectives of Tripura

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The State of Tripura is situated between  $91^{\circ}10'$  and  $92^{\circ}22'$  E latitude and  $2^{\circ}56'$  and  $24^{\circ}32'$  N longitude and surrounded in North, West and South by the territory of Bangladesh, Assam and Mizoram lie on its east. It has an area of 4,086 Square miles and according to the census of 1961 the population of Tripura was 11,42,005. But the present population would be about 20 lakhs. It is a hilly country and five principal ranges of hills, increasing in height towards the east, run North and South, with an average interval of 20 kilometres. The principal hill ranges, beginning from the east, are the Jampui, Sakhan, Langtarai, Atharamura and Baramura-Devatamura. These hills form a water shed from which the drainage pours down north by the Khowai, Dhalai, Manu, Juri and Langai, west into Meghna by the Gomati, and south-west into the Bay of Bengal by the Fenny and Muhuri. Along the north-western and southern boundaries of the State lies a narrow strip of low land most suitable for agriculture and habitation. Along this western border, for some miles to the north and south of present capital town of Agartala, the country is a broken ground, consisting of hillocks alternating with near by valleys. these hillocks are utilized as sites for home steads and the valleys have been converted into paddy fields.

The rich cultural heritage of Tripura is well known. The language, dance, songs, dress, festivals, beliefs, agriculture, administration and fighting activities of the people of the region have greatly contributed towards Indian culture as a whole. Their unique historical traditions are recorded in the literature, epigraphs and the testimonies of the Chinese and Greek travellers and adventurers.

A State of great antiquity, Tripura claims to be the most ancient of all the former princely States in India. Its recorded history goes back to the days of the Mahabharata. This is

also borne out by references in the Mahabharata, the Puranas and the Allahabad Pillar inscription (Davaka) where Tripura has been mentioned as a 'frontier kingdom'. In medieval period Tripura was ruled by powerful rulers like Dharmamanikya (1431-62), Dhanya-manikya (1463-1515) and Vijayamanikya (1529-70). The history of Tripura in the Seventeenth Century was one of gradual decay, although it never became a part of the Subah of Bengal. By the year 1767 State of Tripura accepted British Residency and the Kuki Revolt (1860), Jamatiya Revolt (1863) and Riyang Revolt (1943) are some of the important events of modern time.

On October 15, 1949, Tripura became a part 'C' State under the Indian Constitution. It was governed by a Chief Commissioner with the help of three advisers selected from the representatives of the people. With the reorganisation of the States which came into force on October 1, 1956, Tripura became a Union territory. The Tripura Territorial Council was set up on August 15, 1957 consisting of thirty elected and two nominated members. With the introduction of the Government of Union Territories Act, the Tripura Territorial Council and the Tripura Administration merged into the Government of Tripura when the first popular Ministry of Tripura headed by Sri Sachindra Lal Singha assumed office on July 1, 1963. In 1972, Tripura emerged as a full fledged State.

Early history of Tripura is an unexplored and uninvestigated field of study. There are a few literary sources which are helpful in this connection. Reference to the land of Tripura is recorded in the Mahabharata in which it is stated that the Prajgyotisa king, Bhagadatta, commanded the Magadhas and Kalingas, whereas the Kosala king, Brihadvala commanded the troops from Mekhala and Tripura.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Rajamala (a genuine record of the Tripura Raj family) the rulers of Tripura were descendants of king Druhya son of Yayati of the lunar race. Druhya was succeeded by his son Babru. As the legend has it, the sage Kapila conferred the title of 'king' on Babru with due ceremony and ever since this proud title has been assumed by the successive rulers. It was king Daitya's successor Tripur (the fortieth descendent of king Druhya) who gave the territory the name it now bears. Previous to that this territory was known as 'Kiratadesa' (the land of the Kiratas). King Tripur was a contemporary of Emperor Yudhisthira and men-

tion has been made in the Mahabharata that his son Trilochana was present at the royal Sacrifice called 'Rajasuya Yajna' performed by the Emperor.<sup>2</sup>

Dakshina was the second son of Trilochana. The eldest son, Drikpati, having married the daughter of the sonless king of Hedamba, succeeded to the throne of his father-in-law. When Trilochana died, the younger brothers of Dakshina, together with the nobles, raised Dakshina to the Tripura (also known as Trivega) throne. Thereupon, Drikpati, the king of Hedamba, who claimed both the kingdoms by right of succession, invaded the Kapili Valley. After seven days' stiff fight Dakshina and his brothers were compelled to surrender the kingdom to the king of Hedamba.

*"Saptadin Yuddha haila Tripurar pat  
Vara Vakra Uljanete Khalangma rahila"*

(The first Lahara of Rajamala by K. C. Singha, 1898).

Dakshina and his brothers thus migrated to the Cachar district and founded their capital at Khalangma on the bank of the river Varavakra (Barak). The ancient Trivega, Kapili or the Davaka Kingdom became absorbed in the Hedamba kingdom and this took place about the fifth Century A. D.

Admidst the picturesque hills and forests of Tripura live about 4 lakhs of tribal people who have a rich culture of their own and are proud of their heritage. Belonging to scores of various tribes, such as the Tripuri, Chakma, Rieng, Jamatia, Halam, Magh, Noatia, Garo and Lushai, these tribes had little contact with the outside world till a few decades ago.

On the basis of sources available to him, Mackenzie stated that Jajarpha, the seventyfourth king of Tripura conquered Rangamati (Udayapura) 55 kms. south-east from Agartala and shifted his capital there. From Udayapura he attacked Vanga upto Sundarbans and extended his dominions as far as Amarapur in Burma.<sup>3</sup>

We learn from the ancient Geography that the kingdom of Tripura lies south-west of Manipur and Vanga or Eastern Bengal is on its west.<sup>4</sup>

There are also a good number of Sanskrit sources for the history of Tripura. These are chiefly the Puranas and the Tantra literatures. The boundaries of ancient kingdom of Tripura are described in the Sanskrit Rajamala :

*"Yasya Rajyasya purvashyam Mekhali simatam gata  
paschimasyam Kachhrangi desa simati sundara*

*Uttare Taianganadi simatam yasya samgata  
Achranga nama rajyam yasya akishina simata  
etammadhye Trivegamyam duhyo rajyam susasitam."*

(The ancient Kingdom of Tripura, called Trivega, comprised the Kapili valley, the north Cachar hills and also the modern district of Cachar to the west of Manipur.)

The land of Tripura is mentioned in the Bhavishya Purana along with other lands of eastern India.

*"Varendra-Tamraliptancha Hedamva-Manipurakam  
Lauhityantan traipuram chaiva Jayantakham Susangakam".*  
(Brahma khanda chapter - Bhavishya Purana).

The Tantra literatures refer to the land of Tripura along with adjacent lands of Manipur, Jayantia and Cachar.

*"Tripura Kaikika chaiva Jayanti Manichandrika  
Kachchadi Magadhi Devi asvani Sapta Parvatah"*  
(Kamakhya Tantra).

Guhya Tantra also mentions Tripura in connection with discussing the geography of adjacent places of pilgrimage :

*"Tripurottara bhagachacha yabat Siddheswara Hara  
Paschima Chandika kundam purve kundam Sudhamayam"*

There are also references to the Tripura-Sundari Mahapitha (pilgrimage) at Udayapura in Tripura. It is said that the right foot of Sati had fallen here. Every year in the month of January, a fair is held at this place.<sup>5</sup>

About 1240 A. D. Tripura was invaded by Turki Sultan of Bengal. The reigning King Kirti-dhara alias Chengthumpha, the consort of queen Tripura-Sundari, took the leadership of defence with large number of Tripura troops. The Turkish invaders led by General Hiravant Khan were driven back with great slaughter.<sup>6</sup>

Ratnapha (1275-90) who was twenty-second in descent from Adi-Dharmapha, first assumed the surname Manikya. Since then all succeeding Tripura kings and also the kings of Hedamba assumed this surname. Hence, we find the Barahi Kings of Hedamba assuming this Surname as well as the Surname pha in the fourteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Adjacent to Tripura there were a few other independent Kingdoms in early times. Amongst them mention can be made of Pattikera over Comilla and Sylhet region (7th-11th Century A. D.) and Harikela over Dacca, East Mymensingh and Western Sylhet region (11th - 12th Century A. D.).<sup>8</sup>

There are frequent references to the ancient kingdom of Tripura in the Chinese, Shan and Greek sources. The earliest of the Chinese travellers supplying information on Tripura was Chang K'ien who was entrusted with the mission in 138 B. C. to proceed as far as the Oxus Valley (under the Huns in north-western India). He reported to the Chinese Emperor that the commodities of South-west China were being carried by Indian caravans through Burma and Tripura.<sup>9</sup> This gives the idea that Tripura played the role of a commercial centre for the trade activities between India and South-western China in the 2nd Century B. C.

The sending of two embassies from India of which one was sent by Chandra Vallabh called Yu Chai (moon-loved) by the Chinese in 428 A. D. from the Kapili Valley is recorded in the accounts of Shang Shu (420-79 A. D.) of the 5th century A. D.<sup>10</sup> In this connection it has been said that the king who sent the embassy to China was a king of the ancient Tripura dynasty and this kingdom in the Kapili Valley lasted till at least the 5th century A. D.<sup>11</sup> In this connection it may be noted that even as late as in the middle of the 14th Century A. D., Mahamanikya, great grandson of Ratnamanikya patronised Assamese poet Madhava Kandali to compose the Ramayana in Assamese.<sup>12</sup>

Megasthenes (B. C. 302-298) refers to the Macco-Calinga or the Magh tribes of Tripura.<sup>13</sup> It is mentioned in the Periplus that "in Chryse there is said to be a gold-mine and a gold coin called Kaltis. Immediately after leaving the Ganges, there is an island in the Ocean called Chryse which lies directly under the rising sun and at the extremity of the world towards the east. This island produces the finest tortoise shell that is found throughout the Erythrean Sea"<sup>14</sup> Schoff identifies Chryse with the land of Tripura in the South-west of Assam.<sup>15</sup> Taylor also suggests that the place of gold was somewhere in Tripura.<sup>16</sup> This is also confirmed by Tavernier, who points out that gold was sent overland to China and the merchants of Tripura, trading in Deccan, took back valuable commodities.<sup>17</sup>

Ptolemy in the first half of the 2nd century A. D. refers to Kirrhadia (Kirata) people, who according to Mc Crindle are the people on the foot of the Garo, Khasi and Tripura hills.<sup>18</sup> Gerini also identifies Airrhadai of Ptolenny with Tripura.<sup>19</sup> Yule locates Trilingon or Triglyton of Ptolemy

within the ancient Kingdom of Tripura.<sup>20</sup> Gerini also identifies Pentapolis of Ptolemy to be within Tripura.<sup>21</sup>

There is also a good deal of information about Tripura in the Shan Chronicles. It is mentioned in one of the Shan Chronicles available to Captain R. B. Pemberton that in 777 A. D. the Pong king Margnow died, leaving two sons, called Sookampha and Samlongpha of whom the eldest Sookampha succeeded to the throne. Samlangpha was despatched by Sookampha at the head of a powerful force to subdue first the principality of Bhamo in the east. Next he conquered western country of the Basa (Banga) king, evidently Cachar. Next he conquered Tripura. From Tripura he marched across the hills and descended into the Manipur Valley near Moirang, on the western bank of the Logtak Lake.<sup>22</sup>

There are also available a few epigraphic sources for the early history of Tripura. The Kapili valley formed the northern division of Tripura kingdom. This valley in the Nowgong district of Assam is still known as Davaka. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta of the 4th Century A. D. has mentioned this Davaka in the northern part of ancient Tripura kingdom. The kingdom of Davaka is also identified with Dacca region near ancient kingdom of Tripura.<sup>23</sup> According to R. G. Basak, Samatata stood for nearly the whole of the Delta of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra including parts of the districts of Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, eastern part of Dacca and Tripura.<sup>24</sup>

S. K. Chatterjee testifies the beginning of the Tripura Era as 590 A. D. by showing the use of the Tripura Era 1336 (= 1926) by the Tripura Government in the present century in connection with publication of Rajamala in three volumes.<sup>25</sup>

According to R. M. Nath, the Tripura Era is started from the year 590 A. D., the date of accession of Tripura king Jujaru pha, who conquered the Lika king of the hilly tract of Chittagong and established his head-quarters at Visalgarh in the hilly Tripura area.<sup>16</sup>

A Copper Plate inscription dated 641 A. D. issued by the Tripura King Adi Duarmapha alias Dungur-Pha donated the whole of Panchakhanda (within Sylhet) to certain Brahmanas from Mithila. The inscription is quoted below :

*"Tripura parvatadhisa Sri Sriyuktadidharmapha  
Samajna datta Patrancha Maithesesu tapasvisu  
makarendu rabai Suklapaksha panchadasodine*

*Tripuro Chandra-banabde pradatta datta-patrika*"

(Vaidik Samvadini quoted in the Srihatter Itivritta by A. C. Choudhury.)

A Copper Plate found in Tripura dated 644 A. D. throws light on the contemporary Geography of Tripura. It is issued in connection of a gift of land to a Brahmana by a king named Loke-Nath in the Joy-Tunga Province. Another Copper plate recently discovered in the Kalyan village of Tripura mentions a royal family—Shreedharna Rat, Jiva-dharna Rat, Baladharana Rat having a kind of autonomous power in a portion of Samatata region.<sup>27</sup> The Bhatara Copper Plate throws light on the Tripura-Sylhet relations.<sup>28</sup>

The archaeological (monumental) remains of ancient period of the history of Tripura so far recovered from the Tripura region include stone, metal and terracotta sculptures. The notable sites in this connection are Pilak in Belonia, Udayapura in South Tripura and Unokoti in the North. A number of Black-stone sculptures of 11th and 12th centuries of East Indian school of medieval art have been recovered from Udayapura (55 Km. south-east of Agartala). At Unokoti, a vertical rock cliff extending over a mile is witnessed with numerous massive rock-cut sculptures. Besides these rock-cut sculptures, the remains at Unokoti consist of a number of sand stone sculptures, stone pavements, debris of bricks and stones, and brick basement of temples. There is also a stupa portrayed on the black-slabs of Buddhist sculptures and some terracotta sealing recovered from Pilak. The scholars in the field are of opinion that this type of stupa sculptures went to Burma from Bengal through the passes of Tripura sometime in the 8th-9th century A. D.<sup>19</sup>

Thus in the twilight of our present age a great responsibility rests upon our historians and archaeologists who can unfold many valuable sources of the early history of Tripura for the inspiration of young generation. The discussion hitherto made, is no doubt incomplete, nevertheless it would provide a clear back-ground for the preparation of a comprehensive history of the ancient land of Tripura. The writing of such a history has now become a desideratum simply on the ground that Tripura is an economically backward State and situated in an area of peculiar strategic position.

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