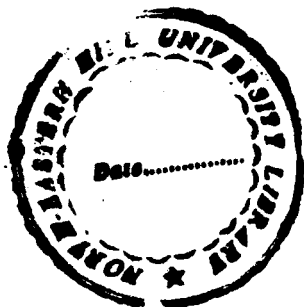


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**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

**SIXTH SESSION
AGARTALA : 1985**

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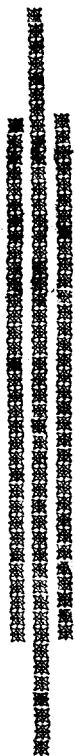
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Preface

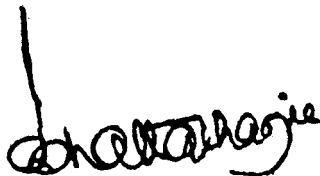
The Sixth Annual Session of the North East India History Association held at the Calcutta University Post-Graduate Centre, Agartala on October 3-5, 1985 was one of our most colourful academic meets in the region, attended by the largest number of delegates. Professor H. L. Gupta, formerly Head of the Department of History, Saugar University presided over the Session, which was inaugurated by Sri Nripen Chakravarty, Chief Minister of Tripura and graced by Dr. B. D. Sharma, Vice-Chancellor, North-Eastern Hill University as the Guest of Honour. Shri Dasarath Deb, Deputy Chief Minister of Tripura also addressed the delegates. Our colleagues, Professor J. B. Ganguly, Director, CUPG Centre, and Dr. Mahadev Chakravarti, Reader & Head, Department of Modern History at the Centre did us great honour as Chairman of the Reception Committee and the Local Secretary of the Session respectively.

We are grateful to the Calcutta University Post-Graduate Centre, Agartala for hosting the Session and warm hospitality offered to the delegates. The administration, members of the teaching faculties and the students' community in the Centre were all involved in the Session. The Centre received generous support from the Government of Tripura. The Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and their cabinet colleagues generously spared time from their schedules to be with the delegates and participate in academic discussions. They entertained the delegates and offered as gifts some publications on Tripura and excellent pieces of indigenous handicrafts as token of love and affection of the people of the State. The Directorate of Information and Culture, Government of Tripura, organised colourful programmes depicting the rich cultural heritage of Tripura. Study tours were organised to the places of historical importance. On the whole, the delegates shall cherish the fond memory of the Session for a long time.

The academic standard of the Session was also very high. We have maintained our tradition of steady growth in membership pattern and the number of papers presented and discussed. Tripura is one of such areas in our region where we do not have enough historical studies. In Agartala Session, we indeed achieved a major breakthrough. Majority of the papers presented there were on Tripura. These shall certainly generate further research. The volume is a collection of sixty two papers, empirical as well as

analytical and interpretative. Some of the papers, particularly by the colleagues in other disciplines, have added to the merit of the volume by fitting well in our scheme of recording the living history.

I am personally thankful to my colleagues Dr. J. P. Singh, Dr. M. S. Sangma, Dr. O. P. Kejariwal and Dr. Gautam Sengupta for the ready help in editing and publishing the volume.



Shillong
The 22 August 1986

(J. B. Bhattacharjee)
General Secretary
North East India History Association

Contents

	Page
1. Presidential Address — <i>H. L. Gupta</i>	1
2. Researches into the Origins, Antiquity, Nature and Functions of the Pre-Historic Meghalithic Cultures of the Hill People of North East India — <i>G. P. Singh</i>	23
3. Terra Cotta -In Bengal and Tripura — <i>Sumangal Sen</i>	36
4. Early Mediaeval Sculptures of Tripura : Some Observations — <i>Gautam Sengupta</i>	41
5. Pilak Civilization of Tripura — <i>Ashis Kumar Baidya</i>	48
6. Tribal Elements in the Coinage of Tripura — <i>Jai Prakash Singh</i>	51
7. A Unique Early Coin of the Manikya Dynasty of Tripura — <i>Jahar Acharjee</i>	56
8. Tripura in the Pre-Manikya Period — <i>Ramanimohan Sarma</i>	59
9. Sankritic Culture in Tripura — <i>Rabindranath Das Shastri</i>	69
10. The Land System of Govinda Manikya as reflected in the Land Grants — <i>D. N. Goswami</i>	77
11. The Date of the Sadiya Stone Pillar Inscription — <i>J. N. Phukan</i>	85
12. Cursory Glance on the Early Historical Perspectives of Tripura — <i>N. N. Acharyya</i>	91
13. The Religious History of the Tipras on the Background of Karchipuja — <i>Priyabrata Bhattacharjee</i>	99
14. Religion and Culture : The Khasi-Jaintia Experience — <i>Soumen Sen</i>	107
15. The Khasi System of Calculating Time — <i>M. P. Rina Lyngdoh</i>	115

16. Myth and Reality : A Study of the Development of Kingship in Early Assam	— <i>Monoranjan Dutta</i>	126
17. Myths, Rituals and Traditions : Some Aspects in State Formation in the Tai-Ahom State	— <i>R. Buragohain</i>	137
18. The Economic Content of the State Formation Process in Medieval Tripura	— <i>J. B. Ganguly</i>	146
19. Local Influence upon the Ahoms	— <i>Debasis Sen</i>	160
20. The Nature of the Ahom-Kachari Relations	— <i>I. S. Mumtaza Khatun</i>	163
21. Operations of Hussain Shah against Tripura- Its Nature	— <i>Debabrata Goswami</i>	170
22. Studies on the Writings on the History of Medieval North East India : Some Comments	— <i>R. L. Hungloo</i>	175
23. Matibar Barsenapati - An Assessment	— <i>S. Dutta</i>	183
24. The Role of the Raja of Tripura and the English in capturing the Mizo Chief Lalchukla	— <i>Suhas Chatterjee</i>	197
25. The Agony of "Charing Raja" Kandarpeswar Singha	— <i>S. K. Barpujari</i>	201
26. The Nature of British objection to the Trade Monopoly of the Raja of Cachar (1827-1830)	— <i>J. B. Bhattacharjee</i>	206
27. Cherrapunji Versus Darjeeling : The Search for a Sanatorium for the Lower Province	— <i>David R. Syiemlieh</i>	219
28. An Aspect of North East Frontier Policy of the Raj : an Overview	— <i>B. Datta Ray</i>	226
29. Dupleix's Trade Mission to Assam 1738-40	— <i>Amalendu Guha</i>	231
30. Coming of Tea in the Brahmaputra Valley : Change in Pattern of Trade	— <i>Keya Dasgupta</i>	239
31. Lushai Risings, 1890-95	— <i>Larimawia</i>	255

32. **The History of Vanga-loka in Tripura** 261
 — *N. C. Nath* 261
33. **Tripura : Maharaja and His Subjects** 265
 — *Banikantha Bhattacharyya* 265
34. **The British Policy and the Indian Princes** 271
 — *Dipak kumar Chaudhuri* 271
35. **The Status of Princely Tripura during British Rule
 in India** 285
 — *Bijan Mohanta* 285
36. **Dismissal of Dewan Nilmani Das -A Case Study** 295
 — *S. K. Brahma* 295
37. **Settlement on Land of the Silchar Tahsil under Colo-
 nial regime** 299
 — *Ratna Dey* 299
38. **Beginning of Silchar Municipality** 305
 — *Sujit K. Ghosh* 305
39. **Social Reaction to Bania Exploitation : A Study of
 Ideological Revolt of the Assamese against Mer-
 chants and Usurers as found in a Nineteenth
 Century Poetry Collection** 311
 — *Sajal Nag* 311
40. **The Jorhat Sorbojonik Sobha : Its Role in Socio-
 Political Awakening of Assam** 316
 — *Shrutidev Goswami* 316
41. **Sonaram R. Sangma : A Study of his Life and
 Works as a Garo Nationalist** 323
 — *M. S. Sangma* 323
42. **Despatch of 1854 and Mass Education in Assam
 during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century** 335
 — *Archana Chakravarty* 335
43. **Development of Bengali News papers in Tripura** 341
 — *Rama Prasad Datta* 341
44. **Brahma Religion and Social Change among the Boros** 347
 — *R. N. Mosahary* 347
45. **Role of the Left Intellectuals : A Survey of British
 Reaction, 1936-37** 353
 — *Subhas Saha* 353
46. **Communist Activities in Tripura : 1939-42** 363
 — *Mahadev Chakravarti* 363
47. **Terrorist Activities in Tripura (1930-33)** 371
 — *Ranjit Kumar De* 371

48. Genesis of Labour Movement Among the Non-Plantation Workers and Wage-Earners in Assam — <i>Dipankar Banerjee</i>	383
49. The Merger of Manipur into India — <i>N. Joykumar Singh</i>	393
50. Accession of Manipur to the Federation : Issues at stake — <i>Bimal J. Dev & Dilip K. Lahiri</i>	407
51. The Struggle for Responsible Government in Tripura (1947-1956) — <i>Benimadhab Majumdar</i>	417
52. Students' Movements in Tripura (1950-70) — <i>Himansu Pal</i>	425
53. Young Mizo Association : Its history, features, some aspects and its role in transforming Mizo Society — <i>Sangkima</i>	433
54. Mizo Problems leading to Insurgency — <i>J. V. Hluna</i>	442
55. Historical Survey of Tribal Uprisings in Tripura — <i>Suchintya Bhattacharya</i>	450
56. Mahishya Das of Cachar and their Social Background — <i>Nitish Ranjan Laskar</i>	454
57. Administrative System of the Garos of Tripura — <i>Sudhanshu Bikash Saha</i>	463
58. Immigrant Tribes in Tripura : A Few Observations — <i>O. S. Adhikari</i>	469
59. The Bishnupriya Manipuris in Tripura : Past and Present — <i>Rabindra Sinha</i>	478
60. Status and Education of Women in Tripura — <i>Binapani Majumdar</i>	482
61. Nongtalang Doloiship : A Socio-Political Study of an Administrative Unit in Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya — <i>L. S. Gassah</i>	492
62. Agriculture Potential in the North East — <i>M. C. Pandey</i>	501
Appendices	
A. Minutes of the Executive Committee	517
B. Minutes of the Annual Business Meeting	519
C. General Secretary's Report	523
D. Treasurers' Report	526
E. Audit Report	528
F. Members of the Sixth Session	530

The Status of Princely Tripura during British Rule in India

Bijan Mohanta

Tripura, had a feudal antiquity of long years. According to *Rajmala*¹, about one hundred fifty Tribal Kings had ruled Tripura for an uninterrupted period of thirteen hundred years since the legendary period. The princely Tripura entered into a new era in 1765 when the King of Tripura tendered his allegiance to the East India Company. The Maharajas of Tripura claimed that they were independent. To all intents and purposes, the princely Tripura until its merger with the Union of India, was referred to as an 'Independent' territory and the emblematic seal of 'Independent Tripura' was used on the official papers.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how far were the Kings of Tripura 'Independent' and what was the nature of the 'Independence' of princely Tripura during the British rule in India.

Metamorphosis of Tripura Kingdom

The territorial pattern of the principality of Tripura (Tripura was then spelt as Tippera) in the hoary past is now embeded in obscurity. But from the available records it is known that the principality of Tripura once covered a vast territory stretching from Sylhet and Cachar on the north to Chittagong on the south and to the east it merged into the hills inhabited by the tribesmen, now called the Mizos.² Formerly, the 'Karimgunge subdivision also seemed to have been included in the Tripura Kingdom'³. The 'Lushai Country', east of Tripura according to Pemberton's report, was also under the control of the rulers of Tripura.⁴

Steward wrote that 'The province of Tippera, which from time immemorial had been independent kingdom became annexed to the Mughal empire,⁵ after the Mughal invasion of Tripura. The situation as it prevailed in 'Tippera' during the Mughal period formed a legacy for the Britishers. Acting upon the Mughal arrangements, the British rulers attached to the British territory only the plain portion of 'Tippera' known as Chakla-Roshnabad, and confirmed therein only the Zamindari right of the king of Tippera.

But on the east, the hilly tracts inhabited by different tribes was considered by the Company as something of different entity. We came to know that the Commissioner of Chittagong Division once suggested to Lord Auckland that the hilly tracts should also be annexed to the British territory ; but it was not approved of considering the expenses involved in its administration. 'The Company sought rupees, and not elephants and so the hills were left to their Native rulers'⁶. Thus, the hills became 'Independent Tippera' and the King who was an ordinary Zamindar on the plains, "reigns as independent prince over 3,000 sq. miles of upland, and was for many years a more absolute monarch than Scindia or Puttiala, . . ."⁷

But the rulers of Tripura failed to protect their territory from the British encroachments. In 1822, while demarcating the boundary between "Hill Tippera" and the British District of Sylhet, Lt. Fisher seized away a large portion of land from 'Hill Tippera'. In the words of Sandys, it was an act of 'robbery of territory on the Tripura-Sylhet border' committed by the Company.⁸

The King of Tripura was deprived of yet another tract of 850 sq. miles in the east after the British had undertaken the Lushai expedition of 1871-72. In the name of security of British India, the British authority unilaterally drew in 1874 the Tripura's eastern boundary line with British India. The King repeatedly requested for reconsideration of the boundary issue. But in 1897, the King was finally told by the Chief Commissioner of Assam that the question of the eastern boundary line was an issue settled long before.⁹

It needs be mentioned here that prior to 1866, the princely state was referred to as 'Independent Tippera'. But thereafter it was not acceptable to the Imperial Government. Since 1866, the appellation 'Hill Tipprea' in lieu of 'Independent Tippera' was accepted by the Government of India as per suggestion of the Lt. Governor of Bengal who viewed that 'this territory though not subject to the jurisdiction of our Courts is not politically - independent'.¹⁰ 'Hill Tippera' again came to be known as 'Tripura' since 1920, on the basis of a representation from the State Durbar.¹¹

Thus, princely Tripura emerged into an administrative unit which took a final shape in its territorial pattern and title at the hands of the British rulers.

British Paramountcy and the King of Tripura

Although the British imperialism had advanced in India with

rapid strides since the time of Lord Wellesley, and an astounding growth of the British Empire at the cost of many an Indian state was marked during the Governor-Generalship of Lord Dalhousie, yet no clear record exists to testify whether the King of Tripura was within the purview of either the Subsidiary Alliance system of Lord Wellesley or the Doctrine of Lapse of Lord Dalhousie.

We come to learn from official documents that 'The British Government has no treaty with the state (Tripura), nor does it receive any tribute.'¹² The King of Tripura enjoyed a dual entity—one as a subject and a Zamindar of the British Government, the other as an 'Independent ruler of 'Hill Tippera'. As the succession to the throne of 'Hill Tippera' automatically bestowed upon one the right to the Zamindari of the Chakla-Roshnabad, so the King was, in fact, 'disposed to receive investiture and do homage at one and the same time, and in one or both capacities to the ruling and Paramount Government''.¹³

Right from the later part of 18th Century, the British Government realized 'nazarana' (tribute) on every succession to the throne in exchange of which the new ruler was recognised by the British Government as the King of 'Hill Tippera'. Hunter wrote : 'Formerly a nazarana of 125 gold mohurs was paid at the ceremony of installation ; but at present the nazarana is fixed at half a year's revenue of the state in the case of direct succession, and a whole year's revenue in the case of indirect succession'.¹⁴ It needs be mentioned here that Birchandra Manikya received the title 'Maharaja' in 1877 after paying 125 gold mohurs to the British authority as nazarana. However, his predecessors had to pay only 111 gold mohurs.

Although the King of Tripura was under obligation to pay nazarana, Tripura differed from other Native states of India and from those which were tributaries. Hunter wrote : 'Until recently at least the Rajas of hill Tippera enjoyed a greater share of independence than the Chiefs of most other Native states of similar description'.¹⁵ The independent status of the King of 'Hill Tippera' was initially accepted by the British rulers. In 1838, in a communication of the Bengal Government's decision to the Commissioner of Chittagong Division, it was stated : "The Raja has an independent hill territory ; that your proposition for its resumption are totally inadmissible".¹⁶ Thus, in the official correspondences of the East India Company, the Kingdom of Tripura was referred to as an Independent State.

But the political events took rapid strides after the Great Re-

volt of 1857 and specially after the transfer of Government from the Company to the Crown. The new era ushered in a new British policy for the Princely States. Although the new policy was heralded by a definite pledge in Queen Victoria's Proclamation in 1858 that 'we desire no extension of our present territorial possessions', yet, judging from the post-Proclamation events, the new policy, it seemed, was reoriented to 'punish the ruler for misgovernment and, if necessary, to depose him, but not to annex the state for his misdeeds'.

Even after the assumption of the Indian Government by the Crown, the Indian states were 'recognised as independent sovereign states and regarded as allies of the British Government rather than their subjects'. It will not be besides the mark to note that on March 15, 1869, a verdict of the Privy Council of Queen Victoria referred to the King of 'Tippera' as an 'Independent' ruler in relation to his "Hill Tippera".¹⁷ But the Act of 1876 by which Victoria assumed the title of 'Empress of India', entirely changed this aspect and made the Sovereign of England the Suzerain of Indian states as well. In 1884, the Government of India said : "The succession to the native states is invalid until it receives in some form the sanction of the British authority." Reiterating it the Secretary of State for India held in 1891 : "Every succession must be recognised by the British Government and no succession is valid until recognition has been given."¹⁸ Thus, on the pretext of ensuring good government, the theory of Paramountcy over the Indian states justified the right of the British Government to interfere in the internal affairs of the states at any time.

In Tripura, the absence of any fixed rule of succession to the throne already gave way to the British authority to interfere in the Palace politics. Disturbances in the State by the 'Kukis' at the time almost of every succession to the throne was a regular occurrence. It happened quite so by the intrigue of the disappointed aspirant for the throne, at whose interest the 'Kukis' held the peace and order in the state to ransom. In such a state of anarchic situation the British authority took the occasion to decide the right of succession to the throne - the practice which at its inception, it may be said, had already sold out the so-called independence of the rulers of Tripura to the Britishers. Ultimately, the Viceroy granted a Sanad on June 21, 1904 to Radhakishore Manikya 'settling the question of succession to the state and its appurtenances'.¹⁹

Again, the situation arising out of Tribal Rebellions,²⁰ besides the raids committed by the 'Lushais' in Hill Tippera and through

it in the British territory of Cachar and Sylhet prompted the British authority to bring under more stringent control the administration of 'Hill Tippera'. Hence, the appointment of a stationary British Officer at Agartala was actively considered.²¹

The Tribal Rebellions took place in Hill Tippera in the mid-19th Century against feudal exploitations, which could not but worry the Britishers. The British Government found in the king of 'Hill Tippera' a ruler of no worth to deal firmly with the 'Lushais' as well as the tribal rebels of his state. Warranted by the situation, the British came forward directly to hold the princely administration in 'Hill Tippera' with a firm grip. With the plan in reserve, the British Government seized the King of his claim of being an independent ruler.

Kailashchandra Singha wrote that it was probably from 1865 or 1866 after completion of the 'Trigonometrical survey of Hill Tippera' that the British rulers referred to the state as only 'Hill Tippera' and not 'Independent Tippera'.²² The 'Nazarana Resolutions' about the Native rulers issued by the Government of India on March 30, 1870, all the more, dismasked that 'Hill Tippera' was not an 'Independent State'. The position of the King of 'Hill Tippera' was declared in 1870 by the Government of India to be that of 'feudatory'. The title 'Maharaja' was only hereditary.²³

Although the British Government ceased to recognise 'Hill Tippera' independent any longer, it was noted by the government that the King had continued to use the words 'Swadhin-Tripura' (Independent Tripura) to indicate the state in the matter of his internal administration. But in the Annual Administrative Report to the Government, the state was described as 'Tippera state' although the actual word used by the Government was 'Hill Tippera'. In view of the fact, the Political Agent in a letter to the Minister of Hill Tippera wrote : 'The use of the word 'Swadhin' (Independent) to describe the state appears to be contrary to the orders of the Bengal Government, dated the 12th July, 1880'. Concluding the letter, the Political Agent stated "I am to request that the Durbar will take measures to ensure that proper description of the state viz. Hill Tippera is always used in future".²⁴ Thus, Hill Tippera lost its claim to be an independent state.

The British Political Agent in Tripura

In the wake of violent 'Lushai' raids in 'Hill Tippera' and in its adjoining British territory, the British Government created an office of the Political Agent at Agartala. The Political Agent

whose appointment was sanctioned in October, 1870 was considered by His Excellency-in-Council to be nominated by the Lt. Governor of Bengal. Further, he was required to take up His duties before commencement of the armed expedition of 1871-72 in the 'Lushai Country'²⁵. The first Political Agent thus assumed office at Agartala in 1871 and he was A.W.B. Power.

The office of the Political Agent at Agartala continued till 1878 when the conduct of political relations with the state was devolved upon the Magistrate and Collector of 'Trippera', who acted as an ex-officio Political Agent for 'Hill Tippera'.²⁶ He had under him an Indian Officer of the rank of Deputy Magistrate, acting as Asstt. Political Agent at Agartala.

The functions of the Political Agent was to protect British interest in 'Hill Tippera' and to advise the King in the matter of his administration. The purpose of his appointment was explained to the King and he was told that the appointment in no way would affect his interest.²⁷ Yet, the British Government later on began to exercise its authority in the affairs of the King through the Political Agent.

We came to know from Kailashchandra Singha that in 1890 the King was made to appoint, in consultation with the ex-officio Political Agent, a Minister of his state with full powers of the administration. Accordingly, Rai Umakanta Das Bahadur assumed Office of the Minister. In the dispensation, the King was divested of his actual administrative authority. A discontented King, Birchandra Manikya at one time issued an order terminating the service of the Minister, Umakanta Das. The Minister reported the matter to the Bengal Government and informed the King of his inability to relinquish his office unless so desired by the Government. The Bengal Government informed the Minister, Umakanta Das to continue in his office until Lt. Governor of Bengal visited Comilla and took steps by himself. The frown of disapproval of his action by the Bengal Government silenced the King who, it was said, confessed apologetically his guilt to the Lt. Governor for his unilateral action,²⁸ when the latter paid his official visit to Comilla in 1892.

But after a great deal of obsecration, the Lt. Governor agreed to dispense with the Minister, Rai Umakanta Das Bahadur, and allow the King to resume the administration subject to some conditions, which seemed to be unprestigious, that the King himself or in his absence both the Yubaraj and the Barthakur as his representatives would attend every year at Comilla the occasion of the

visit of the Commissioner of Chittagong Division and that the King would convey compulsorily to the Commissioner all the information which as and when he would ask him to do so. Moreover, an Annual Administrative Report of the state would also be submitted to the Government without fail.²⁹

Again, in order to tighten up the hold of imperial authority on the principality, the Tripura state, with prior sanction of His Majesty's Secretary of state for India had been placed in direct political relations with the Government of India with effect from the 14th November, 1922. The Governor of Bengal-in-Council acted as Agent to the Governor-General of India for the Tripura state.³⁰

The Maharaja - a great devotee of the British .

It was a known fact to the King or the Maharaja of Tripura that his throne was under the suzerainty of the British Government. Nothing could bail him out except loyalty and good government shown on his part. Thus, to remain in the throne, he dared not do anything which might incur the wrath of the Paramount authority.

During Sepoy Mutiny (1857) the King of so-called independent Tripura, therefore, did not endeavour to prove himself to become worthy of the rank of many a patriotic Chiefs like Nana Saheb, Tantia Topi, Begam of Oudh, Rani of Jhansi and others who resented the loss of authority. Instead, the King of 'Hill Tippera' gave evidence of his great sycophancy towards the British authority. It was borne out by the fact that a group of mutineers from Chittagong set out for the King of 'Hill Tippera' thinking him to be an 'Independent King' who would extend all possible help to them. But it was to their utter surprise that the King Isanchandra Manikyā (1849-1862) just on the receipt of the news of their arrival ordered to get them out of his territory. Most of the mutineers left his state but a few of them took refuge in convenient hideouts nearby Agartala. They were later on rounded up and delivered to the British authority at Comilla where they were hanged.³¹ But in spite of his best efforts to remain credibly in the good book, the King was at one time suspected by the British Government to have allied to the mutineers and on that ground, the Government thought it fit to dispossess the King of his territory. However, it was due to the reasonings of George Metcalfe, the Judge, that the King was exculpated from the charge.³²

Yet, another instance which betrayed the Maharaja's great devotion to the British was the way that he placed himself sadul-

ously at the service of the British Government during the Second World War. '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.'³³ Moreover, it was noted : "The entire resources of the state and personal services of the ruler have been placed at the disposal of the Crown"³⁴ The military force of the Maharaja was rallied round the British Army at Chittagong to add to its strength. The Maharaja, again at the behest of the Britishers, raised an additional battalion by conscription on the tribal youths. It needs be mentioned here that the forcible conscription and the collection of paddy and other foodgrains for war purposes just at the time when Tripura was seized by famine set the stage ready to trigger off the Reang rebellion (1942-43) in Tripura ; but even at the risk of it, the Maharaja left an evidence of his great devotion to his British Political Master.

After the great war, when the Indian National Movement was revived to its decisive stage by launching the 'Quit India' movement, the Maharaja of Tripura was found to have acted again in the British interest. He declared all the Congress Committees unlawful Associations in Tripura.³⁵

Conclusion

It is a common knowledge that the King or the Maharaja of Tripura was an 'Independent ruler' and his state was 'Independent Tripura'. The official records of princely Tripura also bore emblematic mark (royal seal) of 'Independent Tripura'. But in reality the things were not what they seemed to be.

From the time of King Rajdhar Manikya II (1785-1804) the English Government had started to interfere in the Palace politics taking the occasion of disputes over succession to the throne. The practice of exacting 'nazarana' by the British rulers started since then.

It may only be claimed that the Kings of Tripura enjoyed certain degree of independence at the most upto 1870, but since then they were reduced to a state of obedience. After the advent of the British, if initially, the Kings of Tripura enjoyed any 'independence', it was mainly due to the British policy of non-intervention in regard to the Princely states. But subsequently, the policy of non-intervention was replaced by a policy of intervention. On the pretext of misgovernment, the Government seized all claims of the King

as independent ruler. The British authority by official orders appointed a Political Agent, installed a Minister in Tripura and made the King to act upon its gubernatorial wishes.

Under the circumstances, the so-called independent Kings of Tripura also recoiled in fear from their glorious position, and gave evidence of their ungrudging devotion towards the British authority in a way which seemed to be beneath the dignity of any independent ruler. All these *ipso facto* debunked that the Maharaja of Tripura was not politically independent during the British rule in India. He was only a ruler by grace. He enjoyed nothing more than an autonomy in his internal affairs and that too under the suzerainty and at the pleasure of the British, as the Paramount Authority. The King might emblemize his state as 'Independent Tripura', but the so-called independence of Tripura during the British rule in India was mere a myth trailing from its pristine glory.

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2. The Mizos were described by the British rulers as the 'Kookies' and later on as the 'Lushais'.
3. Allen, B. C., *Assam District Gazetteers*, Vol. II, (Sylhet) Chapter 2, P. 22.
4. Reid, A. S., *Chin-Lushai Land* (London, 1893), p.1.
5. Steward, C., *History of Bengal*, p. 267.
6. Mackenzie, A., *The North-East Frontier of India*, (Reprinted in India, 1979), p. 272.
7. *Ibid.*,
8. Sandys, E. F., *History of Tripura*, (Calcutta, 1915) p. 35.
9. Please see, Menon, K.D., *Tripura District Gazetteers*, p. 110.
10. Letter No. 1513, dated the 12th July, 1880 from the Government of Bengal, Pol. Dept., to the Govt. of India, Foreign Dept. (Source : Record Section, Civil Secretariat, Govt. of Tripura) (Unpublished).
11. Letter No. 1571 p., dated the 9th October, 1920 of B. A. Corbett, Political Agent. Also see, *Tripura Gazette Sankalan* (1971) p. 102.
12. *Brief Accounts of the Indian States in Bengal* (Delhi, 1933); Source : Record Section, Civil Secretariat, Govt. of Tripura.
13. Bengal Government's Letter No. 121, dated the 27th December, 1838 addressed to the Commissioner of Chittagong. - cf. Mackenzie, A., *op. cit.*, Appendix-D. P. 411.

14. Hunter, W. W., *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. VI, p. 367.
15. *Ibid.*, P. 461.
16. Bengal Government's Letter No. 121, dated the 27th December, 1838.—cf. Mackenzie, A., *op. cit.*, Appendix-D, p. 414.
17. For reference please see, Singha, Kailashchandra, *Rajmala* (In Bengali, reprinted, Barnamala Ed., Agartala) p. 168.
18. cf. Majumdar, Raychoudhuri & Datta, *An Advanced History of India* (1958), p. 845.
19. *Brief Accounts of Indian States in Bengal*. (Delhi, 1983).
20. The Tipras (or the Tripuris) rose in arms in 1850 ; the Jamatias in 1868 ; the Kukis in 1826, 1836, 1844 and 1860. Please see, Ray, Suprakash, *Bharater Krishak Bidroah O Ganatantrik Sangram* (In Bengali, 1972) pp. 250-255.
21. Please see, Mackenzie, A., *op. cit.*, PP. 908-5.
22. Singha, Kailashchandra, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
23. *Brief Accounts of the Indian States in Bengal* (Delhi, 1983).
24. Pol. Agent's Letter No. D. O. No. 481, dated Comilla, the 11th July, 1914 (Unpublished) - Source : Record Section, Civil Secretariat, Government of Tripura.
25. Orders of the Governor-General in Council dated the 11th July, 1871 ; cf. Mackenize, A., *op. cit.*, P. 311.
26. Bengal Administrative Report (1878-79) pp.14-17 ; ct. Menon, K. D. '*Tripura District Gazetteers*, p. 113.
27. Aitchison, C. U., *A Collection of Treaties Eengagement and Sanads*, Vol. II. p. 194.
28. Singha, Kailashchandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-2.
29. Aitchison, C. U., *op. cit.*, p. 194.
30. *Brief Accounts of the Indian States in Bengal*. (Delhi, 1933).
31. Singha, Kailashchandra, *op. cit.*, p. 157.
32. *Ibid.* p. 161.
33. Resolution No. 1 of the 8th sitting of the State Council, dated the 18th Bhādra, 1349 T. T. (1939 AD) ; - cf. *Tripura State Gazette Sankalan*, p. 155.
34. War Supplement to the Tripura State Gazette, date the 14th January, 1942.
35. Notification of the Chief Minister of Tripura State, No. 176-C, dated Agartala, the 6th Sept., 1942 ; cf. *Tripura State Gazette Sankalan* P. 165.