



Tribal Movement and its leadership in Tripura: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Tripura was ruled by 184 Kings. During the reign of different kings at different time, the people of Tripura raised their rights and demands but many autocratic rulers exploit their urge and needs. For this reason, revolts and movements has been exaggerated by Tripurites at different phase of time. History of Tripura reveals that many tribal leaders took significant role to fulfill the objectives of the movements. The present paper is focusing on the issues which accentuated the people to raise voice against the-then rulers as well as it will focus on how far the leaders helps to reach to mitigate the problems of needs and expectations of the peoples of Tripura with their initiative and actions.

KEYWORDS

Tribal leadership, Tribal Movement

Tripura is a land that comprises one of the eight northeastern states of India. It is a land locked state. Tripura is surrounded by Bangladesh on the north, south and west side and is linked east side with Assam and Mizoram in the northeast. It has an area of 10,491.69 square kilometer. According to 2011 Census, total population of Tripura is 36, 71,032 and tribal population represents 31 percent of Tripura's population. While discussing the tribal communities of Tripura, a great linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee stated that the people of Tripura termed as 'Kirat'. The tribes or clans which are of Indo- Mongoloid origin mainly belong to the Tibeto- Burman group having their own religious rituals, dialects and customs.

The historical text, 'Rajmala' reveals the origin and the history of Tripura where several movements, revolts of Tripura had been discussed. Tripura is home of 19 tribal communities and generic tribes are also staying in this land they are designated as Scheduled Tribes (STs). They numbered 11, 66,813 in the census of 2011. These nineteen tribal communities are Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Halam, Noatia, Mog, Kuki, Munda, Garoo, Lushai, Orang, Santal, Uchai, Khasia, Bhil, Lepcha, Bhutia and Chaimal. The erstwhile princely State of Tripura merged with the Indian Union after independence on the 15th October 1949 and became a Union Territory without a legislature with effect from November 1, 1956 and a popular ministry was installed in Tripura on July 1, 1963. Tripura became a full- fledged State on the 21st January, 1972.

During the reign of different kings at different points of time, the people of Tripura jointly raised their rights and demands but many autocratic rulers exploit their expectations, urge and needs.. The socio- political aspect of Tripura related to movements, revolts and raid becomes serious issues with the changing phases of time.

The present paper deals with the issues of accentuation of the people to raise voice against the-then rulers and how far the leaders helps to reach to mitigate the problems of needs and expectations of the peoples of Tripura with their initiative and actions.

Movement is a non- aggressive, non- violent scope of mutual understanding oriented towards maximum needs of the mass against the persisting system with a series of actions and events to foster a principle or policy over a certain period of time. Movement occurs when exploitation level of the general masses remains very high from their regulating authority. Out of different types of movement, the people of Tripura mainly

organized socio- political movements. A social movement in the area of politics can be organized around a single issue or set of issues, or around a set of shared concerns of a single group. A political movement is a social group which operates together to obtain a political goal. A different type of political movement occurs i.e. local, regional, national and international level.

On the contrary, revolt is comparatively violent in nature, which is not negotiable and they want to change the persisting system raising aggressive voice against the system. Here mass participation may be comparatively below the expected level of maximum support. No movement is successful without a proper and qualitative leadership. History of Tripura reveals that many tribal leaders took significant role to fulfill the objectives of the movements. Side by side, a proper leadership always focuses the needs and expectations of the people and the success of the movement depends on leaders' initiative and actions.

The area of Tripura constituted of Sylhet (presently a province of Bangladesh), Comilla (presently a province of Bangladesh), Chattagram (presently hill tracks of Chittagong and Chittagong province of Bangladesh), Cachar and Karimganj district of Assam state- which also marked along with Chakla Roshanabad. But, the hilly area of present Tripura always remained isolated from the British rule and was under the regime of the Monarchy of Tripura. Various revolts and movements had been taken place in the history of Tripura, some of them are- Kuki Raid (1860), Jamatia Revolt (1863), Swadeshi Movement (1905), Reang Revolt (1942-43), Jana Siksha Movement (1945) and Lushai Reform Movement (1946-47)

Kuki Raid (1860): While describing about the movements and revolts of this part Tripura, many of the writers, commented that the Kukis were by nature real exploiters of general people, but Nalini Ranjan Roychoudhury stated that, "It may be incorrect to view the raids of 1860-61 merely as one of the many tribal uprisings." The people of Tripura faced the chronic problem of Kuki raid from 1836 to 1860 and afterwards.

The Kukis' committed major raids in different time, from the period of Maharaja Krishna Kishor Manikya where he had not given any effective assistance to their demands and even Kukis never places any demand before the king as they were not the part of his territory and jurisdiction. The king wanted to protect the Hilly Tripura so he recommended immediately having an independent chief who would control the part of Tripura. In this context, he handed over the power of independent chieftainship to Ramkanoo Thakur in 1836." In July 1836, Ramkanoo Thakur,

a relative of the Raja, at the head of a group of Mogs, Chakmas, Kukis and Tipperahs, numbering some three or four hundred men, attacked the homestead of Meroki Chaudri, a substantial land owner of Kundul, in Zillah Tipperah, killed fifteen persons, wounded others, plundered the premises, and burnt them to the ground."

On 16 April 1844 a group of Kukis under the leadership of Lalchokla, committed a large scale massacre at the Manipuri village of Kochabari in Pratapgarh, Sylhet. Krishna Manikya's attempt to punish the raider was ludicrous. At last an expedition sent on 1st December 1844 against the raiders under the leadership of Blackwood was successful to arrest Lalchokla. Such types of attacks and atrocities were regular concern for Kukis. They used to come down and attack the villages in the plains, kill villagers and take their heads particularly on the occasion of death of a chief, or especially during the time of Magh, Vasant Sripanchami. In the late 1849, Kuki came down in the plain areas of Chittagong and Cachar and attacked the villagers.

The various historical factors which induced the Kukis to burst upon Tripura show that there were all the ingredients of a full-scale rebellion against the oppressive feudal rule of the Tripura king. The 1860s saw an extended series of raids in Tripura. In January 1860, in Chittagong, the frontier town of eastern India, 400 or 500 Kukis were massed at the mouth bank of the river Fenny where they had burnt down many villages and killed a few people in the area. Then they "burst into the plains of Tipperah at Chagulneyah, burnt or plundered 15 villages, butchered 185 British subjects and carried off about 100 captives."

The Kukis attacked and carried away gold, silver and iron. Troops and police were dispatched immediately by the district magistrate of Tripura, but the Kukis already had withdrawn to the hills and jungles after one or two days in the plains. The raiders were believed to be under the command of Rutton Poea. Isanchandra Manikya and his Minister Guru Bipin Bihari were unable to stop the raid taken place in this part of Chakla Roshanabad also shows their lacking ability. The British authority then came forward to help the villagers, providing them financial assistance of Rs. 13,700/- (thirteen thousand seven hundred rupees) and the king also had to pay half of the amount. After the incident, the main aim of the British military expedition to punish the offending tribes. In January 1861 a sizeable military contingent under Captain Rabon was sent against Rutton Polya's village. January 1861 a sizeable military contingent under Captain Rabon was sent against Rutton Polya's village. On its approach, the Kukis themselves set fire to the place and vanished into the jungles. Their losses were heavy: the English force destroyed about 15 hundred maunds of paddy. At the very time that this expedition was mounted a large body of Kukis accompanied by Reangs made a fierce attack on Udaipur, the old capital of Tripura, killed about 150 persons, kidnapped about 200 ladies and girls and many plundered things, even put into ashes, a few villages of Chakma Community.

Due to the lack of ability of Ishanchandra Manikya, again such brutal massacre had been taken place at Udaipur. On 22 January 1862, another horrible massacre was perpetrated in northern Tripura and Sylhet which is known as Adampur massacre under the leadership of Ratan Poea, Lal Chokla's Son, the leader of the Kukis', committed the crime. At that time also the king of Tripura did nothing. This entire events shows that Kuki raid in Tripura disturbed the natural life of the people. At that time the role of the king Ishanchandra Manikya was very poor to take serious steps or strong actions for protecting the human life from danger. On the other hand, the leaders of the Kukis' attitude through brutal behaviour continued to break the harmony of the peoples of Tripura.

After the devastating raids up to 1862, when Birchandra Manikya ascended to throne, the king of Tripura started to provide 'vat' or gift based on the agreement between Kuki leaders along with the British Government. The king feels that there is no other way than negotiation with them. Even if they were not satisfied with the 'vat', the Kukis usually repeats the

same, thus showing their inherently character of exploiting others brutally and depicts the professional attitude for their subsistence. In 1988-89, the issue of raid arises by the Kukis, when the Commissioner of Chittagong levied taxes from the part of Hilly Tripura, where they are actual habitats.

So, such type of raids organized by Kukis in different phase of time showing their inherent brutal character as well as group leadership. Leadership here does not mean to stay its quality attitude with a single individual in an ascribed manner, but it also possesses the quality which transfers from one to another during the time of raid. The raids which had been organized by those Kukis was not based of any demand, thus not to be considered as any movement or revolt against the ruler.

Jamatia Revolt (1863): Jamatia is the third largest tribal communities in Tripura. The origin of the word Jamatia, in one opinion had derived from the word 'Jamat', which means collection or union of peoples. According to other means tax and 'twiya' means no need to pay. The history of Jamatia reveals that from 1240 to 1757, Jamatia community served a lot to the kingdom of Tripura against the Afgan and the Mughal hordes. They faced lots of trouble like starvation, disease and even lost their lives in the battle fields. So after battle of Plassey, 1757, the then king of Tripura Vijay Manikya II decided to exempt the duty and taxes from the Jamatia community. The exemption of such duty and taxes remained same upto the period of the king Kashi Chandra Manikya. Krishna Kishore Manikya gets into throne on 1860 and takes decision to levied taxes or 'Titun' or 'Taitun' from the Jamatiya community. It is the main reason for Jamatia revolt in 1863, against injustice and humiliations.

'Titun' or 'Taitun' system was one of the ways for making walking passage or path for human movement and sometimes making a route for elephants and the royal family member's officials, army or security people by cutting jungle and bushes. It was the system of putting free labour by the Jamatia community by cutting, cleaning, leveling a path or road for the smooth passage of the king or his officials or army. The villagers had to construct the path, if the king intended to visit their places. In addition, after making the path, all the loads, materials were to be carried by the villagers to their destination without any wages.

The another reason of Jamatia revolt was due to misinterpretation of words by Oakhirai Hazrai, a tax collector, who was sent out from Agartala to Udaipur for collecting taxes, by the-then King Bir Chandra Manikya. Oakhirai's wife and few bodyguards accompanied him. In the way, his wife became sick and he asked the Jamatia people to carry the lady on a cradle made by bamboo splits but, Jamatia people refuse his proposal. After returning to Agartala, Oakhirai complained to the King that the Jamatia community refused to pay taxes, insulted him and plotted to carve out a separate state for them. Since the king did not know the truth of the happenings, he ordered troops of police to go to Udaipur and subdue the Jamatia people but they failed. Most of the soldiers (Binandia) were beaten, wounded and killed. The king then thought of inflicting severe punishment to them and thus he sent a group of Kuki people to Udaipur. They reached and ravaged villages and killed many Jamatia people, brought about 200 heads of the Jamatia people and arrested the Jamatia leader Parikshit, the chief (Hada Akra) of the community. The king ordered bamboo-posts to be set up on both sides of the main road of Agartala and spike the heads on those posts for the purpose of display. Parikshit was pardoned on condition of a promise to practice the Vaisnava way of life. Maharaja Birchandra meant to warn the Jamatia community and others, against further raisings; but he committed a mistake. His cruel treatment towards Jamatias made them to hate him forever. This incident created a gap between the communities, Jamatia community and the ruler, nothing positive was achieved after the revolt. But 'Revolt' means an uprising against a legitimate authority for casting off allegiance. In this sense, it was not a revolt. It was protest against exploitation and humiliation.

The Jamatia community though they have revolted against the tax system levied on them under the leadership of Parikshit Jamatia, but it has not succeeded to achieve the goal of tax exemption and the unjust oppression due to the misinterpreta-

tion of the king's corrupt official, Oakirai Hazrai. So as the mass upheavals of Jamatia community, against the unjust oppression can be marked as a revolt where the leader Parikshit Jamatia proved himself as a unsuccessful leader due to misinterpretation of the corrupt official.

Swadeshi Movement (1905): The movement has actually a very important role to play in the freedom struggle of India. This movement has no such relation in context to free Tripura from any British ruler. But two training centers of Anushilan Samity had been set up at Belonia and Udaipur to support Swadeshi Movement on behalf of Indian Territory. Leaders like Prashant Debbarma, Kunjeswar Debbarma took membership to serve the nation, India.

Here, these leaders of Tripura were not against any of the rulers of Tripura and does not have any demand to get fulfill, which was against the colonial rule and to support Indian Unity. So, the leaders had not achieved anything through movement for peoples of Tripura, rather than to join the Struggle for freedom. Reang Revolt (1942-43): Reang revolt in 1942-43 during the reign of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya. This was partly due to socio- religious and partly anti- feudal crisis arises due to intervention of tax collectors- Roy and Chowdhury who used to collect taxes from the Reang community according to their wish. Rantanmani was the leader of that revolt. Their movement was suppressed by the royal forces.

Ratanmani Noatia was a preacher of religious thought and there were many disciples to follow his path. Among these disciples Reang peoples are large in numbers who used to follow his words. When Ratanmani faced the crisis out of the Roy and Choudhury's domination, try to take revenge from those, thus he instigated Reang community with his words and helps to build the platform for the Reang Revolt.

In 1931, it was a period of acute political tension where movement began against the ruler of Tripura by the Reang community. A number of factors had combined to induce those people to revolt against the ruler. Factors like- over taxation for religious worshipping, punished for keeping more than single wife, free bonded labour, punished for keeping contact with Ratanmani and no action were taken by the king to subjugate the misdeeds of Roy and Choudhury. Scarcity of food, out of war; and famine in Bengal added insult to injure the Reang community. The disappointed people could no longer endure being balked. They found Ratanmani, as a relief and a spokesman.

Under the leadership of Ratanmani, the Reang revolt started against the 'Roy Kanchan' who was at that time, Debi Singh Roy and Khagendra Chowdhury one after another associated with the Post and act as tyrant exploiter against the Reang Community. But the then King of Tripura had not taken any step to control such exploitation, thus rebellion started when the community become conscious with the advice and suggestion from Ratanmani Noatia. The community upraised with the leadership of Ratanmani Noatia, but sudden fall of the rebellion takes place and what happened after the revolt or rebellion, it just come to a halt with the demand to have democratic selection of the 'Roy Kanchan', not directly nominated by the king.

Jana Siksha Movement (1945): To unite the democratic forces of the all India freedom struggle and to give support the tribal downtrodden section of the society of Tripura, 1945, in social, cultural and economic aspect, Jana Siksha movement takes place. But the most important dimension of Jana Siksha movement is all about educational upliftment and eradication of poverty of the backward tribal communities in Tripura. It had been formed with the membership of eleven young educated members of Tripura. This Jana Siksha Movement under the banner of 'Tripura Janashiksha Samity' led by Dasarath Deb, Biren Datta, Nilmani Debbarma, Aghore Debbarma, Sudhanwa Debbarma was a milestone in the history of Tripura. At that time, education was confined to the upper class people. Jana shiksha parishad was formed to depart education to each and every section of the society.

Meanwhile, the King Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya felt that he would not get the credit for such educational establishment or poverty eradication, so he decided to form such type of parishad or council and formed it with the name of 'Tripur Sangha' under the leadership of Ramkumar Debbarma and Lalit Kumar Debbarma has taken the presidentship. But, 'Tripur Sangha' expired in a very short period, because of the certain death of the then king Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, who took different initiatives to stop the movement started by the 'Jana Shiksha Samiti' by harassing and arresting the members of the Council. But ultimately the leaders of the 'Jana Shiksha Parishad' succeeded to receive recommendations from the king to fulfill their demands as to establish 488 primary schools at different parts of Tripura with the help of former education minister of the regency, Major D. A. W. Brown. Later on, the name of 'Tripur Sangha' had been changed into 'Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad' (1948), as a political party with the participation of the members of Jana Siksha Samiti, in the year 1945. Again, with the banned of the Communist party which being ceased its power with Government of Tripura under the command of Kanchan Prabha Debi and the 'Jana Shiksha Samiti' lost its existence. The new party formed as a reaction of such banned, new party had been formed with different tribal leaders, which was named as 'Gana Mukti Parishad' on 1948.

However, 'Jana Shiksha Samiti' succeeded to increase the motivation of the tribal people by increasing the awareness among them. Equally, with the proper leadership of the movement, that helps to give a momentum, ultimately helped to form the present impact of it in the context of Tripura. The goals and objectives of the 'Jana Shiksha Movement' had been achieved which helped to pave the path towards community consciousness and its functions for development.

Lushai Reform Movement (1946-47): Lushai movement was not an anti- state or anti- Maharaja Movement like other previous tribal movements in Tripura. Rather, it was an appeal to the state authority, the Maharaja to define the powers, privileges and duties of the Chiefs, who, due to the lack of control and because of the peculiar geographical position of the region, made their own laws.

Among all the tribal societies in Tripura, it was the Lushai community that enjoyed the maximum degree of autonomy out of the inaccessibility of the area where the Lushai had settled in the Jampui and Sakhan range under the leadership of Hrangvunga and Daikhuma. They were declared chiefs of Lushai hills under the provisional Act of Raj Darbar to rule the region and to pay house hold taxes(Ghar Chukti Kar) and other duties according to the wish of the then King, Bir Chandra Manikya from time to time. But each Lushai chief started to exploit the region of Tripura, i.e. peoples of Lushai Hills by charging more household taxes and duties. Discontent was bringing over the years, and ultimately, the Lushai people of the region started a movement, under the banner of 'Tripura Lushai Union', with a view to put an end to the powers and privileges of the chiefs who were being overpowered by the king. However in 1946- 47, the Lushai people of this region started a movement with a view to put an end to the powers and privileges of the chiefs and thereby, free themselves from the traditional feudal bondage. Hence, on February 22, 1947, they formed a separate Union of their own and named it 'Tripura Lushai Union' under the leadership of Ch.P.Thanga and Lacchuanga.

The movement succeeded to achieve its goal with the declaration of the Chief Commissioner, R.K. Roy, that to abolish the powers and privileges of the chiefs of Lushai Hills. Here, one can see the actual leadership quality with the movement which helped them to achieve its goals and objectives as a very result of the mass community participation.

Appraisal:

The different phases of history witnessed the exploitation towards the people of Tripura, and when such exploitation by any of the rulers started, then only people expresses their uprising movement or revolt against the ruler. All the movement

that takes place in Tripura, starting from Reang revolt to Lushai movement, a very negligible success came in favour of the people of Tripura. There leaders of the Lushai Movement and the Jana Shiksha Movement succeeded enough to increase mass awareness and participation among them. Though the leaders of different movement have to face different troubles and hurdles in their way to leadership, but somehow they represent themselves as successful leaders by motivating people against the tyranny and exploitation of the monarchs of Tripura. Other than 'Jana Shiksha Movement', different leaders though got popularity but not succeeded to enjoy achievement, the real fruitfulness in 'leadership' real sense of the term. The maximum of the movement or revolt that takes place is community based and to establish awareness among the people of Tripura. 'Jana Shiksha Movement' is the ultimate of all the revolts to pave the platform for the success story to free the innocent tribal peoples of Tripura by awaking them to fight for subsistence and literacy.

The tribal society of Tripura, as elsewhere, was characterized by chief at the top of the social leader with special power and privileges. But as their powers and privileges were not defined, the chiefs were often guilty of excesses and abuse of power. The Royal house of Tripura had always found it convenient to maintain this traditional system of chieftainship. It is generally observed that the Royal history of Tripura faced different types of raid, revolts and movements. It happened because of abuse of power by the king, exploitation over the people, feudal bondage, special power and privileges of the chiefs and so on.

Role and leadership quality of movements in a Pre-partitioned North-Eastern Indian State, Tripura was qualitative enough with their step to aware people about their rights and thus indulging them to introduce new phase of liberty and freedom with democracy. Thus initiatives and actions of leaders, though not successful enough, but helps to mitigate their problems of needs and expectations.

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