

## Operations of Hussain Shah against Tripura - Its Nature

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Though about five hundred years have elapsed since the armed conflicts between the Bengal Nawab Hussain Shah (1491 to 1520 A.D) and Dhanya Manikya (1590 to 1420 AD), the ruler of Tripura, yet it is interesting to reconstruct and record these past wars for a number of reasons. Besides dense forests, the land map of Tripura is traversed even to-day by several hill ranges and rivers and the geo-physical features of the land determined the nature of military operations. We come to learn from an unpublished document that "the first regular warfare with the Mahamedans was during the time of Dhanya Manikya".<sup>1</sup> Due to paucity of data it is difficult to give a detailed account of the wars and the nature of their operations, still an attempt is made here to draw an outline.

Dhanya Manikya used the title 'Vijayindra' (conquerer) in his coin of Saka 1428 (1506 AD) and 'Chatigrama Vijayi' (conqueror of Chittagong) in his coin of Saka 1435 (1513-14 AD).<sup>2</sup> These two coins were perhaps issued on the occasions of his grand victory over Hussain Shah. The *Rajmala* (Chronicles of the Kings of Tripura) eulogizes the military achievements of Dhanya Manikya. E. F. Sandys in 1915 mentions how Dhanya Manikya sent his Riang General Chaichug Rai to attack and ultimately how he captured the important Mughal garrison at Chittagong (known as Islamabad to the Mughals i.e. 'the Abode of the Faith'). To avenge that disgrace, in the words of E. F. Sandys, Dhanya Manikya was attacked three times by the Mughals.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand we have completely different accounts in the works of Parameswar Das and Shrikar Nandi, the court poets of Bengal,<sup>4</sup> who mentioned how Hussain Shah easily conquered a big portion of Tripura. According to the Sonargaon inscription (dated 7-6-1513 AD), the name of the builder of the mosque at Sonargaon was mentioned as 'Sher-e-Lasker of Tripura' which indicated that Hussain Shah occupied some tract of Tripura by 1513 A.D.<sup>5</sup>

Thus we have conflicting accounts about the results of the wars in different sources of history. This should be remembered and emphasized, because due to dearth of authentic materials, we sometimes become prey to wrong conclusions. As students of military history, we are interested to search materials for the nature of operations of both Hussain Shah and Dhanya Manikya as this hilly state provided ample opportunities for different types of attacks by the enemies. In all the three campaigns, both the Generals of Hussain Shah and Dhanya Manikya adopted the intelligent tactical use of terrain causing surprise and havoc on the opponent. The victory was achieved by that power which took the upper hand by mobilising army in the up-stream of the river, comparatively an advantageous position if compared to the mobilisation of the enemy in the down-stream. We have instances of intelligent tactical use of the terrain and river in the military history of Bengal also. For example, in the encounter between Isha Khan and Man Singha, Isha Khan, in almost all the cases, took the chance of availing ebb and flow-tide of the rivers.<sup>6</sup> But the unique feature of Tripura was the tactics of both Hussain Shah and Dhanya Manikya of inundating the bank of the river Gumti by building temporary dams and breaking the same in time to drown the enemies.

In fact, the art of planning operations in war in this hill terrain of Tripura and the tactics of using the water of the river against the enemy by both Hussain Shah and Dhanya Manikya have perhaps very few parallels in world history.

### **First Operation**

Regarding this operation, we have conflicting opinions but regarding the strategy used in this war, there is no controversy among scholars. Under the generalship of Gour Mallik, Hussain Shah sent a vast army gathered from the twelve provinces of Bengal to invade Tripura in 1513 A.D. The Sultan's army attacked from the south and reached upto Meherkul a fort of the king of Tripura. The Tripura army could not resist the enemy and the Bengal force marched into the interior instead.<sup>7</sup> Under the general Chai-Chug Rai of Dhanya Manikya, the soldiers of Tripura then took shelter in the fort of Chandigarh and being unresisted the Sultan's army advanced towards Rangamati, the then capital of Tripura, Meanwhile, the Tripura soldiers dammed up the river Gumti

at Sonamura, where the river debouches into the plains and suddenly cutting the dyke at night, the Mughal encampment was swept away and most of the soldiers drowned.<sup>8</sup>

But R. C. Majumdar thinks that General Gour Mallik of Hussain Shah after occupying the upper portion of the river Gumti constructed a dam across the river (Gumti). The embankment, as planned, was broken after three days causing heavy disaster to Dhanya Manikya and his people.<sup>9</sup> Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay, quoting authentic sources, points out that after the conquests of a number of strategical places of Tripura, the Sultan's force leaving the Chandigarh Durga aside, marched ahead and occupied the upper portion of the river Gumti. The army of Dhanya Manikya being ultimately encamped in a lower area of the bank of the same river, were in an awkward position. As such, it was quite obvious that from the strategical point of view, the army of Hussain Shah were able to hold the upper hand over the armies of Tripura and made a dam across the river Gumti.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the views of R. C. Majumdar discarding the views of Sandys and other court poets of Tripura are further corroborated by Mukhopadhyay and a critical student of military history can not overlook it.

### Second Operation

From the *Rajmala* we come to learn that while the Tripura army under the Rieng generals, named Rai-Kachhag Rai-Kachham reoccupied Chittagong. Hussain Shah, with an intention of taking revenge, sent the second expedition consisting of 100 elephants, 5000 horses, and 1,00,000 feet soldiers against the Tripura King under two Generals—Haitan Khan and Karab Khan.<sup>11</sup> In that expedition General Khan advanced on a new direction avoiding the previous way of Meherkul in Comilla. The army of Hussain Shah proceeded towards Kasba and conquered a number of strategical places like Kailagarh, Bisalgarh, Jamirgarh, and Chhaygaria. The Tripura force under the generalship of Chuchag Rai marched to resist Haitan Khan but after a battle near Comilla which lasted a day, the Tripura troops were obliged to retreat.<sup>12</sup> After these conquests Haiten Khan advanced towards Rangamati, the then capital of the kingdom of Tripura. Meanwhile, Dhanya Manikya with his force encamped in a curve of the river Chhanganga<sup>13</sup> named "Debdwar", an ideal place, so far as its strategical position is concerned because of its location at a higher place.

Within short distance, the Hussain Shah's force mobilised at "Machhi-chha", another curve of the same river which was strategically not in advantageous position if compared to the "Debdwar" curve because of its location at a lower place and unsuited for both attack and counter-attack.<sup>14</sup>

In that expedition, the soldiers of Tripura followed the same stratagem which was previously initiated by Gour Mallik. While the Mughal force were trying to cross the river Gumti, a dam was cut off and the rearing waters swept away the army of Hussain Shah. Haitan Khan then had to retreat from the battle field and took shelter in the fort of Chhay-Garia. The technique which he adopted here, the same practice was employed by the Dutch against the Spaniards at the siege of Leyden, viz., breaking down embankments so that hemmed in waters might sweep away the enemy.<sup>15</sup>

### Third Operation

In the third operation, Hussain Shah with a large strength met the army of Tripura led by its king Dhanya Manikya at Kailagarh. In a mile's distance of the South-Western side of Kailagarh, the Sultan's army encamped on the bank of the river Vijay.<sup>16</sup> In the Rajmala there is slight reference regarding this campaign without mentioning the fate. In this expedition, a portion of Tripura was, perhaps, added to Gour, and an officer was appointed to look after the occupied territory.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the weapons used in these wars we may point out that although bow was the chief weapon in India since the earliest times until the 19th century A. D.<sup>18</sup>, the other weapons used in these operations by both the parties were swords, spears, shields, deggers etc.<sup>19</sup> Hussain Shah also used cannon against the army of Tripura and one of the cannons was snatched by the armies of Dhanya Manikya.<sup>20</sup>

As the leadership of the Tripura army was in the hands of Riang Chiefs, viz. Rai Kachhag and Rai-Kachham, we may easily infer that the tribal people took part in these operations against Hussain Shah. Among the causes of invasions, elephants seem to have been the coveted object, and it was by these animals that the tribute imposed upon the kings of Tipperah was always paid.<sup>21</sup>

These three wars reveals the fact that though Dhanya Manikya once extended his territory upto Chittagong, yet he could not hold this occupied land within his control.

All these lands, subsequently, were captured by the Sultan's force and the Tripura army had to retreat on the bank of the river Gumti. A few days after when Dhanya Manikya re-occupied Chittagong, the force of Hussain Shah again compelled the Tripura army to retreat. However, the Tripura army subsequently, were able to force the enemy back to a little distance at Chhgaria Durga.

#### References

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6. P. Sensharma (Major), *The Military History of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 111.
7. Sushila, Mandal, *History of Bengal*, Part-I, Calcutta, 1970,p.-221.
8. E. F. Sandys, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
9. R. C. Majumdar, *Bangla Deser Itihash* Calcutta, 1968, p.84.
10. Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay, *op. cit.* p. 325.
11. Kaliprasanna Sen, *Rajmala* (in Bengali), Vol. II, p. 127.
12. *J. A. S. B.*, Vol. XIX. p. 543.
13. According to *Rajmala*, the river Changanga originated from the eastern side and united with river Gumti.
14. Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay, *op. cit.*, p. 323.
15. *J. A. S. B.*, Vol XIX, p. 544.
16. Kaliprasanna Sengupta, *Pancha Manikya* (in Bengali), Agartala, 1351 T. E., p. 20.
17. *J. A. S. B.*, Vol. XII, p. 333.
18. Chand N. Das (Maj. Gen.), *Traditions and customs of the Indian Armed Forces*, New Delhi, 1984, p. 417.
19. Kaliprasanna Sen, *Rajmala* (in Bengali), Vol. II, p. 123.
20. We have no authentic document to testify the accuracy of the above statement because fire-arms were used in Indian history, perhpas, in the first battle of Panipath (1526 AD) and not earlier, However, the cannon placed at Kaman Chowmohani of Agartala town (believed to be Hussain Shah's cannon) has no mark or writing on it.
21. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. VI, Delhi, 1973, p. 466.