

## The History of Vanga-loka in Tripura

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As to the early Bengalee settlement in Tripura we have some information in the *Rajmala*, the famous poetical work on the annals of Tripura. According to this work, king Ratna Fa (later Ratna Manikya) made a sizeable Bengalee settlement (*Vanga upnivesa*) in Tripura.

As a prince he was in exile<sup>1</sup> in the country of Gaud (Bengal). But he was shrewd enough to cultivate the friendship of the Gauda king. With the help of the latter he invaded Tripura. Having defeated his seventeen brothers who had divided the Tripura Kingdom among themselves he ascended the throne. Out of gratitude to his patron, the Gauda King, he then paid a short visit to him. During this visit, says our author, the Gauda King conferred on him the title of *Mahikya*. Ratna Mahikya had lived among the Bengalee population of Gauda, and he seems to have developed a fascination for the Bengalee race. He asked the Gauda King to supply a number of Bengalee people from Gauda for settlement in Tripura. The *Rajmala* says—

Gaudesvara Sthane Punah Kahileka Ara  
Vangaloka Katha Paile Rajjyete Nivar

He asked the Gauda King again—'How many Vanga lokas or Bengalees have you got for taking, to my State? Ratna Fa was so much interested in the matter that he made a gift of ten elephants to the Gauda Chief for the purpose. Upon this the Gauda monarch issued *parwanas* to all his twelve provincial governors to make a collection of the nine castes (*nava-sena*)—<sup>2</sup>

Paroyana Kari Dila Bara Vangate  
Naba Sena Jateka Jhilant Kari Dite

A total of ten thousand Bengalee families were to be supplied<sup>4</sup>—

Das Hajar Ghara Vanga Dite Ajna Haila

The collection was made promptly. It included, among others, *bhadralokas* and *Srikarnas*. Ratna Fa took them all into Tripura. He settled two thousand families at *Rangamati*, the then capital of Tripura. One thousand families were settled at Rantnapur,<sup>5</sup> five hundred at Yaspur,<sup>6</sup> and another five hundred at Hirapur.<sup>7</sup> It is not stated where the other families were domiciled. It matters little. If they were brought by the Tripura King, they were certainly settled in other places of the State.

The reign of Ratnamanikya can be assigned to the middle of 15th century, for one of his coins is dated Saka 1386 or 1464 A.D.<sup>8</sup> K. P. Sen thinks Ratna Manikya is to be placed a century earlier.

Reference to the Bengalees is met with even earlier in our text. It is said that there was in Tripura a King named Vanga long before Ratna Fa. He settled subjects of his own name<sup>9</sup>—

Tan Putra Hailek Vanga Maharaja  
Apnar Name Raja Sthapilek Praja

Obviously the Vanga or Bengalee people are referred to here. The King was named Vanga and he settled Vanga people. The date of the King, however, cannot be ascertained. Again, the Bengalee people during the reign of King Vanga could not be very large in number. This is why his descendant Ratna Fa felt the need of importing ten thousand Bengalee families.

The Bengalee population of Tripura by the time of King Dhanya Manikya (late 15th Century) was quite large. It is evident from a curious phenomenon recorded in the *Rajmala*<sup>10</sup>—

Purvete Tripur Raja Narabali Dita  
Sahasra Sahasra Vanga Varse Kata Jaita  
Sridhanya Manikye Mana Tahaka Karila  
Tadabadhi Norabali Nisedha Haila

If thousands of Bengalees were sacrificed before a deity, then the population must have been very large indeed.

Dhanya Manikya's grand son, King Vijay Manikya seems to have brought another batch of Bengalees from Dhajghat (Dacca district) and settled them at Dhvajnagar (near Bishalgarh).<sup>11</sup>

Sri Sri Vijaya Manikya Deva Maharaja  
Raja Madhye Virajita Bale Mahateja  
Dhvaja Ghat Hane Jata Baniya Kansari  
Aniya Basaila Nama Dhvaj Je Nagari

Perhaps the Bengalees brought by Ratna Manikya did not include these trader castes, and Vijaymanikya sought to make up the deficiency.

King Rajdhar Manikya had 200 Bengalee Brahmans in his Court :

### Dui Sata Bhattacharya Sabhate Rajar

The Bengalee Hindus came in this way. But how did the Muslim population of Tripura arise ? It is said in the *Rajmala* that Ratna Manikya invaded Tripura with the help of the Gauda King. Gauda was under Muslim rule at the time. The ruler was perhaps Rukn-ud-din Barbak Shah (1455-76 A. D.)<sup>12</sup> He provided Ratna Fa with a big Pathan army. Rev. James Long says about Ratna Fa's invasion of Tripura—"Returning with the aid of Mahammadan troops he conquered the Kingdom and beheaded his brothers."<sup>13</sup>

These Muslim troops of Ratna Manikya, in all probability, constituted the first nucleus of the Muslim population of Tripura. Later Muslim invasions and short-lived occupations of Tripura, doubtless, augmented their numerical strength gradually. Maharaj Vijay Manikya, a hundred years alter (16th century) is reported to have had a ten thousand strong Muslim (Pathan) cavalry.<sup>14</sup> There was a short Muslim rule of two and a half years in Tripura during the reign of King Yasodhar Manikya (17th century) who was defeated by the Muslim army of Bengal. All this was a patent cause of the growth of Muslim population in Tripura. The Badar Mokam and the Mughal Masjid of Udaipur were constructed at that time. One Samser Ghazi also ruled for a time after this, and it must have had a like effect.

The history of Vanga loka in Tripura thus dates back at least from the days of King Ratna Manikya. His reign is called Vanga Upanivesa (Bengalee Colonisation) in the *Rajmala*. The coins of Ratna Manikya that have come down to us are inscribed in the Bengali Script. The language, however, is Sanskrit. No coins of earlier rulers, if any, have reached us ; some think the earlier Kings had no coins of their own making.<sup>15</sup> When Bengali replaced Sanskrit as official language cannot be said with certainty. Bengali as official language is seen from the time of Kalyan Manikya only.<sup>16</sup> Earlier documents have not survived to afford us a look beyond.

## References

1. *Rajmala I*, Ratna Fa Khanda, P. 65 (ed. K. P. Sen).
2. *Ibid*, p. 67. Here Vanga-loka means Bengalee people.
3. *Ibid*, p. 68.
4. *loc. cit.*
5. Modern Radhakishorpur or Mahadev Badi near Udaipur. Here Mamarak Khan, captive general of Bengal, was sacrificed before the Fourteen Gods.
6. Near Naha Tehsil office in Belonia (now in Bangla Desh).
7. Near Udaipur (Tripura).
8. From numismatic and other evidences.
9. *Rajmala I*, p. 46. On this K. P. Sen says : 'Bengalee Colonisation of Tripura started during the reign of Maharaj Vanga'. (*Ibid*, p. 193).
10. *Ibid*, II, p. 29.
11. *Ibid*, P. 60 ; also vide K. P. Sen's glossary, p. 288.
12. According to some it is Tughral (or Tughril) Khan who "invaded the country of Jagenagar (Tipperah) in the year 1279 A. D. ...." (Stewart's *History of Bengal* p. 44). K. P. Sen thinks Ratna Manikya's patron was Samsud-Din Ilyas Shah (1342-1358).
13. J A S B, Vol. XIX ; also vide *Rajmala* (K. P. Sen) I, p. 189.
14. *Rajmala*, Vijay Manikya Khanda ; also *ibid*, III, p. 190.
15. *Bangla Desher Itihās* (madhya-yug), ed. by R. C. Majumdar, p. 480.
16. Vide *Rajal Tripurar Sarkari Bangla* (Published by the Education Deptt., Tripura), p. 3 ff.