

The Patron Sultan of King Ratan Manikya

F.A. Qadri*

Amongst the ruling dynasties of the medieval North-Eastern India, the Tripuris (Tiperahs) were the third to come in contact with the Muslim rulers of Bengal.¹ The Tripuri-Muslim contact forms an interesting phase of the history of Tripuri state formation during medieval period and after.² For a modern scholar working on this aspect of the history of Tripura, it is not an easy task, especially in view of the lack of proper historical information and vague references in the writings of medieval Persian chroniclers. The half information and vague references has created two sets of views regarding the patron Sultan (of Bengal) of King Ratan Manikya of Tripura.

Writing in 1940's, Kalika Ranjan Qanungo identified the patron Sultan of King Ratan Manikya as Sultan Mughith al-Din Tughril (1268-81 AD). Tughril was the last and the greatest of the successful Mamluks who had risen from the position of mere house-hold slave to the independent sovereignty of Bengal in the time of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Balban (1266-83). He possessed all the characteristics virtues of a Turk, indomitable will, reckless, bravery, resourcefulness and boundless ambition. Tughril according to Zia al-Din Barani, was assigned the provinces of Lakhnauti and Bengal by Sultan Balban around 1269.³ But according to Yahya Sirhindi, Amin Khan was assigned Lakhnauti and Tughril was made his deputy, a view accepted by K.R. Qanungo, who is of the opinion that Amin Khan's name is retained in the list of governors of Bengal rather for the sake of courtesy than for any actual achievement. Whereas, continues, Qanungo, his more energetic deputy,⁴ enjoying the full confidence of the Sultan, had been throughout the *defacto* ruler of this (Bengal) province.⁵

Tughril after consolidating his position extended his power up to the modern districts of Faridpur and Dacca and annexed the river tracts of both banks of the Padma as far as Loricol, about 25 miles due south of Dacca, and about 10 miles south-west of Rajabari, known as *Arsa-i-Bangala*. This political unit seems to be a portion of the bigger

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geographical unit known as *Diyar-I-Bangala* (still unsubdued) for Balban is later reported to have referred to his conquest of *Arsa-i-Bangla* by turning out Tughril and to have ordered Bughra Khan to rule over *Diyar-I-Bangala*.⁶

Tughril established friendly relations with the ruler of Tippera. In addition, he sought the extension of his power in the tracts of Radha also. He invaded the territory of Jainagar several times and brought much booty from there. These successes made Tughril arrogant and defiant.⁷ He did not send the booty to the Sultan and started using a *Chatr*⁸ (canopy). He further assumed the title of Sultan Mughith al-Din and caused the *Khutba* to be read and the coins to be struck in his own name. In order to win the support of the people, he distributed his wealth lavishly.⁹

Zia al-Din Barani makes a vague reference to Tughril's several enterprises', and the *Qila-i-Tughril* (the fort of Tughril).¹⁰ Behind which, according to Qanungo lies concealed an interesting phase of the expansion of Muslim power to the modern Faridpur and Dacca districts.¹¹ Tughril also looms large in the popular tradition of the neighbouring district of Tippera. It is said that Ratan Fa, the founder of the erstwhile ruling dynasty of Tripura, sought the assistance of Tughril in ousting his elder brother Raja Fa from the throne. Thereupon, says Qanungo, Tughril invaded the country, placed Ratan Fa on the throne, and gave him the title of Manikya in return for the Raja's present of a precious jewel.¹²

It was not unlikely that Tughril seized the opportunity of establishing a friendly power in Tripura, and thereby tightened his grip on the Rai of Sonargaon.¹³ But whether the ruler of Tripura was Ratan Fa alias Manikya (now onwards) is difficult to accept as the discovery of his coins have decidedly proved the fact that Ratan Manikya belongs to the fifteenth century and not thirteenth century.¹⁴ Hence Qanungo's conjecture based on tradition seems untenable.

N.R. Roychoudhury on the basis of *Rajmala*, the local chronicle of Tripura, narrates the same story with slight change that Ratan Fa's father Danger Fa had eighteenth sons, of whom Ratan Fa was the youngest. Danger Fa had divided his principality into seventeen division and placed a son each in-charge of a division, while Ratan Fa was sent to the court of Gaur (Bengal) as a hostage. But Ratan Fa by dint of his charming personality and intelligence won the confidence of the Sultan of Gaur, who gave him military support to conquer Rangamati. Dangar Fa fled

to hills where he died, while Ratan Fa defeated all his brothers and made himself ruler of the Tripuri principality.¹⁵ It is possible that the Tripuri principality had a vassal or protected status under Gaur during Dangar Fa's reign as he had sent a hostage. Ratan Fa presented some elephants and a ruby to the Sultan and received the title of Manikya from him.¹⁶ The same story is also cited by S.K. Bhuyan, who tries to give it a mythical touch.¹⁷

Ratan Manikya is the earliest of the coin issuing rulers of Tripura. These coins belong to the period between 1464 AD and 1467 AD.¹⁸ He also issued certain administrative reforms which were modelled on the pattern prevalent in Bengal.¹⁹ The coins follow most of the typical characteristics of the coinage of Muslim Bengal. Sultan Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah (1459-1474 AD) of Bengal was the contemporary of Ratan Manikya and it was probably from him that Ratan Manikya secured assistance to usurp the kingdom.²⁰

Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah belonged to the later Ilyas Shahi dynasty. His succession to his father's throne was undisputed.²¹ Histories praise him as "a sagacious and law abiding sovereign in whose kingdom the soldiers and citizens alike enjoyed contentment and security."²² The efficient administration and peaceful reign of Nasir al-Din Mahmud enabled his son and successor Barbak Shah to extend his dominions. The new ruler organised a militia of Abyssinian slaves and employed Arab soldiers also. One of these Arab soldiers was a Quraish, named Shah Ismail Ghazi, whose military exploits are preserved in the *Risalat-al-Shuhada*.²³ This work also supplies detailed account of Barbak's military activities.

Although there is no direct information of any kind available to suggest that Barbak Shah invaded Tripura. But the circumstantial evidences and Barbak's presence in the adjoining territories coupled with the traditions of *Rajmala* and *Tripura Buranji*, J.B. Bhattacharjee's contention that Tripuri principality had a vassal or protected status under Gaur,²⁴ seems quite acceptable. According to A.B.M. Habibullah, the inscription found at Hathkola in Sylhet of Khurshid Khan dated 868 AH/1463 AD confirms that Muslim occupation of Surma valley was continuous.²⁵ Chittagong was a disputed possession, and for some years acknowledged Arkanese suzerainty. Towards the end of his rule, however, Barbak's authority was re-established there, for he is mentioned as the reigning king in Rasti Khan's inscription dated 878 AH/1473 AD found at Chittagong. His reign was distinguished by an all-round expansion. A

mosque inscription dated 870 AH/1465 AD at Mirzagunj, Bakargunj district being the earliest record of Muslim occupation in the area, affords a clear proof of advance on the south, which, linking up the recently conquered Jessore-Khulna region, according to A.B.M. Habibullah established a continuous frontier.²⁶

While writing on the state formation in Medieval Tripura, J.B. Bhattacharjee opines that, 'the process of state formation had entered the most crucial phase during the reign of Ratna Manikya in the sixties of the 15th century AD'.²⁷ His patron Sultan Ruku al-Din Barbak Shah too was quite innovative in the articulation of his political authority in Bengal. His reign witnessed the appearance of the institution of military slavery.²⁸ In the 1460s and 1470s instead of Central Asian Turks, black slaves (*Habashi*) from Abyssinia in East Africa were recruited for military and civil service. Barbak gave four thousand soldiers to Ratan Manikya who were settled by the latter in different parts of Tripura.²⁹

The coins with stylised figure of a lion which was introduced by Bengal Sultans in the first quarter of the fifteenth century was adopted by Ratan Manikya in 1464.³⁰ Though a more generalised symbol of political authority of the Sultans of Bengal, its adoption by the Raja of Tripura was probably due to the craftsmen and artisans being imported to Tripura from Bengal. Writing between 1512 and 1515, evidently on the basis of reports from merchants or ship Captain who had visited Bengal, Tom Pires remarked that the king "is a very faithful Moham-medan", and speaks of tributary "heathen" king such as the Raja of Tripura.³¹

Barbak Shah was great patron of Bengali literature. The celebrated poet, Maladhar Basu, compiler of *Sri Krishna Bijaya*, was patronised by him and was granted the title of Gunaraj Khan. His son was honoured with the title of Satyaraj Khan.³²

A comprehensive political ideology appealing to all Bengalis appeared with the restored Ilyas Shahi dynasty. By evolving a stable, mainly secular *modus vivendi* with Bengali society and culture, in which mutually satisfactory patron-client relations became politically institutionalised. A fairly good deal of such political ideology one can easily discern in the process of state formation in Medieval Tripura under Ratan Manikya and his successors.

Notes and References

1. The first being the Koches of Cooch Behar and Kamrup, the second were Ahoms of Assam, while a number of studies have been pursued on these two ruling dynasties and their contact with the Muslim rulers of Bengal. The Tripuri-Muslim contact has not yet received much attention from historians.
2. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Tripuri State Formation in Medieval Tripura. Social and Polity Foundations in Pre-Colonial North-East India*, Delhi, 1991, p. 67. Bhattacharjee's is the first study of its kind based on a very careful analysis of both primary and secondary sources.
3. Muhammad Habib and K.A. Nizami (eds.), *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. V : The Delhi Sultanet AD 1206-1626, Delhi (reprint), 1982, p. 1141.
4. J.N. Sarkar (ed.) *The History of Bengal*, Vol. 11, Muslim Period, 1200-1757, Patna (reprint), 1970, p. 58.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *A Comprehensive History of India*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1143-44.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 1141.
8. Yahya Sirhindi, *Tarikh-I-Mubarak Shahi*, edited by Khadim Hussain, Bib. Indica, Calcutta, 1931, pp. 40-42.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Tarikh-I-Firoz Shahi*, edited by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Bib. Indica, Calcutta, 1863, pp. 77-79.
11. *The History of Bengal*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *op. cit.*
15. *Tripura Through the Ages*, Delhi, 1983, p. 15.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Tripuri Buranji*, Gauhati, 1962, pp. 34-35.
18. *Tripura Through the Ages*, *op. cit.*
19. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-136.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
21. *The History of Bengal*, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-136.

22. *Ibid.*
23. Compiled in 1633 by Pir Muhammad Shattari and discovered at the Shrine of that Saint at Kantaduar, a few miles north-east of Gholaghat, Rangpur district. The text and an abridged translation of it were published by G.H. Damant in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1874, pp. 216-239.
24. *Tripuri State Formation in Medieval Tripura, op. cit.*
25. *The History of Bengal op. cit.*, p. 135.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Tripuri State Formation in Medieval Tripura, op. cit.*
28. Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier 1204-1760*, OUP, Delhi, 1994, p. 63.
29. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *op. cit.*
30. A.N. Lahiri, *Tripura Coins of Iconographic Interests, Journal of the Numismatic Society*, Vol. 29, 1967, pp. 73-75.
31. *Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, trans. A Cortesao, 2 vols., London, Hakluyt Society, 1944, Vol. 1, p. 89.
32. Richard M. Eaton, *op. cit.*, p. 69.