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 ijirset@gmail.com

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Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya (1923-1947)- An Architect of Modern Tripura

Ramen Debbarma

M.A in History, Pondicherry University (A central University), SLET qualified, RET qualified (Research Eligibility Test, Tripura University), India

ABSTRACT: - Manikya dynasty bestowed the political institution of monarchy in Tripura. Subsequently, Tripura witness the reign of 184 monarchs passing through a vicissitudes of socio-cultural, economic and political transaction. Bir Bikram Manikya, the 184th monarch, is to initial modernization of Tripura. This paper entitled “Bir Bikram Manikya – an architect of modern Tripura, navigates and explores the challenges, initiatives and the contemporary environment. To substantiate this modernization, it is paramount to decode the nature of relation and wave of social issue. The inroads of British administration in Tripura ramified the royal house of Tripura for modernization and westernization.

KEYWORDS: - Manikyadynasty Modernization social Reformation, Development and consolidation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tripura an ancient princely states, reflects a kaleidoscope of composite cultures and vicissitudes of history. It is a miniscule landlocked state located in north-eastern part of India, shares frontier with the states of Assam and Mizoram, flanked on the south, north and west by Bangladesh.

The history of Tripura, so far as it is written, begins with the settlement of yayati's exiled son Druhya¹. The Kings of Tripura attach this ancestral link with the lunar dynasty, which had its capital in the north-eastern part of India. The early history of Tripura is essentially the history of a few scattered regional chieftainships in a sylvan environment. The Tripura dynasty assumed supremacy and the continuous history of this tract begins.

Ratna Pha assumed the title of Manikya, an honorary title conferred upon by the sultan of Bengal, and his successor continued. Tripura witnessed the reign of 184 kings and passed through vicissitudes of developments.

“The historic battle of Phassey on 23 June 1757 between Siraj-Ud- Daula and the East India Company marked the beginning of a new era to the whole of India including Tripura². This new phase of political development proved conducive and amicable for the Manikya rulers to embark welfare oriented policies and new political alignment.

The kings of Tripura now abandoned the policy of opposing the British and adopted the policy of making the British an ally. It is not certain when the process of acculturation began. It seems to be reasonable to suppose that the process of Sanskritization began occurring to the geographical proximity to Bengal.

Historians assert that depercolation of British administration ramified the Manikya dynasty to implement social welfare policies and embark the path of modernization. The Rajas of Tripura came in contact with the British here as a result of the cession of Chittagong by Nawab-Mir-Quasim to the East India Company³.

Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, the second son of Maharaja Birendra Kishore, was only fifteen years old when his father died. He succeeded to the throne at the age of fifteen and was, therefore, too young to administer. The first period of his reign till 1927 and reflects the ideas of his ministers. In the second, the King's strength of character and foresight are exerted. The third beginning about 1933 is a period of turmoil caused by the Great World War⁴.

Bir Bikram Manikya earned the epithet “Architect of modern Tripura”. This reign is marked by reformation, growth and development of the state, and transition from archaic to modernity. After accession to the throne, he devoted himself in right earnest to all round improvement of the state, and from the many-sided activities initiated by him it became apparent that his highness had not only keenly watched the work of the administration council but also acquired through knowledge of the minute details of administration⁵.

He was also appointed to be a Knight Commander of the most exalted order of the Star of India. On 19 Shrawan 1351 Tripura era (4 August, 1941) Maharaja Bir Bikram attended a meeting of the standing committee of the Chamber of Princes held in Bombay. In January 1946, the British government honoured Maharaja Bir Bikram with the distinguished title of Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire.



Objective:-

1. To study and decode modernization process of Tripura.
2. To explore and dissect aspects of development and growth.
3. To analyze and understand significant contribution and patronage of Bir Bikram Manikya.
4. To highlight and re-position socio cultural and political reforms of Bir Bikram Manikya.
5. To navigate and reconstruct the dynamics and milieu of early 20th century.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A very scanty work has been done till now pertaining to modernization efforts of Bir Bikram Manikya, few important sources and literature assisted a great deal in reconstructing and exploring trades of Bir Bikram Manikya. Jagadish Gan Choudhary “Constitutional History of Tripura” sheds light on the socio- political milieu and presents a vivid details, Apurba Chandra “ progressive Tripura” furnish a great deal of information. Also a number of articles and literature have been resorted in the completion of this paper.

Steps undertaken by Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya Bahadur Debbarman:-

Military Reforms:-

After assumption of the throne, Bir Bikram Manikya reorganized the state army and took prompt steps to attract young men of merit and ability to the state military service. He also sent batches of officers and men to 18th Gurakha rifles at Shillong and on their return the Maharaja appointed them to position of responsibility. A graded service was introduced with bright future prospects and the military barracks were removed to a hillock near the Kunjaban garden palace where an up to date cantonment was built⁶.

As a result of the personal interest of the monarch, the military department of the state made great progress within a very short frame of time.

Education and public Instruction:-

Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya also laid strong emphasis on the improvement and development of education. He took early measures to make education as broad based and comprehensive as possible. He also introduced “Vidya pattan” plan for universalisation of education and laid the foundation stone of the Maharaja Manikya College building on 7th May 1937. Tols, maktahs and madrasas received increased grants and should grant inputs to growth. With a view to encouraging learning, he also introduced numerous scholarship, stipends and prizes and initiated measures for recruitment of members of the civil services from state scholarship⁷. By an order dated 20 Bhadra T.E. (Aug,1934) the king desired to make primary education compulsory for all categories of schools.

Industry and commerce:-

Industry and commerce are important parameters of economic growth. Economic growths are pre- requisite to fuel and finance the process of modernization. Bir Bikram Manikya separated from general administration the department of industry and commerce to increase its efficiency. He also invented various means for the development of cotton, kapok, oil seeds, tobacco, and export of other products for the purpose of extensive propaganda and to popularize the state products among Indians. The industrial department in collaboration with the state agriculture department opened a stall in the Calcutta congress exhibition of 1929, in charge of the agriculture officer of the state. All these initiatives and policies gave a great impetus to trade and commerce.

Agriculture Department:-

Bir Bikram Manikya also reorganized the agricultural department to increase the agricultural productivity and produce surplus.

Following measures were taken up to achieve this target:

1. Introduction of better quality of cotton in jooms, in the hills as also in plains.
2. Introduction of superior quality of paddy in jooms as well as improved varieties of Aman in the plains.
3. Extension of cultivation of superior quality of jute, tobacco, sugarcane and potato crops both in the highland and river valleys.
4. Preservation of manure and use of selected seeds.
5. Circuit lectures against nomadic jooming and in favour of plough cultivation.

Also the department opened an enquiry office in heart of the Agartala Bazaar to furnish people with all information regarding agriculture operation, seeds, appliances, plants and cattle diseases⁸.

Reform in Banking:-

Bir Bikram Manikya, for proper and timely financing of industry and trade, asked his councilors to form a scheme for starting a state bank. By a royal proclamation, Tripura state bank was established on 4th, July, 1934. Maharaja Bir Bikram authorized the establishment of the bank and directed it to function along European lines.

Social Reforms:-

The monarch, resonated progressive ideas and inclined towards social reforms, he disapprove orthodox practices and worked earnestly for the removal of evil customs which prevailed among the hill tribes.

Constitutional Reform:-

By a declaration dated Baishak 1349 Tripura era (14 April, 1939), Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya assured to take effective steps to adopt, enact and give to his subjects a written constitution. It took two years to draft the constitution. The King gave his asset to it. On 20 Ashar 1351 Tripura era (July 1941). It came into effect from 1 Sruvan 1351 Tripura era (July 1941). The constitution contained provision for the Composition of Privy Council, legislative Assembly cabinet, village council and the like¹⁰.

Reform in Village administration:-

The ancient Indian tradition of village administration and justice through a small body of elders was present in Tripura also. But in course of time, it became almost defunct and desultory. Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya came forward to reform and reorganizes it. In June 1940, the king had given assent to an Act which came to be known as Tripura state Village mandali act, 1350 Tripura era. It set the standard for state formation of village union and village board based on adult franchise. The Act outlined the functions and powers of the boards.

Development of Transport and Communication Network:-

Transport and communication network are quintessential for connectivity, transportation, mobility and development. Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya, a visionary and progressive monarch, played a significant role and enhanced on multitudes of spectrum to bolster transport and communication network. The Agartala airport was built in 1942 and many roads were improved to augment transport system. The monarch also sanctioned a scheme for the constitution of a light railway within the state and requested Messrs Martin and co to take up the work.

❖ Challenges Faced by Bir Bikram Manikya:-

i. Acute political Crises:-

The outbreak of the world war impaired the evolution of the state and compelled the monarch to stress on military reform. As a result of the World War II, the Japanese air raid on Agartala airport took place on 20th November 1943. Agartala became a heritable Warfield. Hundreds of British, Indian and Negro soldiers camped in an around Agartala. Tripura troops were sent by Maharaja to Chittagong hill tract, Arakan and Burma to cooperate with British Indian troops in checking the Japanese advance.

ii. Riang Unrest:-

A movement began among the Riang community. A number of factors had combined to induce these people. Khagendra Choudhary, the head of the Riang community, selfishness and exploitation combined with scarcity of food and Bengal Famine were the prime factor for Riang unrest. Tacit diplomacy and swift mobilization of defence personal proved effective in controlling Riang unrest.

iii. War- induced inflation and famines:-

The year 1940 was eventful. The repercussion of the Great War was felt in the distant land of Tripura also. Price of essential commodities rose higher and higher. By an order dated 18 Magh, 1349 Tripura era (February, 1940) a committee of nine members was formed to take precaution against abnormal price rise.



III. CONCLUSION

From the above, it is to be noted that Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya was a visionary, progressive and illustration monarch of the Manikya dynasty. He endorsed and followed inclusiveness and religious tolerance policy. He also initiated a myriad of policies, schemes and reforms to spread western education, eradicate social evils, consolidate Anglo Tripura relation and modernize the state on the western lines .He aptly deserved and earned the epithet “Architect of modern Tripura”.

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