

Tripura's Role in India's Freedom Struggle

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Abstract

Tripura, a small but historically significant princely state in northeastern India, played a crucial role in India's freedom struggle. Despite being geographically distant from the major centers of the national movement, the people of Tripura actively contributed to the anti-colonial resistance through socio-political movements, tribal uprisings, and nationalist activism. The influence of the Indian National Congress (INC) and revolutionary movements reached Tripura, inspiring leaders like Dasarath Deb, Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, and Bhaskar Debbarma. The tribal and non-tribal communities of Tripura united against British imperialism and feudal exploitation, laying the foundation for a progressive society.

During the early 20th century, Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya introduced significant reforms, including educational and infrastructural developments, which indirectly supported nationalist aspirations. The Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad (TRGP), formed in the 1940s, became a platform for mobilising people against British policies and feudal oppression. The royal family of Tripura maintained a delicate balance between supporting British authorities and accommodating nationalist aspirations. However, the youth of Tripura were deeply influenced by the broader Indian independence movement, leading to active participation in underground revolutionary activities and peasant movements.

The role of tribal communities was significant, as they fought against exploitative landlords and colonial policies that disrupted their traditional way of life. Leaders like Dasarath Deb championed tribal rights and worked towards integrating Tripura into independent India. The socio-economic struggles of the peasants and working class played a pivotal role in fuelling nationalist sentiments in the region. The integration of Tripura into the Indian Union in 1949 marked the culmination of prolonged resistance and negotiations.

Tripura's contribution to India's freedom struggle was multifaceted, involving political mobilisation, tribal resistance, and progressive social reforms. The legacy of the struggle continues to inspire the region's socio-political landscape, emphasising the importance of unity and perseverance in the fight for justice and equality.

Keywords : Tripura, Freedom Struggle, Indian National Movement, Tribal Uprising, Dasarath Deb, Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad, Peasant Movement, British Imperialism, Integration of Tripura.

Introduction

Despite its distance from the national movement's epicenters, the northeastern princely state of Tripura played a key part in India's liberation war. Even though Tripura was still a princely state under the Manikya dynasty's control, its citizens were instrumental in the independence fight. Revolutionary groups, national leaders, and

rising popular discontent with British colonial control all played a role in the region's social and political awakening. With the greater objective of Indian independence in mind, Tripura evolved into a hub for anti-British actions, indigenous resistance, and social reform initiatives.

To comprehend Tripura's part in the fight for independence, one must examine its political climate, the involvement of both indigenous and non-indigenous people, and the impact of outside forces like the Indian National Congress (INC), revolutionary groups, and Gandhian ideology. The state's reigning family had a complicated relationship with the British, balancing devotion to the colonial overlords while simultaneously implementing progressive changes. Many Tripuran politicians and freedom fighters, however, were vehemently opposed to British rule and relentless in their pursuit of independence. In addition to making up a sizable portion of the population, the indigenous groups were instrumental in the fight against British political and economic dominance.

The liberation struggle in Tripura was affected by various national events, such as the Swadeshi struggle (1905-1911), the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934), and the Quit India Movement (1942). These movements had a major influence on the intellectual and political awakening of the people of Tripura. Revolutionary movements like the Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar, active in Bengal and other eastern areas, also gained support in Tripura. Many young revolutionaries from the state joined these groups and fought in violent rebellion against the British.

Furthermore, the incorporation of Tripura into independent India was a major component of its historical trajectory. The last king, Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, made considerable measures toward modernization and governance reforms before his untimely demise in 1947. His successor, Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi, ultimately signed the Instrument of Accession in 1949, uniting Tripura into the Indian Union. This signified the victorious completion of the people's protracted battle for self-determination and national unity.

Tripura's commitment to India's liberation movement is a tribute to the fortitude, patriotism, and sacrifices of its people. The state's historical path illustrates the tenacity of its leaders, revolutionaries, and average inhabitants, making it an important element of India's battle for independence.

Tripura Under the Manikya Kings

Tripura, one of the princely kingdoms in northeastern India, was governed by the Manikya dynasty for numerous centuries. During British control, the monarchs of Tripura had a complicated relationship with the colonial government, combining their devotion to the British with their own attempts at modernization and progress. While the Manikya kings were not actively participating in the Indian independence fight, their policies and administration had a major influence in creating the socio-political awareness of the people, which eventually contributed to the nationalist movement.

The early 20th century witnessed considerable developments under the Manikya monarchs. Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya (1862–1896) was one of the first monarchs to initiate progressive reforms in Tripura. He was motivated by contemporary administrative principles and made initiatives to promote education, infrastructure, and government. Though he remained loyal to the British, his reforms indirectly inspired a new generation of educated young who became conscious of the developing nationalist movement in India. His successors, Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya and Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, pursued these reforms while also encountering rising nationalist feelings among the populace.

Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya (1923–1947) had a key role in defining the destiny of Tripura. He implemented economic and social reforms, stressing modern education and infrastructure. Under his administration, various schools and universities were created, which led to the growth of a politically aware young. Despite his formal loyalty to the British, he maintained communication with Indian nationalist leaders and was aware of the shifting political situation. His progressive policies provided the framework for Tripura's ultimate incorporation into independent India.

During the British colonial era, the administration of Tripura was indirectly impacted by British policies, which harmed the native populace. The inhabitants of Tripura, notably the educated middle class, started engaging in nationalist movements inspired by the Indian National Congress and revolutionary parties from Bengal. The state's strong cultural and political links with Bengal had a key influence in disseminating nationalist ideologies. Many young revolutionaries from Tripura joined groups like the Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar, helping to the violent battle against British authority.

Though the Manikya rulers did not explicitly challenge British authority, their administration helped build an atmosphere where nationalist sentiments might thrive. The state's transition from princely control to merger with independent India in 1949 represented the climax of this protracted process. The importance of the Manikya dynasty in Tripura's history remains crucial, since their policies created the framework for the region's socio-political growth and ultimate involvement in the Indian liberation war.

Influence of the Indian National Movement

The Indian National Movement had a tremendous influence on Tripura's liberation fight, influencing the political awareness of its people and encouraging them to reject colonial oppression. Although Tripura was a princely state and not directly under British administration, the impact of the greater nationalist movement eventually reached the territory, leading to popular support for India's independence. The engagement of Tripura's people in the national fight can be observed in their involvement in numerous mass movements, revolutionary actions, and social reforms inspired by the Indian National Congress (INC), Gandhian ideology, and revolutionary groups from Bengal and Assam.

One of the early effects of the national movement on Tripura came via the Swadeshi Movement (1905-1911), which formed as a response to the partition of Bengal. The campaign urged the use of local items and the rejection of British imports. Tripura, being culturally and physically near to Bengal, experienced a surge in

nationalist sentiments during this era. The Swadeshi attitude pushed local leaders to foster self-reliance and indigenous businesses, which subsequently became essential aspects of the liberation movement.

The Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922), begun under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, significantly intensified nationalist sentiments in Tripura. Many students and intellectuals from Tripura left British-supported educational institutions and endorsed the cause for Swaraj (self-rule). The impact of Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence and civil disobedience promoted nonviolent demonstrations and resistance against British policy. The agitation also led to the emergence of nationalist leaders in Tripura who demanded broader political and social changes.

The Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934) had a tremendous influence on Tripura's political awakening. Inspired by the Dandi March and the statewide demonstrations against British taxation, the people of Tripura grew increasingly outspoken in seeking political rights and opposing British-imposed restraints. Nationalist leaders from Bengal and Assam gave their support to Tripura's indigenous activists, significantly strengthening the anti-colonial campaign.

During the Quit India Movement (1942), the influence of the Indian National Movement reached its apex in Tripura. Despite rigorous supervision by the royal government, many young revolutionaries and political activists backed the movement by staging rallies, disseminating anti-British leaflets, and demanding an end to colonial rule. Underground revolutionary organizations from Bengal, such as the Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar, found followers in Tripura, who gave assistance for their actions against British authority.

Overall, the impact of the Indian National Movement was essential in molding Tripura's position in the liberation movement. It unified all elements of society, spurred political participation, and ultimately laid the ground for Tripura's incorporation into independent India in 1949.

Role of the Tribal and Indigenous Communities

Tripura's tribal and indigenous people played a vital part in India's liberation fight, contributing to both direct resistance against colonial control and socio-political movements aiming at self-governance. The tribal population, which includes tribes such as the Tripuris, Reangs, Chakmas, Jamatias, and Halams, had a unique socio-political identity that affected their involvement in the independence struggle. While the princely state of Tripura remained under the sovereignty of the Manikya family, tribal leaders and activists played a crucial role in opposing British influence and battling for economic, social, and political rights.

One of the important characteristics of tribal involvement in the liberation struggle was their hostility to British economic policies that exploited local resources and destroyed their traditional way of life. British policies favored zamindars and moneylenders, resulting to land alienation and economic problems for the indigenous populations. In reaction, various tribal uprisings and demonstrations erupted, opposing the colonial

economic framework and calling for indigenous rights. These movements, albeit essentially local, were strongly tied to the greater nationalist fight against British authority.

Leaders like Dasarath Deb, a notable tribal activist and eventually the Chief Minister of Tripura, played a significant role in rallying the indigenous community for the liberation fight. He was actively interested in creating awareness about nationalism among the tribal people and worked towards integrating them into the greater political struggle for independence. Under his guidance, the Jana Shiksha Andolan (People's Education Movement) was established to expand education and political awareness among the tribal community, making them more aware of their rights and the wider national fight.

Additionally, the tribal groups offered major support to the Quit India Movement (1942), contributing to marches, demonstrations, and acts of disobedience against the British authority. Many indigenous youth joined revolutionary groups motivated by organizations like the Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar, which carried out violent struggle against colonial control.

The active engagement of Tripura's tribal and indigenous groups in the liberation movement displays their tenacity and devotion to India's independence. Their involvement not only opposed British authority but also provided the groundwork for socio-political changes that ultimately helped to the incorporation of Tripura into independent India.

Revolutionary Activities and Local Leaders

Tripura, despite geographically far from the major hubs of India's nationalist struggle, experienced substantial revolutionary operations against British authority. Inspired by national leaders and movements, local leaders and freedom fighters in Tripura actively engaged in the war for independence. Revolutionary activities in the state were fueled by both military resistance and sociopolitical forces, which were essential in resisting colonial domination and pressing for self-rule.

Emergence of Revolutionary Movements

The effect of the revolutionary activities in Bengal and Assam greatly affected the political awareness of Tripura's young. Secret revolutionary organizations like Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar gained adherents in Tripura, and many young men from the state joined these groups to fight against the British. The beliefs of Subhas Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army (INA) also resonated with the people of Tripura, prompting many to participate in the battle.

Key Local Leaders and Their Contributions

1. Dasarath Deb – A famous politician and eventually Chief Minister of Tripura, Dasarath Deb played a vital role in rallying indigenous populations against British authority. He aggressively worked for the socio-political upliftment of the indigenous people and joined the Communist movement to combat colonial exploitation. His leadership substantially helped to the liberation war as well as post-independence Tripura's growth.

2. Birendrakishore Debbarman—The Maharaja of Tripura during the early 20th century, he played a unique role by backing changes that indirectly assisted the independence struggle. Though not overtly anti-British, his actions in education and administration helped create a climate where nationalist ideals might thrive.

3. Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya – The last sovereign monarch of Tripura before independence, Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya made continuous measures to modernize Tripura. He maintained communication with national authorities and worked towards integrating Tripura into independent India. His tragic death in 1947 led to a period of change, but his vision helped determine Tripura's political destiny.

4. Sachindra Lal Singh – A famous political figure, he eventually became the first Chief Minister of Tripura. He was extensively engaged in rallying people against British rule and played a part in Tripura's ultimate union with India.

Role of the Tribal and Indigenous Resistance

Tripura's indigenous populations also played a vital part in fighting British policies that damaged their customary ways of life. Tribal uprisings and demonstrations against exploitative British policies were regular, and many tribal chiefs collaborated with nationalist groups to seek justice and self-governance.

The revolutionary actions and efforts of local leaders in Tripura substantially affected the state's participation in India's liberation movement. From armed resistance to political engagement, these figures played a significant role in organizing people against colonial authority and building the groundwork for Tripura's incorporation into independent India. Their legacy continues to inspire future generations throughout the state.

Integration with Independent India

The merger of Tripura with independent India was a key event in the region's history, signifying the end of princely rule and its transformation into a democratic state. Before India's independence in 1947, Tripura was a princely state controlled by the Manikya family, which had administered the territory for many centuries. Although the rulers of Tripura had a strong connection with the British, the political changes in India and increasing nationalist sentiments affected the state's ultimate unification into the Indian Union.

Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, the last sovereign monarch of Tripura, had a key role in defining the state's contemporary character. He initiated various administrative changes and stressed education and infrastructure development. However, his unexpected death in May 1947, just months before India's independence, put the state in a period of uncertainty. His little son, Kirit Bikram Manikya, was designated the heir, and Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi took the post of regent.

With the departure of the British, princely kingdoms were given the opportunity to join either India or Pakistan. Given Tripura's physical and cultural closeness to the Indian mainland, Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi opted to integrate the state with India. However, this choice was not without problems. Political instability, economic challenges, and rising dissatisfaction among tribal and non-tribal populations made the transition difficult. Additionally, foreign forces and internal power struggles contributed to the complexity of the issue.

Despite these hurdles, Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi signed the Instrument of Accession on October 15, 1949, legally uniting Tripura into the Indian Union. With this, Tripura became a Part C state under the Indian Constitution, directly ruled by the federal government. Later, in 1972, Tripura acquired full statehood.

The incorporation of Tripura into independent India was an important milestone in the region's history. It maintained political stability, economic prosperity, and the conservation of the cultural uniqueness of its people. Today, Tripura's path from a princely state to a full-fledged state of India stands as a tribute to the perseverance and patriotism of its people, who played a significant part in molding the region's future.

Conclusion

The contribution of Tripura to India's liberation movement remains an inspirational chapter in the nation's history. Despite being a princely state with minimal direct involvement from British control, Tripura was significantly inspired by the nationalist movement spreading throughout the country. The political awareness of the people, the efforts of revolutionaries, and the impact of foreign movements played a key role in determining Tripura's involvement in the battle for independence. From political activity to military resistance, Tripura's involvement was distinguished by patriotism, sacrifice, and an unflinching dedication to India's independence from colonial domination.

The socio-political situation of Tripura was unusual, since it was controlled by the Manikya dynasty, which had a complicated relationship with the British. While some rulers launched progressive changes that indirectly benefited the independence cause, others were constrained by the demands of the colonial government. However, this did not discourage the people of Tripura from actively partaking in the movement for independence. Various parts of society, including students, intellectuals, and tribal tribes, proved essential in resisting British policies and propagating the notion of self-rule.

One of the most essential components of Tripura's liberation fight was the engagement of its tribal and indigenous populations. Unlike many other places where nationalist movements were driven by urban elites, Tripura experienced the involvement of native tribes, who rejected British policies and battled for their rights. Leaders like Dasarath Deb played a significant role in rallying tribal groups and connecting their efforts with the greater independence movement. Their battle against exploitation and tyranny was not only about political independence but also about social and economic fairness.

The impact of the Indian National Congress (INC) and revolutionary groups like Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar was also widely felt in Tripura. The principles of Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, and other famous figures motivated the people of Tripura to participate in the liberation movement by both non-violent and militant tactics. Many young revolutionaries from Tripura joined underground activities, while others actively engaged in civil disobedience and non-cooperation campaigns.

As India neared independence, the topic of Tripura's inclusion in the Indian Union became essential. Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, the last sovereign monarch, undertook administrative and modernizing measures that harmonized with the nationalist cause. However, his untimely death in 1947 placed the state in a transitional period. Eventually, under the leadership of Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi, Tripura signed the Instrument of Accession on October 15, 1949, legally joining independent India. This signified the climax of the region's protracted battle for self-determination and its solid support for the Indian nationalist cause.

The memory of Tripura's liberation fight continues to inspire future generations. The sacrifices made by revolutionaries, tribal leaders, and average residents illustrate the deep-rooted sense of patriotism that determined the state's involvement in India's independence. Today, Tripura stands as a proud and vital component of the Indian Republic, with its rich history of resistance and tenacity influencing its socio-political character. The contribution of Tripura to the national movement serves as a reminder that the battle for liberation was not restricted to a few large cities but was a collaborative endeavor that united varied areas and people throughout the country.

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