



## Tripura - At a Glance of Naval and Maritime Historical Concern

Dr.Nirmal Bhadra

Associate Professor

Swami Vivekananda Mahavidyalaya

Mohanpur, Tripura, India

This paper studies about the naval expeditions, trade and commerce of Tripura in connection with the Maritime history of the state from the extreme part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the British rule in India. It also attempts to make a focus of study on the consequences of the influx of naval expeditions made by the kings of Tripura as well as by the colonial imperialism.

It is really a difficult job to discuss the maritime history of Tripura throughout the ages because of the great scarcity of data in this regard. Accounts written by some colonial writers on North East India and some Annual Administrative Reports of the British Political Agents of the British Government stationed in Tripura almost no reliable information given in this regard. 'Rajmala' the main source of the history of Tripura is confined the life of the kings of the state and the different political events during their reign. However, K. C. Singha and K. P. Sen two writers of Rajmala and W. W. Hunter a colonial writer did try to give some indication in this regard, but there was no strong presentation in their accounts. It is unfortunate that scholars' attention has not been focuses on these appeals. Now present work aims at unraveling the myth.

If we to pay attention to carefully observe the geographical location of Tripura, we can find that the present state Tripura is located between the parallels of 22° 56" and 24°32" north latitudes; and between 91° 10" and 92° 21" east longitudes. The state is bounded in the north, west, south and southeast by the international boundary of Bangladesh. The geographical continuity with the Indian mainland is maintained only by the northeast where the state has a common boundary with the Karimganj Sub-division of the Cachar district in Assam and Kotasib and Mamit district of Mizoram. There is no continuity with any waterway and sea route. The Bay of Bengal is near about 60 to 80 kilometers far away from the extreme south point of the state.

However, Tripura is a state of great antiquity. It was a princely state and it claims to have its existence since about 3000 BC<sup>1</sup>. In the present time, some of the analysts have given some exceptional facts about ancient history of Tripura state. Among them, Prof. R. K. Dey has commented that from the very beginning Tripura state lacked political starts. It also did not have any specified boundary. From 507B.C up to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the plain land of the southwest Part of Tripura was under the rule of some Hindu dynasties. Among them, the main were the Guptas, Nathas, Ratas, Chandras, the Buddhist dynasty of Khadgas Vermans, Pattikaras, and Devas of Srihatta. Therefore, in 1257 due to the Muslim invasion and decline of the Deva dynasty in the East Bengal, the less powerful Tipra or present Tripura unified the plane lands of the West and the hilly region to the state of Tripura<sup>2</sup>. On the basis of this opinion it can be concluded that the royal family of Tripura originated from North India from regions like Sundarban in West Bengal, Brahmaputra Valley, Barak Valley and then to various places in present Bangladesh like Syleth, Comilla, Chattagram, Noakhali etc., which comprised very near of see side.

For all divided ideas and explanations, the historians have different opinions regarding the origin of the naming of the state Tripura. Among all these, one concept of K.C. Singha is to some extent, acceptable by the learned men, which says that the word Tripura has derived from the two words Tui and Pra. In Tripura language or Kok-borok language, the word Tui means water and Pra means nearest place, i.e, the word tui and pra is mingled to form the word "Tuipra" which gradually changed to form the word "Tripura"<sup>3</sup>. Practically if we analyze the history of Tripura then we would see that, once the boundaries of Tripura extended up to the Aarakan starting from the Bay of Bengal<sup>4</sup>. As a result, the denizens of those areas thought Tripura to be their state. Thus with the passage of time, the word, Tripura changed to from the word "Tripura".

On the other hand W.W., Hunter, had mentioned in his accounts that 'Chittagong originally formed a part of the once extensive independent Hindu kingdom of Tipperah ; but prior to its conquest by the Mohamadans, it had frequently change masters. It lay on the disputed frontier between the Hinduism of Bengal and the Buddhisam of Burmah and formed a source of chronic feud between the Hindu king of Tripura and the Buddhist king of Arakan<sup>5</sup>'.

Maharaja Dhannya Manikya (1490-1520) was one of the greatest kings of Tripura. It was during his reign that Tripura became free from all sorts of chaos and corruption, and the foundation of the administrative system of the state of Tripura has strengthened. During this time, Tripura has connected with Burma in the East<sup>6</sup>. It was during his time that Tripuras boundary extended up to Bangladesh and Arakan. The remarkable event during his reign took place in the year 1513, when he defeated and banished the Sultan of Bengal, Hussain Shah, and conquered Chittagong<sup>7</sup>. But soon, taking the advantage of weakness in the administrative system of Tripura, Nasrat Shah, Son of Hussain Shah, caused the soldiers of Tripura to go away from Chittagong<sup>8</sup>.

. However, Bijoy Manikya, was a very clever and powerful king. During his reign, peace was restored in Tripura and the state reached the height of its glory. At the time of his reign, the state extended from the borders of Arakan to the banks of the Ganges<sup>9</sup>. Along with this, he was the contemporary of the Mughal emperor Akbar (1556-1605). Information regarding the reign of Bijoy Manikya has mentioned in the Ain-i-Akbari where it is said, "Adjoining Bhati is an extensive tract of territory inhabited by the Tipperah Tribes. The name of the ruler is Bijoy Manikya whoever obtains the chieftainship bears the title Manikya after his name and the nobles that of Narayan. He had a force of two hundred thousand footmen and a thousand elephants. Horses are scarce<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand in describing Ralf Fitch and Abul Fazal, it is said that Bijoy Manickya's territory included the whole of Tripura, Nowakhali, Chattogram and South east part of Sylhet district during his reign<sup>11</sup>.

After Bijoy Manikya it was very tough to control over Chattagram. During this time under discussion, Chattagram became a prestigious place for the kings of Tripura, Arakan and Sultans of Bengal. Finally, Amar Manikya (1577-85), brother of Bijoy Manikya regained the power and took total control over Chattagram<sup>12</sup>. Amar Manikya was the one to make the last attempt to protect his kingdom from Muslim invaders. He also, to some extent, built up resistance against the Muslim in Gaur. He also made a strong naval contingent. He was successful to some extent in making Tripura again powerful by suppressing the Zamindars at Gaur and the kings at Arakan<sup>13</sup>. But taking the advantage of disunity among the sons of Amar Maniky, the Moghs of Arakan attacked Tripura, further weakened the kingdom, and recaptured on the Chittagong. With this, the naval expedition of Tripura finally ended and Chittagong became the legendary of Tripura.

The maritime Trade and commerce of Tripura had been made on the sea routes of Chittagong and Kolkata port. Rivers of Tripura and Bengal like Feni, Meghna, Karnaphuli, Gomati, Padma, Ganga etc were the main river way which connect the state by Bay of Bengal<sup>14</sup>. The peculiar advantages that Chittagong possessed enabled it to command in early times almost the entire trade of Bengal. The port afforded easy access and safe anchorage to ships of 20 feet draught, while its proximity to the river Meghna gave ready communication with all the country traversed by the Ganga and Brahmaputra. The growth of the European settlements on the Hugli attracted the trade of Bengal from the eastern to the western corner of the Bay of Bengal and Chittagong, which had gained from the Portuguese merchants who trading- place into comparative insignificance<sup>15</sup>.

Before the 17<sup>th</sup> century the reputation of trade and commerce of Tripura were spread in foreign countries. Along, with the foreign businesspersons there was another class of businesspersons in the state. As per the writing of the French traveler, Tavernier gold was exported from Tripura to China and in exchange, silver was imported from China to this country<sup>16</sup>. Tavernier has reported to say that during his journey from Patna to Delhi for the period from 1640 to 1666 there were businesspersons from Tripura doing business in those regions. He found them specially buying things like carol, yellow amber, tortoise shells, seashell, and bran lets etc<sup>17</sup>.

It is further known from “Rajmala” that Maharaja Vijoy Manikya (1532-63) brought some Goldsmiths, Blacksmiths, Bronze smith etc from outside. These artisans brought about development of these crafts. As a result, iron made materials as Chopper, sickle, paddle, spade, axe, katari, takwal etc began to be produced in this state. Besides the things of domestic necessity and define materials such as spear, sward etc were also produced here<sup>18</sup>. However, there was no existence of these things in nineteenth century Tripura. Because during this time the tribes of the hills of Tripura obtained all their necessary things of daily use such as earthenware, Brass materials, silver ornaments from the markets of adjacent British district<sup>19</sup>.

An important aspect of the crafts of Tripura is the use handloom and spinning wheel. K. P. Sen highly praised the skills of the tribes of Tripura for their excellence in these crafts. According to him, the tribal women of the hills of Tripura have shown great skill in this job of weaving. He further said that the reputation of this weaving industry transcended the limit of the royal family and reached everywhere inside and outside the state as well as the European countries.<sup>20</sup> However, the position of weaving industry in this state was very high. Dress like prachury, chaddar, dubra, ‘Kachali’, Ria etc were generally woven by the tribes of Tripura which was exported to the markets of Bengal and western countries<sup>21</sup>.

However, imports to Tripura in the nineteenth century included salt, cloth, molasses, vegetables, dried fish, fancy goods, European tiger, ganja, opium, earthen pots, onion, and all sorts of manufactured goods, piece of goods, hardware, and sugar etc<sup>22</sup>. Since the 1880’s brass articles, kerosene etc also began to be imported. In the last decade of the nineteenth century the import from European made goods were especially fancy goods and cloths increased significantly. At this time, these articles began to enter into the interior of the hills of Tripura as the demand of these goods increased there. These articles came to Tripura via from places like Calcutta port, Chittagong port, Dacca, Narayanganj, and Brahmanbaria<sup>23</sup>. Chief among the exports were Karpas, cotton, til (an oil seed), various forest products like cane, bamboo, poeries (cloth carpet) elephants, charcoal, mats, occasionally rice, garjan oil, honeyetc<sup>24</sup>. Needles to say that, the epicenter of this exportation was the sea route of Bay of Bengal Via chittagong and kolkata port. Besides these, the people belonging to the Reang and Chakma clan made a kind of boat called ‘kunda’ and ‘tong’. These boats were sent to places like Tipperah, Noakhali and Chittagang of the-then British Bengal through the river Feni. <sup>25</sup>.

Due to Industrial Revolution in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was drastic change in the policy of British Government in India. The British wanted much more control over resources in India. Much capital was soughed to develop infrastructure in the form of railway etc. They began to extract more revenue from the local chiefs at the cost of native’s wasteland. Forest minds has brought under controlled. This slaps were incasing of Tripura, which was practice by them via Chittagong port.

In the Amlighat region of present Sabroom subdivision of Tripura there was a ferry toll station on the fenny river. It was the toll station this tax was collected on the forest produces that passed through this river. Now this river was on the border of the state with Chittagong district of British Bengal. Consequently, in 1874 the British Government demanded share of the revenue collected at this ghat<sup>26</sup>. The British Government was given a 6 Anna (37.50 pice) share of the revenue. Two officers, one from the state of Tripura and one from the British Bengal, were appointed to supervise the collection of revenue from this toll station. Later on in 1886 the sole responsibility of collection of this revenue went to the hands of the British Government. However, the 10 ana share of the king of Tripura has sent to him<sup>27</sup>.

According to Kailas Chandra Singha the writer and an eminent historian of ancient Tripura the people from Fisherman community of Tripura had originated from the Dravidian clean of South India. Singha also describe that, this people at first eradicate the Chandelles the lion part Bengali people of Tripura to the eastward from the south. However, at one time the fisherman community, originated from the Dravidian clean silently migrated to the Bengal and Tripura for searching better fish field of sweet water<sup>28</sup>. There is no doubt that the way of such migration had made throughout the Bay of Bengal.

During the Arakan period Chittagong has become an area of Portuguese, because the Arakani king was very much fan of such people for his administration and naval activities. The Raja favour rehabilitation to this Portuguese from Goa, Cochin, Malacca etc<sup>29</sup>. However, Merriam Nagar, which is located at a little distance from Agartala state capital of Tripura, there are some people who are of Portuguese origin. They came to Tripura in the ancient time<sup>57</sup>. During the time of Amar Manikya (1577-85), some Portuguese came to work in the naval army of the king. In the nineteenth century, they were earning their livelihood by settling down in permanent agriculture<sup>30</sup>. K. C. Singha has described them as equivalent to the Bengalese. This is because, though they were of Portuguese origin, yet they are leading the lifestyle of the Bengalese and are following the heritage and pattern of the Bengalese<sup>31</sup>.

Tea industry developed widely in Tripura in the 1920's, but it was not possible for both the Bengalis and the tribes of Tripura to work in tea garden and take part in production of tea. This was because neither the Bengalis nor the tribes of the hills were acquainted with the work in tea garden. Consequently, to meet the requirement, labourers for tea cultivation were brought from various parts of India, such as Chotanagpur Bihar and Orissa. In course of time, a part of these people crowded in agriculture after leaving work in the tea garden and became the permanent citizens of Tripura<sup>32</sup>. Obviously the roadway of such migration has been made by Bay of Bengal via Kolkata and Chittagong as because there was no road, no rail at all and no communication system in the state during the time under discussion. The only term for communication with the outside world from Agartala was the rainy season. During that time fairly large sized boats could come to Agartala through the river Gomati<sup>33</sup>.

Table: 1

Immigrated Tea laborers in Tripura during 1931 census:

Sl. No.	Name of the Caste/Race	Origin	Number in 1931
1.	Orang	Chata Nagpur	979
2.	Kand	Orissa	667
3.	Kaur	Chata Nagpur	117
4.	Khandayet	Orissa	752
5.	Khaira	Chata Nagpur	113
6.	Gareri	Bihar	58
7.	Turi	Chata Nagpur	139
8.	Naya	Sautal Paragana	37
9.	Nagesia	Chata Nagpur	22
10.	Panki	Orissa/Chata Nagpur	1064
11.	Barayek	Chota Nagpur	28
12.	Birjia	Chota Nagpur	114
13.	Bhuiya	Chota Nagpur	139
14.	Mundi	Chota Nagpur	2058
15.	Lodh	Chota Nagpur	37
16.	Sautal	Sautal Paragana	735
	Total		7056

Source:

1. Debbarma, S., *Census Bibarani*, 1931, pp. 69-75
2. Das, S., *Tripurar Tapashili Yatider Itikhata*, Agartala, 2009, pp. 12, 18, 66, 67

Finally it may be concluded that the North East Indian State Tripura had a chequer history of maritime expedition, migration, Trade and commerce. But in course of time, once an imperial/monarchial state, Tripura has undergone and witnessed many significant historical events. Passing through these events it has boldly faced many blows and accepted the reality of destruction and reconstruction. He has lost his geographical figure with other hands of power

which left some crucial and glorious history. Immunization of Maritime and naval activities in Tripura is legendary.

### Reference:-

1. Directorate of Census Operations Tripura, Agartala, A Portrait of Population, p 1.
2. De, R.K., Report On The Administration Of Tripura State, (1898- 99, 1899-1900, 1943-46) Varanasi, 1997, p. viii.
3. Singha, K.C., Rajmala –ba-Tripurar Itihas, Commilla, 1896, Re-Print, Agartala, 1405, B.S. p.1.
4. Sen., K.P., Sri Rajmala, Vol.-I, Agartala, 1926, Re-Print, 2003. pp 83,84.
5. Hunter, W.W., A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.-VI, London, 1876, Re-print, 1973. p 110
6. Singha, K.C., Op. cit. p. 45.
7. Sen K.P., Op. cit. Vol.-II, p.150.
8. Bhattacharyya, A.C., Progressive Tripura, 1930, Re-Print, New Delhi, 1985.p. 23
9. Deb, C.B., Ancient Tripura and its Modern Rulers, Comilla, 1940, p.1.
10. Fazal Abul, Ain-i-Akbari, Vol.-II, Translated by Jurret and sarkar, Calcutta, 1942, p. 130.
11. Singha, K.C., Op. cit. p. 55.
12. Sen, K.P., Op. cit. Vol.-II, pp. 76, 77.
13. Singha, K.C., Op. cit. pp. 58-60.
14. Chaudhuri, D.K., (ed.), Administration Report Of The Political Agency, Hill Tipperah, (1878-79,--1889-90.), Vol.-II, Agartala, 1996. pp.67, 105.169 & Tripurar Arthanoitik Itihas, Agartala, 2003.. p.61. Also from Cumming, J.G., Survey and Settlement of the Chakla Rosanabad Estate in the District of Trippea and Noakhali, (1892-99), 1907, p.69
15. Hunter, Op. cit. p. 191
16. Sen, K.P., Vol.-II, Op. cit. p.155.
17. Misra, B.P., Socio Economic Adjustment of Tribes, A case study of Tripura Jhumias People's, Delhi, 1976. p.65.
18. Sen, K.P., Vol.-IV, Op. cit. p.149
19. Choudhury, D.K., Tripurar Arthanaitik Itihas, Op. cit. p.61.
20. Sen, K.P., Vol.-IV, Op. cit. pp.116, 117
21. Ibid. Vol.-II, p.153 & Vol.-I, pp.117, 118.
22. Chaudhury, D.K., (ed.), Report, Vol.-II, Op. cit. pp.41, 67,105.
23. Chaudhury, D.K., (ed.), Report, Vol.-II, Op. cit. p.67.& Choudhury, D.K., Tripurar Arthanaitik Itihas, Op. cit. p.61.
24. Chaudhury, D.K., (ed.), Report, Vol.-II, Op. cit. pp.67, 105
25. Cumming, J.G., Survey and Settlement of the Chakla Rosanabad Estate in the District of Trippea and Noakhali, (1892-99), 1907.p.69
26. Chaudhury, D.K., (ed.), Report, Vol.-I, Op. cit. pp.68, 69.

27. Choudhury, D.K., Tripurar Arthanaitik Itihas, Op. cit. p.46.
28. Singha, K.C., Op. cit. pp.233,234
29. Hunter, Op. cit. p. 111
30. Sen., K.P., Op. cit. Vol.-IV, pp.191,192.
31. Singha, K.C., Op. cit. p. 8.
32. Bhattacharjee, P.N., & Singh, R.G., Tea Plantation and The Tribes of Tripura, Agartala, 1995.pp. 28, 40, 42.44
33. Chaudhury, D.K., (ed.), Report, Vol.-I, Op. cit. p.53.

