

Sanskritic Culture in Tripura

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A small principality of the Princely State of Tripura constitutes a relic of the past. Like most ruling dynasties of India, Tripura Kings claim descent from the Lunar race and they traced their origin to a great antiquity which is indeed a talk of historical research even today. Regarding the antiquity of the illustrious royal family of Tripura, the following Slokas may be quoted from the *Rajaratnakara*, a pioneer Sanskrit poetical work of Tripura.

atiprachinamevedam rajyam Tripura samjgitam |
Mahadevaviharartham Brahmana nirmitam pura||12/94||
tripuresavanam punyam prasiddham satyakalatah|
Kiratanicayastatra nivasam chakrire pura||12/95||
te kale vipulam rastram kritavanto dhanurdharah|
Bhavani kripaya rajan tritayamiti sushrumah||12/96||¹

I have tried to give a glimpse of Tripura's contribution to Sanskrit culture and civilisation in general and Sanskrit studies in particular out of scanty and scattered materials. Sanskrit was employed in almost all the phases of mundane and celestial activities which may generally be deciphered under the following standpoints :

I. Religion and Philosophy

A singular feature of the imperial Tripura is that it has been casted and influenced by religion as evidenced from the inscriptions of temples and crematoriums, numismatic norms, Sanskrit religious books and manuscripts.

a) An inscription engraved on the temple of Mahadeb Bari of Udaipur which dates back to the reign of Maharaj Kalyan Manikya (1650 A. D.) goes as ;

*Sri Sri-kalyana devastripura -
 narapatischandravamsavatam -
 sah
 prasadutsriya dharmavyavahei -
 tavapuse bhaktitah Sankaraya²*

-which at once proves the existence of Saiva religion in Tripura. Similar inscriptions depicted on the walls of Tripura-Sundari Temple by Maharaj Dhanya Manikya (1501 A. D.), Visnu Temple by Maharaj Vijay Manikya (1548 A. D.), Visnu Temple by Maharaj Gobinda Manikya (1660 A. D.), Visnu Temple by Maharani Gunabati Debi (1668 A. D.), Gopinath Temple by Maharaj Ram Manikya (1677 A. D.), Radha Madhab Temple by Maharaj Krishna Manikya (1775 A. D.), Jagannath Temple of Comilla by Maharani Sulakshana vividly infer the various religious faiths of Tripura.

b) The inscriptions plustered on the crematoriums also prove the same. One of them rendered by M. K. Brajendra Kishore and Ranabir in the name of their mother in 1933 A.D. is as follows :

*Om Sri Sri Radhamohana
 Vijayate, he natha, he
 tayita he anathaika
 vandho he Krishna he
 karunaikasindhof³*

c) The coins issued by Ratna Manikya (1464 A. D.), Maharaja Vijaya Manikya (1560 A.D.), Maharaja Yasodhara Manikya (1600 A. D.), Maharaja Dharma Manikya II (1714 A.D.) and Maharaja Ishana Chandra Manikya, Birchandra Manikya and Bir Bikram emphasise the flourishing of Parvati-Parameswara, Siva-Durga, Gouri, and Radhakrishna.

d) The manuscripts as a whole also speak on the same lines. Traces of 'Sri Haripriti' in the Sanskrit Mss. of *Rajmala* substantiate our view.

II. Social Organisation

In accordance with the religious philosophy the society has directly or indirectly conceived a cultural and spiritual bond.

a) The Kings who were bent on the welfare of the subjects

were in all spheres guided and advised by a number of erudite Sanskrit Pandits and Purohits. Among them we may mention the name of Raj Guru Bipin Behari Prabhu Goswami, Dwara-pandit Krishna Chandra Sarma, M. M. Baikunthanath Tarkabhusana, M. M. Gurucharan Tarka Saradarshan Tirtha, Dwara-pandit Mineswar Sarbabhouma (hailed from Manipur), M. M. Ramkrishna Tarka Tirtha, Raj Pandit Rebat Mohan Kavyaratna, Raj Pandit Baikuntha Vachaspati, Pandit Chandrodaya Vidya Vinode. The Kings of Tripura were very fond of fetching Brahmin Pandits from other parts of the country, the central object had always been to establish and promote most wholesome relations with the Sanskrit culture of India. Such a tradition may be traced as far back as 641 A. D. when King Adidharma Pa brought five Vedic Pandits namely Srinanda, Ananda, Gobinda, Sripati and Purusottama from Mithila.⁴

(b) During the period of ceremonies and sacrifices religious practices, terrestrial or spiritual affairs mingled with marriages, Sraddha, Pujas and pieties - the kings and the like usually issued letters and invitation cards, ceremonial blessings, shastric injunctions and social directives in Sanskrit. To quote from a marital blessing toward Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya,⁵

*Manikyarajkulamujjwala-mindu-vamsam
Sastam tathaiva valarama-purasya-rajyam/
tasyaiva rajatanaya sahadharmini swam
kritva-swadharma-manutistha sujagya-rupam||3||*

(c) I have recently come across at least 2 or 3 cases of Hindu Law settled by the Pandits of Tripura in collaboration with the veteran Pandits of Navadwip. This has a reference to the Sraddha-tattva problem of the Manipuris of Tripura in 1905 A. D.

(d) The Maharajas used to arrange Pandit Sabhas, especially, during the 'Pitri-Paksha'.

III. Language and Literature

(a) The contribution of Tripura to Sanskrit literature is well-marked by the publication of *Rajaratnakar*, *Kantakaratak*, *Gobinda-manikya-charitam*, *Prasasti Patram*, *Abhisekah*, *Banastotsava* and *Ashi-Lipih* (eulogium). A historical data can be ascribed from *Gobinda-manikya-charitam* about the arrival of

Sultan Suja, son of Emperor Sajahan to Arakan where he met Gobinda Manikya. The *Gobinda-manikya-charitam* ventilates a laudable view of the exchange of thoughts among the two,⁶

*Tada Sultana Suja Gobindama-
nikasya karam dhritva Pro-
Vaca vo bhupate Bhabatam-
ahamadya yadvahumanya.
te tan namaranam Visma-
risyami. etc.*

(b) Sanskrit was even the language of inter-state communication. *Tripura Buranji* and *Tripura Desar Katha* point out that king Ratna Manikya sent two envoys who submitted their credentials and messages of the King of Tripura in Sanskrit to King Swargadeva Rudra Singha at the Ahom Court in 1710 A. D.⁷ One of the envoys Pandit Rameswar Vidyalankar took part in a Shastric Sophistry with Pandit Joygopal of Assam.⁸

(c) The incorporation of several Sanskrit words in the original language of the Tripuris, the Kok Borok bears testimony to the blending of the language. Examples may be cited as :

i) <i>Valkala</i>	<i>Bukur</i>
ii) <i>Roupya</i>	<i>Rufai</i>
iii) <i>Padma</i>	<i>Padda</i>
iv) <i>Viksha</i>	<i>Bikha</i>
v) <i>Toah</i>	<i>Tui</i>
vi) <i>Andhakarrah</i>	<i>Andar</i>
vii) <i>Dhatri</i>	<i>Dai</i>

IV. Pedagogical Firmament

(a) Discrete and special importance has been paid to the cause of Sanskrit education. Besides innumerable Tols or Chatuspathis there was the existence of a Sanskrit College called Maharaja Sanskrit College during the reign of Maharaja Radha Kishore Manikya (1897 - 1909 A. D.). I was able to collect a Sanskrit letter issued on February 4, 1909 by the students of the said College during Saraswati Puja.⁹

b) According to the Report of the General Administration of Tripura State for the 1933-34 A. D., "the Maharaj Kumaris received their education as before.....under a pandit."

It gives an indication of the Sanskrit education for the women.

c) Astro-palmistry was practised in Sanskrit. Horoscopes were casted in Sanskrit at random. Raj-jyotish Srinath Sironi and Chandramoni Jyotishsagar were celebrated astro-palmists. Kailash Chandracharya copied astrological books in 1876 A. D. Pandit Chandramoni composed *Natun Panjika* in 1920. Maharaja Dhanya Manikya heartily encouraged the advancement of astrology.

d) Honorary causa and laurels, like *Bharat-Bhusan*, *Tanraj*, *Bhagavat-Bhusan*, *Mahamanyabara*, *Raj-Sabha-Bhusan*, *Manyabara* were conferred upon the distinguished scholars and dignitaries of the State. It is most interesting to note that the highest title of honour such as, Mahamanyabara, Dewan Bahadur, Manyabara were moulded on Star of Diamond in Debnagri script on the Coat of Arms. For meritorious and distinguished royal activities the worthy persons were honoured by the titles - *Karmavir*, *Karma Daksha*, and *Karmanistha* in order of merit. In each of these cases the motto engraved in Sanskrit as *Karmanulam amalam Yasonrinam*, *Karmana Narah Saphalyam Srayates Karmani mati-rastam* respectively. At the time of offering rewards or laurels, the Kings employed the motto in Sanskrit - "*Bifhatu Rajabha ktip Karmani tava*"

Maharaj Birendra Kishore Manikya was adorned with the title of Dharmadhurandhara by the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal for his patronage to Sanskrit education.

(e) Siksha Board was constituted in 1345 T. E. with two from Sanskrit Wing.

V. Economic and Political Endeavour

a) The Copper plates issued in different times serve as valuable documents of land grants. The first of its kind was perhaps that of Maharaja Adhidharma pa. The land grant written in Sanskrit was despatched in the year 641 A. D. (51-T. E.) referring to the *Brahmottara* in Pancha-Khanda of Sylhet District, as follows^{10(a)}

*Tripuraparvatadhisa Sri Srijuktadidharmopa,
Samrajnam dattapatrancha Maithilesu tapaswisu/
Vatsa-vatsya-Bharad waja-Krishnatraya-parasarah,
Srinandananda-Gobinda-Sripati-purusottamah||*

: : : : :

*Makarasthe ravou suklepakshe panchadasudine,
Tripura-chandravanabde pradatta dattapatrika|*

The Copper plates issued much later during the reign of Dharma Manikya written in Sanskrit in 1458 A. D., besides another issued by Vijaya Manikya -I (1488 A. D.) are worth mentioning.

(b) The Royal Coat of Arms bears its motto in Devanagri Script—

Kila Bidu Birata Saramekam—

‘know that Bravery is the only real thing in the World.’ While remarking on the Royal Coat of Arms Mr. Makhan Singh of Lahore wrote in Urdu,¹¹ in the book presented by him on the occasion of the marriage of Maharaj Bir Bikram Manikya. The English version of which may be read as - Nothing could be more explicit than these words which clearly show how the illustrious house has kept the chivalrous spirit of its race by constantly reminding of the true spirit which Sri Krishna, the great hero manifested centuries ago.

(c) Royal proclamations were made in Sanskrit. As far back as the reign of Maharaja Vijaya Manikya (1528-1570 A. D.), a royal charter threatening the rebellious Halam tribe inscribed on a metallic animal runs¹²

*Purva-pasya Kramadbhavanta atmiya
idanim yadi vaiparityamacharanti
tadopari dharmah sasyanaso vavisyati
parschad gajah sarddolou/*

It means¹³ :

The relationship which has been prevailing with you, if there be any contradictory behaviour at present, then it will cause the destruction of your foodgrains, religion and yourselves will be slain by elephants and tigers. The preamble of the KHASH SERESTA issued by H. H. Maharaj Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur bearing the Sanskrit headline,¹⁴

*Narapate-radesoayam Karaka-
Vargesu pracaratu paramasya
Virajate rajdhani Hastinapura.*

VI. Spread of Culture Abroad

(a) A great historian Somerset Playne remarked, “In ancient times there were in Sagar Island a famous Tol or Sanskrit College for Pandits and shrine of Shiba, erected by

the Rajas of Tripura when their dominions spread far more westward than they do now."¹⁵

Approximately, this College was built between 1358 and 1462 A. D.¹⁶ The cordial relationship of the people of Sagar Island since the time of Maharaja Trilochan of Tripura has undergone a tragic change with a tragedy in the geographical map of India. Sorry to quote from the *Calcutta Review*,¹⁷

"Two hundred years before the foundation of Calcutta, it (Sagar Island) contained a population of 200,000 souls which one night in 1688 was swept away by an inundation."

Yet some of the relatives of the people of Sagar Island may be living in Tripura because the Priests of Chaturdas Devata Bari at one time were brought from Sagar Island by the King.¹⁸

(b) The Kings of Tripura used to grant annual donation to the Centres of Sanskrit Learning such as, East Bengal Saraswata Samaj, Dacca, Benevolent Society of India.

A grant of Rupees six hundred by H. H. Maharaja of Tripura to the E. B. Saraswata Samaj, Dacca was the highest except to the grant by Bhowal Raj (Rs. 1000/-) and Government grant (Rs. 2,400/-) for the year 1926-27.¹⁹ H. H. the Maharaja of Tripura fixed up grants for honoraria to the Visiting Pandits. He donated money to the Pandits like Harakishore Adhikari of Sitakunda to publish his books.²⁰ The Kings of Tripura encouraged the copying of Sanskrit books and Manuscripts for the spread of Sanskrit Culture. It is to be noted that Jayadeva's *Gitagovindam* was copied by Jagannath Das Vairagi in 1288 A. D. whereas *Srimad Bhagavat Gita* was copied in 1808 A. D. by Srivisnu Das. About 450 years before Krishnaram Sharma copied *Srimad Bhagavatam* and Pandit Ramdhan Deo Das prepared the copy of *Sri Goraksha Vijaya* in 1824 A. D.²¹

(c) Even today the Sanskrit inscription of Chandranath Tirtha justifies the benevolence of the Kings of Tripura for the spread of Sanskrit culture and civilisation outside. The epigraph on the temple of Annapurna of Chandranath (now in Bangladesh) may be cited as²² :

*"Sri Sri Annapurna Jayati
Sri Birendrakisora Varmanapate
patnipradhana Sati Samrajni*

Tripuradhiswari janani

Sri Rajalak shamipara/

- which has manifested cultural flavour around us.

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