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# Decode the Social Conditions of Tripura in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century- A Historical Analysis

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**ABSTRACT:** Social contour exhibited social osmosis as results of assimilation Aryanization and percolation of western norms. During early 19<sup>th</sup> century India stood in threshold of transition from regressive to progressive, conservative to inclusive and fragmented to unified. Tripura, in this context, marred with illiteracy, slave system, male chauvinism, gender inequality and religious dogma deviated from the broad spectrum of social welfare and ethos. Ramified by the social reforms concurrent to the Manikya dynasty, the ruling house also adopted initiatives to iron out social vices and trailblazers social filtration. Tipperah community provided monarchy for the people of Tripura. A succession of more than one hundred kings constituted a rich tradition of monarchy.<sup>1</sup> It is paramount to decode and deliberate on how Manikya dynasty manifested social reforms and developed social infrastructure. Tripura in the nineteenth century reflected assimilated society, confluences of cultures and a paradigm shift. This paper is an attempt to reconstruct a holistic picture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Tripura, decode the prevalent social conditions and evaluate the evolution of social framework.

**KEYWORDS:** Social osmosis, Assimilation, Urbanization, Westernization, Regression, Reformation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tripura, a pristine suzerainty of Manikya Dynasty, also sprawls over parts of Assam and Bangladesh. It has passed through vicissitudes. In spite of that, continuity and change constitute the dominant characteristics in the evolution of the society of Tripura. To the Tipra dynasty goes the credit of unifying the hills and the valleys and of continuing their rule up to 1949AD- a fairly long period for a single dynasty. This dynasty passed through vicissitudes but still survived and protected the Kingdom of Tripura.<sup>2</sup>

From the geological, geographical, ethnographical, social and political point of view, Tripura is intimately link to the other parts of India. Socio Religious rites, the modes of production, literature and life pattern of Tripura bears close affinity and same to the other parts of India. It seems to be reasonable to suppose that the process of Sanskritisation began when the Tipra community came down to the Barak valley in Srikatta (-Slyhet).<sup>3</sup> Slyhet was the confluence of the two types of culture, namely the complex culture of the Bengali people and the Tipra people. Adi-Dharma Pha is credited to have initiated the process of acculturation and Sanskritisation. Sanskritisation brought peace, prosperity and national integration and Literacy. The Tipra monarchies started assuming a national character and gradually vouch Hindu cultures, civilization, language and literature.

At a time when the socio-political conditions of Bengal were alarming, Tripura stood as a solid foundation.<sup>4</sup> The Manikya dynasty became ardent champion of Sanathan Dharma. At their behest, Temples were built, Tanks were dug, and Sanskrit books translated to propagate and popularize Sanathan Hinduism. Brahmin was also issued land grants and consequent Sanskritisation. Acculturation in the context of Tripura connotes social mobility process through the medium of Sanskritisation and Westernizations. Sanskritisation occurred in those castes which enjoyed political and economic power but were not rated high in ritual, i.e., there was a gap between their ritual and politico economic positions.<sup>5</sup> Along with Sanskritisation, the process of Westernizations has also ramified social conditions.

## II. OBJECTIVE

1. To study and understand social milieu and dynamics of Tripura.
2. To reconstruct and analyses traits of social conditions.
3. To navigate and explore facades of society and implications.
4. To highlight and encapsulates social reform and associated progressiveness.
5. To decode and dissect multiples spectrum of social development.

### III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As a result of paucity of related literary sources,, only a paltry number of literature were referred in the process. Mostly secondary data were used barring few primary data. It is significant to mention few prolific literatures namely a constitutional history of Tripura by Jagdish Gan Choudhury, Progressive Tripura by A P Bhattacharjee etc.

### IV. COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS

#### **A.Religion:-**

Religion is referred to as a system of beliefs, practices and values concerned with the sacred.<sup>6</sup> Although the Manikya dynasty advocated Sanathan Hinduism, the people of Tripura particularly The Tripuri people were animist in nature. The kings of Tripura had their guardian deities called Chi-BwrwiMwtai or Chaudda devata. Their name are hara,Uhari,ma,bani,kumar,ganapa,bidhi,kha,abdi,ganga,sikhi,kamaand himadri. The worship of fourteen deities was a focusing point of unity in diversity.<sup>7</sup> The Kings of Tripura followed a policy of religious tolerance and uphold the principles of Secularism. Also generously extended patronage to Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. At the behest of the Manikya dynasty, tanks were dug, Hindu temples were built and Sanskrit books were translated. Brahmins were offered lands for settlements and consequent Sanskritisation.

Wathop ritual and worship were central to the religious practice of the people of Tripura. A cross made of two vertical bamboos tied on an elongated structure constituted Wathop. There are annual rituals of Nok Khamani (a ritual of home protection against evil deities) and community village protection rituals known as Ker.<sup>8</sup> Indigenous pantheons also assimilated, absorbed and inducted into fore fold of Aryanised Hindu Pantheon.

#### **B. Norms of the social system:-**

The people of the Tripura followed patriarchy (male hegemony) and patrilineal norms, patronymic were also in vogue. Although the kings of Tripura followed Sanathan Hinduism and were cultured to sanskritisation, caste system was shallow and out of context in Tripura. The people of Tripura are patriarchal in their lineage. In earlier period, the right to inheritance was from a father to a son or sons. Though daughters are not yet treated on fully equal terms with sons in matters of property. The two thirds of a man's property go to his sons while the rest is shared by his widow and daughter or daughters. After the death of the widow, her share goes to her son or daughters where he stayed before her death.

Primogeniture was the criteria for accession to the throne but in certain cases owing to elder son luscious and lackluster younger son ascended to the throne by the will of the Monarch or support of the court members.

#### **C. Conditions of womenfolk's:-**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, woman folks were not at equal terms or at par with men folk. Daughters were deprived and not entitled to the right to inherit a Father property or will. Although each tipperah village was self governing. Women had no membership in the village panchayat.<sup>9</sup> The political rights and aspirations were overshadowed by Patriarchy. The Tipperah royal family was a patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal and polygynous family. Primogeniture was not open for women. Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had low literacy rate. This low literacy rate is attributed to inadequate social infrastructure, family priorities and norms of the society. Several social evils practices such as the practice of slavery, child marriage, sati and polygamy had impaired women's welfare.

#### **D. Institution of Marriage:-**

The people of Tripura followed monogamy and polygamy. Endogamy and exogamy were in vogue and contain social connotations.Rajdhar Manikya, the King Of Tripura, tied nuptial knot to a Princess of Manipur. At Agartala the King gave his Harisheshwari in marriage to rajdhar Manikya.<sup>10</sup> Most of the Zamindars, Affluent families and Royal families practiced Polygamy, polyandry was not followed in Tripura. Among the Tripuri community, there are two types of Marriage Hiknamani and kajjakmani. The first one is by mutual consent. The Second one is a negotiated and love marriage where the parents play major roles.

#### **E. Social Organization:-**

Each of the Tripuri branches had its own elementary social and administrative organization starting from the village level to the chieftainship of the tribe. They exercised their traditional autonomy essential to progressive society. The village council was an important organization in the social life of the Tripuris. The council had the power to resolve



serious issues like land disputes, breaches of customs, harassment of women, and marriage problems. Thus, the indigenous people of Tripura had evolved their own system of local government much before the modern panchayat system was formed.

#### **F. Hasham Bhojan:-**

The practice of organizing an annual royal feast at the capital was known as Asha Bhojan or Hasham Bhojan. All the tribal chiefs and headmen would be invited and entertained once a year at the time Of Durga puja in the month of October. It was a grand occasion of dialogues between the Kings and the subjects. The chiefs and headmen would get an opportunity to ventilate their grievances and to seek redress. The kings also would get the opportunity of enumerating the number of families of each tribe and collect the house tax. It was a master stroke of strategy.

#### **G. Taitoon, Begar and Lahar:-**

There was a provision to provide food, lodging and transport free of cost for the employees of the king while moving from one place to another. It was known as Taitoon, Lahar and Begar. What was Taitoon and Lahar in the hills was Begar in the plains. Roads and communications were very poor, primitive, tedious and risky. Under the system, the employees on journey could halt in the house of a village headman; he would provide food and lodging for one night; and the headman used to direct a young man carry the luggage of the employee to the next village. Lahar means the service of clearing jungles and creepers along the path free of cost.

#### **H. Demographic composition:-**

The people of Tripura, during the rule of royal Tripura dynasty comprised of mainly 5 (five clans, originated from one common stock, the mogoloid family- Tibeto Burman. The five stars symbolism in the Royal Coat of Arms had the significance of ‘Pancha –Tripura’ and their mutual understanding, active participation in administration, unity, solidarity of the people of -1. Tripuris, 2. Reangs, 3. Jamatias, 4. Noatias and 5. Halams (all clans) were instrumental in the consolidation and p[rogress of the state. At the behest of the King., A substantial population of Hindu Bengalis also settled down in Tripura. As an entourage to the princess of Manipur, a sizeable population of Manipuri Meitei domiciled in the Kingdom.

#### **I. Education:-**

Most of the populations were pre literate and had poor access to Education. Education infrastructure were inadequate and paltry, institute of knowledge were open for Royal families and elites of the society. There are two schools in the state supported by the Rajah. That at Agartala is conducted on the same principles as our Zillah schools; two masters teach English, and two Bengalese and Sanskrit. It musters between thirty and forty scholars, many of whom belongs to the Rajah’s family (his sons do not attend school, they are being taught privately, and all are learning English; others are sons of men holding office in the state, of Talukdars living in the vicinity, and others. One or two Mahomedddan also attend. Nearly all belongs to the better classes.<sup>10</sup> The literacy rate was below 2 %percent and majority of the population were illiterate, while few of the inhabitants of the plains on the border received instructions from village mukhtabs.

#### **J. Feudalism:-**

There is no denying the fact that feudalism developed in princely Tripura in response to a need for defending the kingdom against attacks. Ghar Chukti tax and Taitoon system codified feudalism and exhibited the existence of feudal structure. Feudalism arose as the military organization of a harassed agricultural society; its virtues were martial rather than economic; its vassal and lords were expected to train themselves for war, and be ready at any moments to leave the plough share for the sword.<sup>11</sup>

#### **K. Slave system:-**

During the reign of Manikya dynasty, slavery existed in Tripura and slaves were used for household chores, to protect the Royal family members and to espionage. By a judicial order dated 17 Ashar 1288(july1878) the age old practice of Slavery was abolished<sup>12</sup>.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

In a nutshell, Social gamut and mileu of 19<sup>th</sup> century Tripura was in a transitional phase. All the parameters of society ranging from education to gender equality ameliorated and paved conducive ground for social progress and welfare in the following periods. It is significant to note that the Kings of Tripura adopted reformative mechanism and plethora of



policies to redress the lapses and lacunae; namely the abolition of Sati, slavery and Joolai system. The Monarchs also setup educational institutions and social organizations to ameliorate gender equality and social bindings among different Tribes and populations.

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