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Manipuri Queens in the Royal House of Tripura: A Historical Study

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Abstract

Manipur and Tripura are two important states of North east India with a long glorious history of their own. Both the states maintained cordial relationship from the very early period despite regular intervals of conflicts. Marriage alliances between the royal families of Manipur and Tripura were common which began from remote antiquity and continued till 20th century. The instance of first marriage alliance between Manipur and Tripura is recorded to be occurred during the reign of Tripuri king Taidakshin around 5th century A.D. However, the most notable cases of matrimonial alliances between Manipur and Tripura started towards the end of 18th century. The Rajas of Tripura married not only Manipuri princesses but also many Manipuri girls belonging to plebeian family. Among them many girls were inhabitants of Tripura who came during the Burmese invasion of Manipur. The marriage alliances not only brought cordial relations between the two kingdoms but also there was cultural assimilation. The tradition of marrying Manipuri girls were even followed by many noblemen of the Tripura royal family. Tripura also witnessed various public welfare works that was contributed by the Manipuri Maharanis. Thus, we find that the Tripura royal house was filled with descendents from the Manipuri queens.

The present state of Manipur and Tripura are situated in the North Eastern part of India. Manipur is geographically bounded by Nagaland in the North, Mizoram in the South, Cachar district of Assam in the West and Burma in the East. Manipur enjoyed the status of an independent princely state up to 1981. It was only after two years of Indian independence that Manipur was merged in Indian Union on 15 October 1951. Whereas, the state of Tripura is bounded by [Bangladesh](#) in the north, south, and west and to the East lays the states of [Assam](#) and [Mizoram](#). It was a [princely state](#) during the [British rule](#). Like Manipur,

the native kingdom of Tripura also merged with the Indian Republic in 1949. Thus, geographically it is only a portion of Assam that stands between Manipur and Tripura.

From ancient times Manipur and Tripura were the two independent princely kingdoms. In the early period Manipur was called by the Tripuris as Mokhali/Mekhali and to the Manipuris the kingdom of Tripura was known as Takhen/ Takhel. The word 'Takhen' has come from the Bengali word 'Dakhin' which means South. The people of Sylhet used to call Tripura 'Dakhin' which was pronounced by the Manipuris as Takhen. They deviate the 'd' sound

changing to 't' and that of 'i' sound changing to 'e' due to their speech habit. During their princely regime they were neighbouring states and came into contact with each other in many occasions such as for trade, diplomacy, dwelling, matrimony etc. There are many instances of elephants brought to Manipur from Tripura. Besides, the kingdoms came in close contact with each other for political interdependence when there were rapid invasions of Burmese in Manipur and that of Pathans and Mughals in Tripura. The relation between the two kingdoms was filled with occasional conflicts and war fares. There were several cases of hostilities between Tripura and Manipur particularly between 16th to 18th centuries. These were in 1533, 1634, 1696 and 1724 A.D. The most remarkable armed clash between Manipur and Tripura took place during the reign of Tripura king Dharma Manikya II (1717-1733 A.D.) and the Manipuri king Garib Niwaz or Pamheiba (1709-1748 A.D.). In this battle Tripuris were severely defeated by the Manipuri troops. In order to commemorate the glorious victory over Tripura, a book was written called "Takhel Ngamba" (Tripura Conqueror). The book gives an excellent detail about the arm clash. However, despite such hostilities, matrimonial relationship between the two states continued which helped to maintain their age old friendly relationship. Matrimonial alliances between the two kingdoms began from centuries back. In this regard, the first reference of Tripura-Manipuri matrimonial alliances is recorded in the royal chronicle of Tripura "Sri Rajmala". According to the chronicle, Tripuri raja Taidakshin, grandson of King Trilochana married a princess of Mekhali (modern Manipur). But, the details of the marriage is absent in the sources. They are silent about name of the princess as well as of her father. The renown historian. R.M Nath stated that the marriage took place

during 5th century A.D. However, due to discrepancies in the chronology of Tripura kings no date can be accepted as trustworthy. Again, the state chronicle of Manipur "Cheitharol Kumbaba" recorded that in 1609 A.D. Akhoicham girl 'Yangnu' wife of the king of Takhen (modern Tripura) went to her country. But, we do not find any further details about this marriage.

The most notable cases of matrimonial alliances between Manipur and Tripura started towards the end of 18th century. At the end of the century in 1785 A.D., Rajdhar Manikya II ascended the throne of Tripura and ruled up to 1804 A.D. In Manipur, his contemporary raja was king Bhagyachandra alias Joy Singha (1759-1761 & 1763-1798 A.D.). During their rule the first historically important marriage alliance took place. The old Raja Bhagyachandra of Manipur was a religious person and after installing his eldest son Labanyachandra as new king of Manipur started for pilgrimages to many secret religious places of India. On his journey he also visited Tripura and halted back at Agartala, the capital for some days. During his stay he gave one of his daughter princess Hariseswari in marriage to Tripura king Rajdhar Manikya II. This marriage was effective in bringing cordial relations between the two states. Raja Joy Singha then left for his pilgrimage by river ways. Rajdhar Manikya helped him by supplying 15 boats for the river journey and also gave seven hundred silver coins to Raja Bhagyachandra for his travelling expenses. The new queen Hariseswari brought along with her the idol of 'Sri Radhamadhav' which was installed in the royal compound. The king brought the priest of the temple, some musicians, some noble men and maid attendants of the queen from Manipur and gave them settlement near the royal house at a village called Mekhlipara. But, unfortunately, at present no Mekhli inhabits in the village. When the capital of the

kingdom shifted from old Agartala to the new Agartala (Nutan Haveli) during the reign of king Krishna Kishore Manikya (1829-1849 A.D.) the deity of the 'Sri Radhamadhav' was brought to the new place and installed to the north of the royal palace. After the name of the Radhamadhav the place came to known as 'Radhanagar'. Many Hindu festivals like 'Maharas' were performed in this temple every year as it is done in the 'Sri Sri Govindajee' temple of Manipur. Thus, Radhamadhav temple became famous for Manipuri Rasa dance and many pilgrims from places like Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong visits the temple only to view the 'Maharas' dance.

The policy of marrying Manipuri girls by the Tripuri raja continued thereafter. Sri Kailashchandra Singha in his book "Rajmala Ba Tripurar Itihas" has written that during the Burmese invasion of Manipur in 1819 to 1825 A.D. which is called in the history of Manipur as the 'Seven Years Devastation' many Manipuris had to flee from their native land and many of them took shelter at Tripura and later permanently settled. The then Raja of Tripura Kashichandra Manikya (1826-1829 A.D.) was fascinated by the beauty, cleanliness and plethora of health of the Manipuri girls. In 1826 A.D., he married princess Kutilakha/Kutilakshi of Manipur. He also married three other Manipuri girls who were the settlers of Tripura. After the death of Raja Kashichandra Manikya, his son Krishna Kishore Manikya (1829-1849 A.D.) ascended the throne of Tripura. Like his predecessors, he also married many Manipuri girls. Of which three of them were the daughters of Manipuri king Marjit Singha, they were - Chandrakola, Vidhukola and Akhileswari. Krishna Kishore Manikya was very fond of hunting and for the purpose he used to visit to a place called Haidra, 5 miles west of capital Agartala. It was a forest land which was marshy, thickly

wooded and full of birds which was very convenient for hunting and games. He also constructed a rest house at the place. At his old age the Raja also married a Manipuri Brahmin girl called Purnakala who was appointed as cook in the Tripura royal kitchen. This marriage was not supported by the Manipuris of Tripura. It was superstitious believe that it was a sin for a kshatriya to marry a Brahmin girl which will lead to misfortune of the king. Raja Krishna Kishore Manikya made Purnakala his chief queen but he did not take the Maharani Purnakala to the royal palace. Therefore, he built a house at Haidra (Dholeswar) for the Rani where she was kept along with some attendants. From that time in 1838 A.D., the construction of new capital or Nutan Haveli at Agartala began. Thus, Rani Purnakala became one of the factors behind the establishment of a new capital at Agartala. The king Krishna Kishore Manikya was killed by thunder in 1849 A.D.

Maharaja Krishna Kishore Manikya was succeeded by his son Ishan Chandra Manikya who ruled from 1849 to 1862 A.D. The new king also had three Manipuri wives. They were Moirangthem Chanu Muktabali Devi, Keisam Chanu Jatiswari Devi (she was mother of Maharajkumar Navadipbahadur, father of Indian famous musician Sachin Deb Barman) and Khumanthem Chanu Chandreswari Devi. Maharani Muktabali and her family were inhabitation of Sylhet. Ishanchandra Manikya brought her and her brother Moirangthem Shovananda or Sevananda to Agartala and gave settlement at Dholeswar. She constructed a temple of god Lakshmi Narayan at Dholeswar. The famous Manipuri musician of the time Babu Moirangthem Babuni was her nephew. He was one of the teachers who introduced 'Rasa' dance in Tripura. The next Tripura king, Birchandra Manikya (1862-1896 A.D.) not only followed the practice and policy of

marrying Manipuri girls but also encouraged the development of Manipuri culture in Tripura. Maharaja Birchandra Manikya is regarded as the founder of the modern Tripura. He had three Manipuri Maharanis namely, Ningthem Chanu Bhanumati, Panganbam Chanu Rajeswari or Kaboklei and Khuman Chanu Manmohini. Maharani Bhanumati was most favorite queen of Maharaja Birchandra Manikya. She was the daughter of Rajkumar Kulendrajit and sister of Rajkumar Ranadhwaj who was one of the influential ministers of the Tripura king. It is said that Maharani Bhanumati had a premature death which greatly disheartened the raja. The raja became very weak and he tried to console himself by reading Rabindra Nath Tagore's work titled "Bhagnahriday" (broken heart). Maharaja Birchandra also composed many poems in memory of his beloved wife Bhanumati. Panganbam chanu Rajeswari alias Kaboklei was the second Maharani of the king. She gave birth to Radhakishore Manikya, the next king of Tripura. A village called Rajeswaripur was established in the name of the queen. It is noteworthy that the Manipuri traditional festival 'Lai Haraoba' was introduced for the first time in Tripura by Maharani Rajeswari. She also installed the 'Sri Sri Radhamadhab' temple at Dholeswar and 'Lainingthou Pakhangba' temple at Banamalipur. The third queen of raja Birchandra Manikya was Khuman Chanu Manmohini. She was the daughter of Bhanumati's sister. Maharani Manmohini was only 13 years when the Raja married her. She also established a temple and a mandapa near the present Iskon temple at Tripura.

The policy of wedlock with Manipuri girls was continued by the next Tripura king Radhakishore Manikya (1896-1909 A.D.) whose mother was a Manipuri. He also had three Manipuri Maharanis - Maharani Tulshibati, Maharani

Monomanjuri and Maharani Ratnamanjuri or 'Dhaka Rani'. Radhakishore Manikya married Ratnamanjuri when he was a prince. In 1874 A.D., the then raja Birchandra Manikya went to Dhaka for a meeting with the British Governor Northbrook. He also visited the palace of exiled Manipuri Raja Debendra Singha at Dhaka. There, Birchandra Manikya saw Ratnamanjuri, the beautiful daughter of the dethroned Manipuri king. He was charmed by the beauty of the princess and decided to make her his daughter-in-law. Thereafter, he brought the princess at Agartala and arranged her marriage with his son Maharajkumar Radhakishore. She was called by the Manipuris of Tripura as 'Dhaka Rani' as the new queen has come from Dhaka. Maharani Ratnamanjuri was the mother of the next Tripura king Maharaja Birendrakishore Manikya. The first queen of Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya was Maharani Tulshibati. She was simply daughter of a cultivator of village Tarou (Nalgoriya) situated a little far away from Agartala. Maharani Tulshibati was a great social activist and kindhearted person. Even today she is remembered by the people of Tripura for her various contributions for the development of the society. She is credited for initiating the spread of women education in Tripura. During the last part of 19th century a wave for the development of women education in Tripura was initiated by the Maharani. With her effort she succeeded in establishing the first girls school in Tripura called "Maharani Tulshibati Balika Vidyalaya" located at Agartala. In 1905, the Maharani established a separate woman cell at the Victoria Memorial Hospital (presently known as I.G.M) at Agartala. She also could feel the difficulty of the people who had to come far away from villages to Agartala only for the purpose of marketing. Therefore, she requested the raja to establish a market (bazar). As a result, a market was

established and to commemorate her contribution the name of the bazaar was kept as “Ranirbazar”. Thought Maharani Tulshibati was an uneducated person but she was expert in compositions of songs and poems. Her composed songs related to ‘Holy’ festival were very famous during the time. Maharani Tulshibati also installed ‘Sri Sri Radhamadhad’ temple at Nalgaria and ‘Lainingthou Puthiba’ temple at Abhoynagar. Beside these we find that in almost all the Manipuri villages of Tripura such as Bishalgarh, Bamutia, Murabari, Daccabari etc. the Manipuri queens installed a number of temples. Rent free lands were provided by the queens to their relatives for the erection of the temples and mandapas. In the royal palace of Tripura the queens introduced the plantation of Basil leave as it was an important plan for offering to gods. The Manipuri queens brought along with them the culture and religion of their parental state which they enriches even in the royal palace of Tripura.

The next Tripura Raja Birendrakishore Manikya (1909-1923 A.D) married ten (10) Manipuri girls but they were not given the status of Maharanis. The year 1909 A.D. was a memorable and historical moment for both Tripura and Manipur. The then Manipuri king Churachand Singh paid a visit to Tripura on the occasion of coronation ceremony of the new Tripura king Birendrakishore Manikya. The Administrative report of Tripura 1908-09 A.D. recorded that “On 2nd Magh (15th January), His Highness the Maharaj of Manipur paid a visit to the state. The occasion was one of universal rejoicing. The Manipur house had been related to the Tipperah family by marriage, from a very long time, but this was the first occasion when the Heads of both the houses met one another as relatives. On this occasion, the Talukdars of Nurnagar, the most important section of the tenure holders in Roshnabad

were invited, and all of them attended the Durbar held in honour of his Highness the Maharaja of Manipur”. The Manipuri king also visited many Manipuri villages of Tripura and rendered financial help to the settlers. After the death of Maharaja Birendrakishore Manikya in 1923 A.D., his son Birbikramkishore Manikya succeeded to the throne of Tripura. But, as Birbikramkishore was only 16 years then, the coronation ceremony was performed when the prince completed his 19th year. The new raja had seven (7) wives, of which three of them were Manipuri but they were kept as simple Ranis. Beside this many nobilities of the Tripura royal family also married Manipuri girls. Some of them were Maharajkumar Navadipbahadur, Brajendra Kishore alias Lalukarta, Ramendra Kishore alias Nimukarta who married Nirupama Devi, Bhadravati Devi and Jotirani Devi respectively. The famous Indian musician Sachin Deb Barman (S.D. Barman) was the son of Nirupama Devi, wife of Maharajkumar Navadipbahadur. Again, Maharajkumar Navadipbahadur was the son of the Manipuri queen Jatiswari, the third wife of Ishanchandra Manikya. Thus, we find that there were many cases of Manipuri girls who were taken as wives by the Tripuri Rajas and its nobilities. But, no Manipuri king married Tripuri princess except for the fact that Rajkumar Tilak kumar Singha of Manipur royal family married Urmila Devi daughter of King Krishna Kishore Manikya of Tripura.

Thus, the historical evidences revealed that matrimonial alliances were common between Manipur and Tripura like in many other monarchical form of government. The Tripura royal house was filled with many descendents from the Manipuri queens. It is noteworthy that the policy of wedlock between the two royal families started from very early period which continued up to 20th century. The

marriage alliances brought not only cordial relation between the two states but also there was assimilation of cultures and religion. The Tripura ruling house had become synonymous with Manipuri culture and magnificence for these reasons. The Tripuri rajas married not only the Manipuri princesses but also many other Manipuri

girls of rather plebeian family. But, all the Manipuri queens were not given the position of the Chief Queen. The history of Tripura is filled with various contributions made by the Manipuri Maharanis for the development of its subjects in all aspects of life. Thus, Manipuri Maharanis had important position and high status in the royal house of Tripura.

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