

Tripura Rajya Jana Siksha Samiti—its origin and activities

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The Tripura Rajya Jana Siksha Samiti was established on 11 pous, 1335 T.E. corresponding to 27 December, 1945 A.D. A great desire on the part of the people of Tripura to be educated was the force behind its establishment. The then newly educated youths of Tripura realised that in order to end the social injustices and superstitions the people's consciousness was first of all needed. But this awareness was impossible without education. Considered in this light, the Jana Siksha Movement of Tripura was nothing but a challenge against monarchy or feudalism²

A few factors were responsible for the birth of this organisation. The situations arising out of the Second World War and the age-old socio-economic-Political anomalies necessitated the birth of the Jana Siksha Samiti. Firstly, the repercussions of the great War on the State constituted a special and noticeable feature. With the advent of Japan in the arena, about the close of 1941, the European War turned into a world conflagration, the war-front came to the very gates of Tripura. The dangers were unfortunately accentuated for a time by hostile forces of nature at work— with unsettled weather conditions, heavy floods, landslides and loss of crops, the hill sections³ in particular being practically in the throes of famine³. The Administration Report⁴ further narrates the complex situation on of the state:

Acute scarcity verging on famine prevailed for a time in the neighbouring provinces, the reactions of which was keenly felt in the state, and an inrush of distressed people that followed gave rise to grave problems. Prices of rice shot up to even Rs.50/-.

The rulers of the Native States were very loyal to their British connection. Like other Indian rulers, the kings of Tripura placed the entire resources of the state at the disposal of the British Crown during the two World Wars. The amount of donation made

by Tripura to the various war funds in the Second World War: was very big indeed⁵. For raising these funds, the people were exploited. Servitude, despotism and oppression exceeded description in Tripura.

Secondly, the state represented the most backward agrarian economy of a feudal type. The system of what was known as Veth and Begar (meaning forced labour) prevailed in almost all the states of India⁶. Tripura was no exception. Here all classes of labourers, workmen and artisans were compelled to work for the princes and their officials, in many cases the only remuneration being the barest necessary of food. A few important feudal taxes can be mentioned here. They were Taitung (by which the hill people were compelled to carry luggage of the officials on tour), Kaziana (a communal tax collected from the Muslim subjects upon the marriage of their daughters), Ghar Chukti (family tax on hill people), Ghasuri (grazing tax) etc.

Thirdly, during the Second World War, the Reangs, the most primitive tribes of Tripura, under Ratanmani Noatia rose in revolt against the increased oppressions of the Chowdhuries and the king's effort to recruit military personnel from the Reang youths⁸. The rebellion was suppressed by the king in brutal manner and used the other tribal communities against the famine-stricken Reang rebels. Thus the Reang rebellion like all other India rebellions ended in failure. But this peasant struggle had not been in vain. It had awoken the tribal people from their age-long lethargy and slumber. The final struggle was in front.

Finally, the sudden influx of refugees in Tripura from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as a result of serious communal disturbances in Dacca in 1942 and Noakhali and Comilla districts in 1946 created added problems for Tripura.

Under this background, the educated young people of Tripura realised that in order to be organised against the feudal oppressions the blind loyalty of the tribal people for the king was to be destroyed. The destruction of this loyalty was possible only through the spread of education. They further realised that illiteracy was the prime pillar of feudal oppression. This realisation was at the root of the Jana Siksha Samiti's rise and

a far-reaching outlook was very much active there.

The light of education in Tripura was in a very bad shape prior to Jana Siksha Samiti's coming into existence. It is revealed from the Census Biharani of Tripura, 1930 A.D. that among the 10,861 literate people 10,094 and 767 were male and female respectively. Per thousand of the total population, 28 were literate and only 49 and 4 among the male and female respectively could read and write. But during the census of 1920 A.D. it was found that 82 or total 21,564 were literate per thousand. In comparison with the previous census the member of literacy in the present was fixed at half. The reason for this variation was probably due to the enumerator's mistake in understanding. However, it is mentioned in the fore-gone pages of the Biharani that the growth of population was 25% in 1930 in comparison with the year 1920¹⁰. The Administration Report for the years 1937-1940 A.D. also gives a gloomy picture of the plight of education in Tripura. The total number of schools during these years was 138,132, and 141 with an aggregate numerical strength of 7176,7786, 8955 respectively. Besides, there were private schools numbering 31,33 and 33. There were 6 permanently affiliated High Schools and 1 branch for boys. The total number of pupils in¹¹ these institutions was 1832, 1923 and 1947 respectively.

The educated youths of Tripura made an abrupt change in the education system. They began to establish primary schools in villages and hilly areas. Under the guidances of Sri Biren Datta primary schools were established at Jampuijala, Takarjala, Padmanagar, Rangapaniya, Ramchandraghat (Bartali), Athaimura, Iswar Sardarpara, Nugrai Kabra Para, Vidyamohan Hazari, Behela Bari, Gopalnagar, Radhanagar, Janme-joynagar, Champaknagar, Akhaliyachera and in many other places also. Some of them had later grown¹³ up. With the appointment of Major D.A.W. Brown¹² as Education Minister of Tripura in 1945, the activities of the Jana Siksha Samiti were accelerated. Mr. Brown encouraged the members of the Samiti to start schools of Primary education all over Tripura. A list of 450 school was placed before the Maharaja Bir Bikram Bahadur for grant. The Maharaja accorded grant for the schools. Supervisory divisions were created, Sadar-South, Udaipur and Belonia were put under the charge of Sri Agnore

Deb Barma, Amarpur and Sabroom were under the charge Sri Sudhanya Deb Barma and Hemanta Deb Barma. Sadar North and Khowai were put under the charge of late Hemanta Deb Barma and Sri Dasarath Deb Barma respectively¹⁴

Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya was not against the setting up of these schools. But he was not perhaps in favour of their enormous increase. This may be due to two reasons: Firstly, the financial liability as the king had to pay a handsome amount to the war fund of the British Government. Secondly, the feudal nature of the king. Mass education might change the loyalty of the people. However, he had to accord grant to the majority of the Schools. There was a fear among the Thankurs (nobility and relatives of the king) and the Maharaja on the ground that the Jana Siksha movement might not be restricted for the movement of education alone. The Thakurs set up a Seva Samiti to check the influence of the Jana Siksha Samiti and described the latter as a 'Samiti of a few children! Effort was also made to attract the members of the Jana Siksha Samiti towards the Seva Samiti. But the growth of this Seva Samiti was intolerable to the Maharaja as it might create future troubles for capture of power. He himself then established the Tripura Sangha. The Sangha could not make much head among the people¹⁵.

The Jana Siksha Samiti did not remain an organisation only for the spread of education among the backward and hill peoples of Tripura. In a leaflet of 1946 it declared its aim as two: They were the organisation of movements against illiteracy and poverty. Other socio-economic issues came gradually to the forefront. With the withdrawal of ban in 1946 from the political parties, the Samiti found the field clear for starting those other movements. But the movement was not merely a movement for education or for social reforms only. The aim of it though hidden was to transform Tripura into a place of mass movement for socio-economic justice. The members were already influenced by the scientific philosophy of Marx and hence the support of the communists behind its Movement greatly concerned the king.¹⁶ Many of the laterday communist leaders were also originally the members of this Samiti¹⁷. Thus the Jana Siksha movement laid the foundation stone of later

unprecedented mass movement of Tripura. Immediately after this, people's struggle to capture political power began to flow in a definite channel. Later the establishment of the Tripura Jatiya Mukti Parishad, the Tripura Ganamukti Parishad, the Tripura Upajati Ganamukti Parishad, and finally the Communist party as a gradual process arose out of the movements started by the Jana Siksha Samiti.

Notes and References

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