



Democratization of Monarchy in Tripura

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Abstract

Democracy is a form of government in which the ruling power of a state is largely vested not any particular class or classes, but in the members of the community as a whole. Democracy allows every individual to participate directly or indirectly in forming a government and also to exercise political rights. Tripura is a state under Indian Union since independence of India. Before merger with the Indian Union, the *Tripuri* dynasty ruled over Tripura for several centuries from 642 AD to 1949 AD. In the year 1949, the Tripuri kingdom was handed over to the government of India. The merger of Tripura with India marked the ending of the monarchy and the foundation of democracy in modern Tripura. The present paper is an attempt to analyse different stages of political change on the way of achieving democratic status of Tripura State.

Key Words: Democracy, Monarchy, Political, Status, Participation, Merger.

Introduction

Democracy is a form of government in which the ruling power of a state is largely vested not any particular class or classes, but in the members of the community as a whole. Democracy allows every individual to participate directly or indirectly in forming a government and also to exercise political rights. On the contrary monarchy is a form of government in which absolute power and authority is vested in a single person and usually hereditary figure.

Tripura is located in the north-eastern corner of India. The state is surrounded by Bangladesh in three sides and it is connected with mainland of India through Assam and Mizoram. *Sri Rajmala*, the official chronicle of Tripura, it has drawn a long list of Tripura kings deriving ancestral relations with the famous *Lunar* dynasty of the *Mahabharat*. The *Tripuri* dynasty ruled over Tripura for several centuries from 642 AD to 1949 AD. In the year 1949, the Tripuri kingdom was handed over to the government of India. Since its merger with Indian Union, Tripura is playing an important role in the politics of the country. The geographical location and political status of Tripura made it a delayed participant in the drama of Indian politics. Politics as a mass activity, made its impact only from the second quarter of the twentieth century.

Maharaj Bir Bikram Kisor Manikya, the last king of Tripura breathed his last on 17.05.1947 just before two and half month of Indian independence. A great crisis soon blows up over Tripura. The regent *Maharani* Kanchanprabha Devi on behalf of the minor king signed the Instrument of Accession to merger with Indian dominion and handed over the administration of Tripura in 1949. The merger of Tripura with India marked the ending of the monarchy and the foundation of democracy in modern Tripura. The present paper is an

attempt to analyse different stages of political change on the way of achieving democratic status of Tripura State.

Objectives of the study:

The purpose of the research is to explore the political evolution in Tripura to gain a familiarity with political phenomena. This research has two specific objectives. The first is to draw attention to the transformation of monarchy to democracy in Tripura. The second is to appraise the working of the political process in the democratic set-up in Tripura.

Method:

According to the nature of the topic, historical method constitutes the major plank. The historical method has been adopted to explore the political history of Tripura. Political status, as one of the components of complex society of Tripura, has, over the centuries undergone profound changes. A chain of relevant events has been selected and interpreted. Historical investigation into the past has enlightened the present. The present paper is based on Large number of secondary data, which has been collected from Census Reports of India, Economic Review of Tripura 2013-14, published by Govt. of Tripura, election reports form Website of Election Commission of India etc.

Population of Tripura

The Population of Tripura is mixed and variety of ethnic elements can be found in it. People of almost all provinces of India are found here. The Bengalies and the Tribal people constitute the two major ethnic groups of Tripura, making the bulk of the population. The state is densely populated. The following table shows the population of Tripura right from 1874 to 2011 census.

Table 1
Population of Tripura

Census Year	Total Population	Decadal Change	Density	Tribal Population
1901	1,73,325	26.10	17	91,679
1911	2,29,613	32.47	21	1,11,303
1921	3,04,437	32.59	29	1,71,610
1931	3,82,450	25.63	36	1,92,240
1941	5,31,010	34.14	49	2,56,991
1951	6,39,028	25.87	62	2,37,953
1961	11,42,005	76.86	109	3,60,070
1971	15,56,342	36.28	149	4,50,544
1981	20,53,058	31.92	196	5,83,960
1991	27,57,205	34.30	263	8,53,345
2001	31,91,168	16.03	304	9,93,426
2011	36,71,032	14.8	350	11,66,813

Source: Census Reports of India

The above figures indicate that the total population within a century has increased more than twenty times. The decadal growth rate shows fluctuations. A fall in the growth rate from preceding figure is probably owing to the spread of epidemics. The 1961 figures show an abnormally high rate of growth. The influx of the Bengali Hindus and tribal families from East Pakistan and Chattagong Hill Tracts may responsible for the high rate of increase.

Transition from monarchy to democracy:

Tripura was economically weak, politically disordered, strategically at risk, socially a divided house, and administratively chaotic during the critical days of 1947-48. So the foresighted king, *Maharaja* Bir Bikram opted for joining the federation. The king's decision was executed by the Regent *Maharani*

Kanchanprabha Devi. **On 13 August 1947**, just before two days of independence of India, the *Maharani* of Tripura and Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of British India and the first Governor General of independent India signed the “**Instrument of Accession**” for joining the federation of India. During June 1947 to 15 August 1947, 562 among 565 Native States (popularly known as Princely States) ruled by native princes signed the “Instrument of Accession”. According to the document, native princes were to continue to rule their native states independently except on the matters related to defence, external affairs and communication; but the native princes had to give assurance to hand over the power to elected public representatives gradually. The mission and vision of the framers of the new Constitution of India envisaged a tremendous task so that a slow but steady process of territorial integration, administrative reorganisation, economic development and democratisation may coalesce and synchronise.

Tripura acceded to the Indian Union in 1949. The merger agreement was signed by Kanchanprabha Devi on behalf of the minor *Maharaj* Kirit Bikram on 9th September 1949, and the administration of the state was taken over by the Government of India on 15th October 1949.

Tripura became a centrally administered state since 15.10.1949, and was included in the C-category of states. The head of the territory of Tripura was the Chief Commissioner. Parliament passed the Government of part C states’ Act 1951, providing for the setting up of Council of Advisers in part C states. In early 1952 an electoral college of 30 members was constituted through election held in January 1952. The Electoral College was not a deliberative body. The Electoral College elected one representative to the Rajyasabha.

One Council of Advisors was constituted on 14th April 1953 to aid and advise the Chief Commissioner in accordance with the provisions of the Act of 1951. Three non-official persons from the public, namely Sachindralal Singh (1907-2000), Sukhamay Sengupta (1919-1995) and Thakur Jitendra Deb Barma (1886-1984) were taken in the Council.

In 1956 the Parliament of India passed the Territorial Council Act, 1956 (Act. 104 of 1956) providing for the setting up of the Tripura Territorial Council consisting of 30 members. The first election to the Tripura Territorial Council (TTC) was held in March 1957. The Indian National Congress led by Sachindralal Singh got 15 seats, Communist Party of India got 13 Seats, the Tripura Ganatantric Sangha got only one Seat and a Neutral candidate got one Seat. Sachindralal Singh became the Chairman. The second election to the TTC was held in February 1962. The INC got 17 seats, while the CPI got 13 seats. Sachindralal Singh became the Chairman again. The TTC carried out the administration through five departments, namely, General Administration, Education, Health Services, Engineering and Animal Husbandry. In addition, there were one finance committee and four standing committees.

The Parliament passed the Government of Union Territories Act, in 1963. The Act provided for the promotion of the Territorial Council to the status of a Legislative Assembly. The people of Tripura greeted it with outburst of applause and cheering. It came into effect from 1st July 1963. The oath of allegiance was administered by the Honourable Chief Commissioner, S. P. Mukherjee.

Sachindralal Singh was sworn in as Chief Minister. His Colleagues in the ministry were Sukhamay Sengupta, Rajprashad Chaudhury, Dr. Binodbihari Das and Manindralal Bhaumik. Upendra Kisor Ray and Ershad Ali Chaudhury were Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively.

The first election to the Tripura Legislative Assembly was held in February 1967. The Congress got 27 seats; the CPI got one seat and CPI (M) got two seats. Sachindralal Singh was again selected leader of the Congress and thus he became the Chief Minister. His colleagues in the ministry were Rajprashad Chaudhury, Taritmohan Dasgupta, Krishnsdas Bhattacharya, Prafulla Das, and Mansur Ali. Manindralal Bhaumik and Manoranjan Nath were Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively.

The administration of Tripura either as a part C state or as a Union Territory during the period of 15th October, 1949 to January 1970, was run by Chief Commissioner. Right from February 1970, the designation of the head of the Union Territory was changed by the Government of India from Chief Commissioner to Lieutenant Governor. It was another step towards promotion of the status of Tripura.

The Twenty-Seventh Constitutional Amendment Act 1971 will ever remain a great landmark in the constitutional history of Tripura, and Manipur and Meghalaya. Full-fledged statehood was accorded to

Tripura, Manipur and Meghalaya in January 1972. The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, graced the grand inaugural ceremony of Tripura on 21st January 1972 in Agartala. Thus, the operation of the forces of change have largely facilitated the constitutional and other developments in Tripura during 25 years (1947-1972). The aspirations of the tribal people for self-government were also fulfilled through the formation of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC). It was introduced on April 1, 1985 under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

The path of transition from monarchy to democracy was not so easy. The people of Tripura aroused with solidarity and enthusiasm and fought against restrictions on political activities, illiteracy, oppression of *Diwani Rule* after the signing of the Instrument of Accession (1947) by the Regent *Maharani* for joining the federation of India; and reversely annexing Tripura with Pakistan, and fought for refugee rehabilitation, protection of Tripura's separate politico-administrative entity against the recommendation of the State Reconstruction Committee for merger of Tripura with Assam, popular responsible government and tribal autonomy, etc. After a long struggle of the people of the state, Tripura has achieved democratic political status.

Universal adult franchise has been in exercise in Tripura, as elsewhere in India, on several occasions for the last several decades since merger with the Indian Union. But, before merger, the *Maharaja* of Tripura did not allow any political activity in the state. Hence, there was no political party in Tripura till independence of India. As the people of Tripura state were not directly under the British rule; the anti-British attitude was also not so much prevalent among the people of Tripura.

At the end of the 1920s, the Comilla District was a centre of revolutionary activities, especially of the *Anusilan Samity*. At that time there was no scope for higher education in Tripura. After completion of school education, the students would go outside of the state, especially to Comilla, for higher education. Having come into contact with the revolutionary activities, some of the students became involved in revolutionary activities and they formed 'Chatra Sangha' at Agartala in 1927. In 1928, some disassociated members of 'Chatra Sangha' formed 'Bhratri Sangha'. The youths of the locality would become members of either of the two main revolutionary organisations in the then Bengal - the *Anusilan Samity* and the *Jugantar Party*. The said two students' organisations 'Chatra Sangha' and 'Bhratri Sangha' were secretly inspired by the freedom fighters.

Keeping the aims and objectives of the Indian National Congress in mind one local group formed the 'Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad' during 1935-1938. Its founders were sri Sachindralal Singha (1907-2000), sri Sukhamay Sengupta (1919-1995), sri Hariganga Basak, sri Umeshlal Singha (1907-1979), sri Khirode Sen and smt. Asha Mukharjee. After the Second World War, the global situation underwent a dramatic change. There was a tremendous political awakening in the country, the impact of which stirred the people of Tripura state also. When independence of India was in sight, the Indian National Congress was formed in Tripura on 26 January 1946. But initially it was a district unit of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee.

From the Communist organisational point of view, Tripura state was then within the Comilla District committee of CPI. Sri Biren Datta (c.1910-1992) was associated with the Comilla District Committee; Sri Datta had a direct hand in the formation of the Tripura Janashiksha Samity. A unit of Communist Party was formed in Tripura under the Comilla District Committee in the middle of 1946. The Secretary of the Unit was sri Debaprasad Sengupta. Other members were sri Biren Datta, sri Jiten Datta, sri Santi Datta and some other young persons. The Communists earlier would take part in mass movements through other mass organisations like Tripura Rajya Janamangal Samity (1938), and later through Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal (1946). The Communist Party of India took the tactics of working through the workers' and peasants' organisations till the situation compelled the party to mobilise its own independent strength. The Communist unit thereafter spread its influence through the movements of Janashiksha Samity and later the Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad. The Janashiksha Samity was formed in 1945; almost all the Communist leaders in Tripura came forward to its formation. The declared objective of the Janashiksha Samity was to struggle against illiteracy and poverty of the Tribal society in Tripura. Immediate after independence of India and Tripura's merger with the Indian

Union, the tribals were organised under the banner of the Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad in 1948, with a belief of Communist ideology.

To articulate their ideas and interests, tribal people in Tripura organised themselves into several associations and unions, such as Tripur Sangha(1946), Seng Krak(1947), Paharia Union(1951), Adivasi Samity(1954), East India Tribal Union(c.1956), Tripura Upajati Juba Samity(1967), Nikhil Tripura Upajati Juba Samity(1967), Tripura Peoples Liberation Organisation(1981), Tripura Hills Peoples Party (1983), Lama Kautal (1985), National Liberation Front of Tripura (1989), Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (1997), Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipra (2002) etc.

The common people of Tripura are allowed to participate in political activities openly after merger of Tripura with Indian dominion. Political Participation in practice does not mean physically direct participation in managing a government proper, but participation is the complex process of forming a government through elections. The right to political participation is usually given to every adult, normal citizen equally on the basis of the principle: one vote; one vote one value. It has antecedence. Its slow and steady growth has been often marked by bloodshed and cruelty. It is a growing human right against a declining divine right of the monarchs.

Political participation refers to those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and, directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy. These activities are: casting vote, seeking information, holding discussions, attending meetings, making financial contributions to political parties, staging strikes and demonstrations, communicating with the legislators and other leading figures and the like. However, the most active forms of political participation are formal enrolment in a party, canvassing and registering votes, speech writing and speech making, working in campaigns and competing for public and party offices.

Election is a means of political participation in an indirect manner. National, state and local level elections are conducted in Tripura on regular basis. People take part in casting of vote in a festive mode in the state. Voting is the most prominent form of political participation. It periodically allows a large number of citizens to register their approval or disapproval of government activities. Every citizen has one vote that counts equally.

The first general election in India was held in 1952. More than 47 percent voters in Tripura had cast their vote in the first election. Gradually, the voting percentage increased in the state. The following table shows the degree of political participation in terms of voting in Tripura:

Table 2

Degree of Effective Participation in the Elections to the Electoral College/Tripura Territorial Council/Tripura Legislative Assembly

Year	Voters	Votes	% of voting
1952	2,71,672	1,27,961	47.10
1957	4,32,904	2,79,894	64.65
1962	4,80,609	3,17,867	66.14
1967	6,66,637	4,32,019	71.21
1972	7,63,075	5,00,866	65.64
1978	9,61,998	7,53,062	78.28
1983	11,34,111	9,26,928	81.73
1988	13,43,066	11,51,658	85.75
1993	16,73,028	13,58,244	81.18
1998	17,27,463	13,96,565	80.84
2003	19,31,720	15,20,417	78.71
2008	20,38,001	18,59,122	91.22
2013	23,58,493	21,65,482	91.81
2018	25,80,113	23,05,977	89.38

Source: I. J. Gancaudhuri: *A Political History of Tripura*

2. Website of the Election Commission of India

Table 3

Degree of Effective Participation in the Elections to the Lok Sabha in Tripura

Year of Election held	Percentage of vote casted in Tripura
1952	48.05
1957	62.5
1962	67.7
1967	67.89
1971	60.2
1977	70.06
1980	79.97
1984	77.32
1989	83.89
1991(midterm election)	67
1996	79.09
1998(midterm election)	80.86
1999(midterm election)	68.14
2004	67.39
2009	84.45
2014	84.72

Source: Website of the Election Commission of India

The above tables show that voters in Tripura take part in electoral politics on festive mode. Large number of voters cast their vote in any socio- economic and political atmosphere, which shows the political consciousness of common people and also existence of popular democracy in Tripura. In Tripura, elections have always evoked spontaneous participation in a celebratory mode. Even at the height of blood-spilling insurgency and intimidation of voters by gun-toting militants' between 1982-1988 and again between 1993-2003, polling percentage in Tripura had always floated around a huge 80 percent. The degree of effective participation in Lok Sabha election also increased at the same direction.

Conclusion: The political status of Tripura has undergone different phases and ultimately got a popular democratic status. Tripura's merger with the Indian Union accelerated the process of development in a big way. In 1949 monarchy yielded place to democracy. The Raj reclined, and gave way to democracy. The royal family of Tripura signed the merger agreement in New Delhi on 9.9.1949, and the administration was taken over at Agartala on 15 October 1949. It marked the end of an epoch and the beginning of another. Henceforth, development and democracy have been running side by side. Regarding democracy, it may be briefly stated that democratic decentralisation has been accomplished within a few decades. Improvement in Tripura's constitutional status from a C-category of state to a full-fledged state was accomplished on 21 January 1972. The Tripura Legislative Assembly passed the historic Bill for the formation of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) on 23 March 1979. Following the 73rd and the 74th amendments to the Constitution of India, Gaon Panchayets and Urban Municipal Governments have been thoroughly reorganised. The tiny state of Tripura has been divided into small districts, sub-divisions and blocks.

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