

## Dismissal of Dewan Nilmani Das - A Case Study

S. K. Brahma

In this small article an attempt has been made based on the official documents, both published and unpublished, to enumerate the role of the *Thakurs* in the Court of Birchandra Manikya, Maharaja of Tripura (A.D. 1862-'96). The *Thakurs*, members of the royal family, took a decisive role in formulating the State policy. Nilmani Das, Dewan of Birchandra Manikya, lost his post as a result of the conspiracy of the *Thakurs*.

Guru Bipin Behari Goswami, Minister of Ishwan Chandra Manikya (A.D. 1849-'62), tried to curtail the financial and political power of the *Takurs*.<sup>1</sup> But taking the opportunity of the disputed succession of Birchandra Manikya, the *Thakurs* exerted pressure on the King and refused to give evidences in his favour if the Guru was not arrested. To get rid of the position Bir Chandra placed him in Confinement on the ground of supposed misappropriation of fund.<sup>2</sup> With the consent of the *Thakurs* he appointed Braja Mohan Thakur to look after the management of the State and Zamindari.<sup>3</sup> Thus, after temporary eclipse of power, the ascendancy of the *Thakurs* had been restored in the Court of Birchandra Manikya. Regarding the state of affairs, Magistrate of Comilla reported, "The Raja is utterly helpless to control his immediate dependents or defend himself in the event of a combined revolt".<sup>4</sup>

### Appointment of Nilmani Das

British Govt. had decided to appoint Political Agent in Tripura and Mr Power became the first Political Agent in 1871. To deal with the *Kukis*, the establishment of a strong internal administration was felt necessary. The financial condition of the State was also to be improved.<sup>5</sup> So with the advice of the Agent,<sup>6</sup> the service of Nilmani Das, Sub-Registrar at Comilla (an adjoining district of British India) was transferred from the Govt. of Bengal to that of the Raja of Tripura.<sup>7</sup>

Nilmani Das introduced excise duty, stamp duty, criminal and civil procedure and certain other important reforms. Due

to his efficient administration the revenue of the State and Zamindari had also been increased.

### **Conspiracy against Nilmani Das**

But the Thakurs, who had lost their position in the court, hatched a conspiracy against him, headed by Thakur Dinabandhu Deb, who had lost the Dewanship (called in his case Managership), after the appointment of Dewan Nilmani Das.

In the winter of 1876 the Raja of Tripura lodged a complaint to the Agent against his Dewan. But strangely enough in spite of the request of the Agent, the Raja was not prepared to explain the grounds of his dissatisfaction with his Dewan.<sup>8</sup> Coxhead, Agent in Tripura, informed the matter to Cramford, Under Secretary to Bengal Government.<sup>9</sup> He took the matter seriously and had informed the Agent that the Raja should be 'recommanded at once to suspend the Dewan pending the enquiries to be instituted.'<sup>10</sup> The copy of this letter was forwarded to the Raja by the Agent.<sup>11</sup> The Raja informed the Agent that the Dewan had been suspended and directed to give charges of his duties to Thakur Dinabandhu Deb.<sup>12</sup> The Agent immediately wrote a letter to the Raja seeking an interview with him for a discussion regarding the matter.<sup>13</sup> But neither the Raja nor the Nazir (Dinabandhu Deb) had any intention to discuss the matter with him.<sup>14</sup>

However, a meeting took place between the Raja and the Agent and it was decided that the Agent would make an investigation on the Dewan's 'believed mal-administration'. But within a few hours of the decision, the Raja had informed the Agent that Thakur Dinabandhu Deb had been authorised by him to enquire into the charges against the Dewan.<sup>15</sup> This letter of the Raja was a great surprise to the Agent. So he had refused to render any assistance regarding the enquiry.<sup>16</sup> Under such circumstances, the Raja had no other alternative but to agree with his earlier proposal.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, from the above correspondences between the Raja and the Agent it is clear that the Raja had made an alliance with Thakur Dinabandhu Deb, the head of the Thakurs.

### **Proceedings against Nilmani Das**

On the appointed day, the Agent with the help of Nazir, Dinabandhu Deb, as his assistant had conducted the charges against the Dewan. Twelve charges were brought against him by the Nazir including some principal financial charges. But the majority of them were rejected by the Agent on the ground that the

Dewan had acted for the interest of the State.<sup>18</sup>

He found that three charges against the Dewan were justified. But after a careful scrutiny of the diary of the Dewan, and some unpublished documents, scholars may reach to the conclusion that the findings of the Agent were not correct. As the diary and other important documents, were written in Bengali, the Agent was unable to understand them.

One of the enquirers into the charges against the Dewan, was in fact one of his accused (Nazir Dinabandhu Deb), who was incapable of exercising that impartiality and independence of judgement. Thus, the manner in which the enquiry was held and conclusion arrived at, could leave no doubt that the enquiry had been held with the only object of causing his dismissal.

The Agent informed the Raja regarding the result of his enquiry.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Secretary to Bengal Govt. informed the Agent that the Dewan should be immediately removed from his present service as "The Govt. has lost confidence in the Dewan".<sup>20</sup> Nilmani's appeal to the Govt. of Bengal was rejected.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Nilmani Das, regarding whose character, honesty and efficiency all the Political Agents of the State and the Raja himself spoke highly became a victim of the Court intrigue. The Thakurs did not hesitate to oust a person, however honest he might be, if he was opposed to their interests.

### Conclusion

After the removal of Nilmani Das, Thakur Dinabandhu Deb and other Thakurs, took possession of large Zamindari and Talukdari in addition to their high offices.<sup>22</sup> Within a very short period, some of the Thakurs became the wealthiest persons in Tripura by taking ijara (lease) of certain Taluks and 'Bankar Mahal' (Forest revenue) at a very low rental. The Thakurs, thus deprived the State from a considerable amount of revenue.

Dismissal of Dewan Nilmani Das throws some light on the contemporary Court politics of Tripura. It shows the role of the Thakurs in the Court of Birchandra Manikya and his attitude towards them. The Thakurs, as a privileged class, offered "a continual hindrance to the social and administrative improvement".<sup>23</sup>

### Notes and References

\* The P. Agent found the following charges against the Dewan justified.

- (a) The Dewan falsely represented that he had paid the revenue from the Zamindari Collection.

- (b) He extorted from the Raja a written promise for the payment of a sum of Rs. 5000.
- (c) He acted improperly by sending an application of the treasurer for a present on account of his son's Upanayan to the Raja.
1. Bengal Judicial Progs (BJP), dated 12th June, 1863, No. 48.
  2. K.C. Sinha, *Rajamala*, P-164, 1984, Agartala. 3. Ibid, p. 171.
  4. B. J. P. dated 25th Dec. 1871, No. 351.
  5. Letter, Commissioner of Chittagong Division to the Raja of Tripura, (Unpub) dated 10th June, 1871, No. 1121.
  6. Letter P. Agent to the Ben. Govt. dated 24th May, 1873, No.60 (Unpub) vide File 'Appointment and Dismissal of Dewan Nilmani Das' No.  $\frac{6-62}{3-24}$  (Poli. Dept.) Secretariat Archives, Agartala.
  7. B. J. P. dated 11th June, 1873. No. 2099
  8. Letter, P. Agent to the Raja dated 12th Dec., 1876 No. 320 (Unpub) vide File, Dismissal of Dewan, Op. cit.
  9. Letter, P. Agent to the Under Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, dated 15th January, 1877, No. 366 (Unpub) vide File, 'Dismissal of Dewan', Op. cit.,.
  10. Letter, Under Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal to Political Agent dated 29th January, 1877. No. 1132, Dismissal of Dewan, Op. cit.,.
  11. Letter, P. Agent to the Raja dated 1st Feb. 1877. No. 392 (Unpub). File. op. cit.
  12. Letter, Raja to the P. Agent, dated 2nd Feb. 1877. No. 396 (Unpub) vide File, op. cit.
  13. Letter, P. Agent to the Raja, dated 4th Feb, 1877. No. 404 (Unpub) vide File, op. cit. 14. Ibid.
  15. Letter, Raja to the P. Agent dated 5th Feb. 1877, No. 257 (Unpub) vide File, op. cit.
  16. Letter, P. Agent to the Raja, dated 6th Feb, 1877, No. 406 (Unpub) vide File, op. cit.
  17. Letter, Raja to the P. Agent, dated 6th Feb. 1877, No. Nil (Unpublished) vide File, op. cit.
  18. Proceedings against Nilmani Das, (Unpub) vide File, op. cit.
  19. Letter, P. Agent to the Raja (Confidential), dated 17th Feb, 1877, No. 427 (Unpub) File op. cit.
  20. Letter, Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal to the P. Agent dated 2nd March, 1877. No. 883 (Unpub) vide File, op. cit.
  21. Appeal of the Dewan to the Govt. of Bengal dated 7th April, 1877(Unpublished) vide File, op. cit. 22. *Rajmala*, op.cit., p.180.
  23. Administration Report of the P. Agent of Hill Tripura 1875-'76 A. D. p. 8.