

## Resistance Movements In Tripura- With Special References To The Jamatia In 1863 And Reang In 1942

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### ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

This paper examines two significant resistance movements in Tripura: the Jamatia Rebellion of 1863 and the Reang Uprising of 1942. Both revolts were driven by socio-political and economic factors, particularly the oppressive tax systems and exploitation by tribal chiefs and Maharaja's officials. The Jamatia Rebellion, led by Prakshit Jamatia, arose due to harsh tax collection practices and personal insults by officials. Similarly, the Reang Uprising, spearheaded by Ratanmoni Noatia, was a response to unequal taxation, food crises, and forced recruitment during the Second World War. Both movements were confined to the respective tribes and were primarily against local officials rather than the ruling Maharaja. Despite their failure, these uprisings reflect deep-rooted socio-economic injustices and the tribal peoples' fight for dignity and autonomy in a colonial and monarchical context.

**Keywords:** Resistance Movements, Tripura, Jamatia Rebellion, Reang Uprising, Socio-Economic Factors, Taxation, Tribal Chiefs, Maharaja, Colonial Exploitation, Second World War.

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The history of the 'Resistance Movements' can broadly include any irregular armed force that rises up against an enforced or established authority, government, or administration. This frequently includes groups that consider themselves to be resisting tyranny or popular aspiration or any other ideas which are imposed on them. The degree of such resistance may vary from group to group or from regions to regions in terms of its ideology or achievements of goals. Sometime it may be that the whole population or only a part of the population is involved in such resistance movement. Whatever may be the ideology or goals of such resistance, it is always against the established order and any kinds of acts from such a resistance movement is usually condemned by that established order. The resistance movement leads to confrontation with the established order thereby the natural response being conflict. There were many resistance movements that had been brutally suppressed in the face of stiff resistance. We have many instances in North East India where many resistance movements have taken place. Tripura is also not an exception. As far as Tripura is concerned the two resistance movements- among the Jamatias in 1863 and the Reangs in 1942 are worth mentioning.

The uprising of the tribal people against the exploiter group is not a new phenomenon. The struggle is initiated in order to safeguard their honour and to protect their freedom against those who tried to deprive them. The nature and character of the movement varies from region to region and tribes to tribes. Whatever be the causes of the rebellion, it can not be fulfilled without a leader or collective leadership under whom the rebellion is given direction. The forms of leadership may be identified under three different categories- they are- (1) patriarchal leadership- in which the person upon whom the members perceive themselves to be dependent is both loved and feared. (2) tyrannical leadership where the emotional relationship is dominated by fear; and (3) ideal or charismatic in which the relationship is characterized by love and affection.<sup>1</sup> The rebellions in both the cases under study were carried in case of the Jamatias under the patriarchal and in case of the Reangs ideal or charismatic leadership. The Jamatias resistance found patriarchal leadership under Parikshit and the Reangs found ideal or charismatic leader in Ratanmoni Noatia.

In order to understand the nature of the resistance in both the cases it is important to understand the political and socio-economic factors prevailing in Princely Tripura during that particular period. In the absence of proper law of succession, whenever a reigning Maharaja died, confusion arises as to who would be the next ruler. Disputes as to the right to the succession are of constant occurrence. Almost every vacancy in the Raj produced disturbances and domestic wars, and exposed the inhabitants of the hills to frightful disorders<sup>2</sup> Such a situation also arose after the death of Maharaja Ishan Chandra Manikya on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1862.

Although Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya ascended the throne but Nilkrishna and Kalathakur were also contender to the throne. The matter was finally settled in the court in favour of Bir Chandra Manikya. The investiture ceremony of Bir Chandra Manikya was delayed due to internal quarrels and took place in the year 1870. This type of situation created confusion in the minds of the hill people particularly in payment of *Gharchukti* or house tax<sup>3</sup>. There is always a fear that such tax will be collected twice within a given particular year - by the existing ruler and the claimant to the throne. Once that the existing ruler will be deposed, another ruler who comes to the throne will again collect the same tax.

In the hill, the administration was carried out through the Chiefs of the tribes appointed by the Maharaja. There were various titles conferred to such tribal leaders such as Rai among the Reangs, Raja in case of the Kuki etc. The leaders of the tribes were the eyes and ears of the Maharaja in the hills and carryout orders and responsibilities entrusted to them from time to time. In short, the chiefs were the link between the Maharaja and the hill people. The most important function of the Chiefs was the maintenance of law and order in their respective areas and well as collection of *Gharchukti* or house tax. The villages were under the control of the village Chief known by various names such as *Kamiphang*, *Choudhuries*, *Sardars* etc. All matters relating the village were the concern of the village chief. Side by side there were many officials of the Maharaja known by various designations who also help in the day-to-day administration and collection of tax.

In the collection of *Gharchukti* or house tax or family tax the officials so appointed by the Maharaja committed all kinds of abuses. The Political Agent, A.W.B. Power in a letter dated 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1872, wrote to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal<sup>4</sup>

The manner in which the tax for the cultivation of jooms is collected in Hill Tipperah is open to all abuses which result from direct taxation..... Instead of tax being collected by an official going from house to house at certain intervals.....for collection to an influential Chowdhry.....I believe the tax is paid more cheerfully by the people in his charge than elsewhere.

Thus it is evident from the letter of the British Political Agent posted at that time at Agartala that the officials entrusted with collection of tax were not fair enough to the hill people and commits all kind of atrocities. Writing about the collection of rents and how harsh it could be can be gauged, from the reports of the Magistrate of Tipperah in 1863 "rents are collected at the point of the bayonet".<sup>5</sup>

Due to the absence of proper transport and communication network, movement in the hills and village to village was rather difficult for the officials of the Maharaja. In order to overcome this huddles a system known as '*Taithung*' system<sup>6</sup> was in vogue.

The international scenario also contributed to the unrest in Tripura. During the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, Tripura contributed all kinds of support to the British and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War also it was also expected. The commitments can be understood as "The entire resources of the State and personal service of the Ruler have been placed at the disposal of the Crown"<sup>7</sup> The amount of donation made by the State to the various War Funds total Rs.57,000 and by the employees Rs.14,000 ,Defence Bonds purchased by the State amounts to Rs.1,75,000 and by the public through the State Rs.44,000 .The State has promised an annual donation of Rs.50,000 to the War purposes Fund and the employees Rs.7,000 the total amount of expenditure incurred on Armed Forces is above Rs.5,00,000.<sup>8</sup> As a part of the War preparation vigorous propaganda measures all round were initiated for facilitating recruitment and generating a spirit of co-operation among the people.

The Jamatia rebellion was led by Prakshit Jamatia who was born in Bejamani village (now Bejimara) in Sonamuar Sub-division; Sepahijala District. He was an extra-ordinary person from his childhood in terms of stature, strength, and wisdom.<sup>9</sup> The genesis of the resistance movement of 1863 can be traced in 1850 itself. Ishan Chandra Manikya son of Krishankishore Manikya ascended the royal throne of Tripura in 1849. On ascending the throne was confronted with numerous difficulties and the most important being-financial. His father Krishankishore Manikya is said to have whiled away his time in hunting, sports and merry-making. Consequently, the State as well as the Zamindari of Chakla Rosanabad <sup>10</sup> reached the stage of bankruptcy at the time of his death. As a result, on his death left a huge debt burden of rupees eleven lakhs.<sup>11</sup> . To get rid of the debt burden and to find a way out Ishan Chandra Manikya gave charge of his realm to Balaram Hazari<sup>12</sup> including the Zamindari of Rosanabad and appointed to the post of Dewan. The problem for Ishan Chandra Manikya started as soon as Balaram Hajari took the charge of Dewan. In order to assist him in the discharge of his duties Balaram Hazari took the help of his brother Sridama. Both the brothers- Balaram Hajari and Sridama began to rule the State in oppressive manner and there was discontent everywhere in the State more particularly in the hills. Their action reached to such an extent that they became the symbol of tyranny in the State. In order to combat such act of atrocities and oppression the Jamatias began a resistance movement under the leadership of Prakshit and Kriti. The tribal people under their leadership made a sudden attack one day at the dead of the night and attacked the house of Balaram Hazari. In the attacked Balaram Hajari escaped but his brother Sridama could not escape and was murdered by Kriti. The incident shocked Ishan Chandra Manikya and immediately the forces swung in to action and captured both Prakshit and Kriti. While both of them were in jail Kriti was killed by Upendrachandra. The Maharaja desired that Prashit be produced before him so that he can have first hand knowledge abut the real cause of the incident. On the appointed day Prakshit was produced before the Maharaja and during that time the Durbar was also in

session. Prakshit narrated the whole incident in front of the Maharaja and members of the Durbar of how Balaram Hajari and his brother Sridama committed inhuman atrocities while collection of taxes from the Jamatia community. On hearing the entire incident many of the elders present in the Durbar supported with Prakshit. Thereafter, Prakshit was released and Ishan Chandra Manikya removed Balaram Hajari and was replaced by Braja Mohan Thakur. The financial condition of the State did not improve even after Braja Mohan Thakur took the charge. In order to find solution at one point of time Maharaja Ishan Chandra Manikya wanted to appoint Dakshinnaranjan Mukherjee of Calcutta but instead Bipin Bihari Goswami (the spiritual guide or Guru) of the Maharaja assumed the charge of the State as well as the Zamindari of Rosanabad. The Maharaja practically did nothing and left the sole management of every matter of his realm in the hands of his the spiritual guide or Guru who aimed at resorting the finances of the Maharaja who was over head and ears in debt to the great *Mahajans* (money-lenders). Bipin Bihari Goswami did everything he could in order to restore the financial stability of the State. Gordon has thrown some light on the character of Goswami. As a ruler, Goswami was incompetent, unfaithful and utterly unscrupulous. He hardly respected any body and seemed to study to estrange the hill men from him.<sup>13</sup> The financial situation as it looks might have improved but subsequent incident that followed will indicate that such exercises were at the cost of the common people or subjects who had to bear the maximum burden of taxation.

Ishan Chandra Manikya died at the age of 34 in 1862 and was succeeded by Maharaja Birchandra Manikya. Having complicated with extensive litigation for his succession, Birchandra Manikya was reported to take but little interest in the affairs of the State, and he willingly left the administration of his government in the hands of the Dewan and his other officers. Information regarding the disturbances in the hills among the tribes was also in the knowledge of the Maharaja as is evident from the information he gave to the British authority. He writes, "The disturbances in the hills have been connived at, and are being fostered by his brothers Neelkrishna and Kala Thakur."<sup>14</sup> Such proposition of the Maharaja however is quite contrary to the report of the District Magistrate<sup>15</sup>

"I am convinced that neither Neelkrishna nor Kala Thakur has any hand in this rising. The Rajah's conduct in sending out a number of armed ruffians to collect rent and afterwards cutting off and hanging up the heads of the murdered men, instead of holding a strict dispassionate enquiry into the merits of the affray, were quite sufficient to account for the disturbances in the first instance, and after show of hostility and combination against him without any connivance or assistance on the part of his brother, however, hostile their own feeling might be"

Shortly after ascending the throne Birchandra Manikya had to deal with the Jamatia rebellion under the leadership of Parikshit which in the history of Tripura is known as Jamatia Revolt of 1863. As indicated earlier, the attitude of Bipin Bihari Goswami towards the hill people and the oppressive measures adopted for collection of taxes by the officials of the Maharaja were the primary cause of unrest among the Jamatias.

In the year 1863, it was again Praikshit who led the Jamatias to revolt against the oppressive and unscrupulous officials of the Maharaja and their wrong doings. Parikshit, was then the Sadar or Akra of the Jamatia community. Wakhirai Hajari, was entrusted to collect tax from the Jamatia community who also belong to that community. The Jamatias were in the services of the Maharaja and were exempted from the '*Tyethungs*' system. Wakhirai Hajari also imposed *Tyethung* system among the Jamatias and adopted the oppressive method of tax collection. The act of Wakhirai Hajari created distrust and hostility among the Jamatia community. To make the matter worse Wakhirai Hajari asked the Jamatias to carry his wife on the *Waying* or bamboo made cradle and it so happened that Wakhirai's wife was at that time in her menstruation period.<sup>16</sup> This act of Wakhirai was taken as profligacy by the Jamatias and such order was disobeyed. Wakhirai Hajari took act as an insult and waited for opportunity to punish. In order to avenge, Wakhirai Hajari reported to the Maharaja that the Jamatias refused to pay taxes they had a plan to have an 'Independent Jamatia State'<sup>17</sup> under the leadership of Parikshit. In order to ascertain the truth the Maharaja sent some *Brindias* or soldiers to the Jamatia villages. Wakhirai was in some collusion with some of the *Brindias* and gave some of the names of the Jamatias who refused to carry his wife. Once in the Jamatia villages the *Brindias* made charges on the disrespect shown to Wakhirai Hajari. The Jamatias refused the charges brought against them and made it clear that it was no disrespect to Wakhirai Hajari but were not able to carry his wife who was in her menstruation period during the visit. There was a heated argument between the *Brindias* and the Jamatias and situation reached to such an extent that all the *Brindias* were killed by the Jamatias. Thereafter rumor spread that the *Brindias* were killed by the secret forces of Parikshit. After this incident the Maharaja was also seriously given to belief that the intension of the Jamatias was to establish 'Independent Jamatia Kingdom' and dethrone him. Some armies were sent to the Jamatia villages but most of them were killed by the Jamatias and few could escape and reported the matter to the Maharaja. In order to punish the Jamatias for their rebellious act, the Maharaja decided to seek the help of the Sikam<sup>18</sup> soldiers. He sought the help from Hmursaipuia and Huapuiliiana, the two Rajas of the Sikam. The two Rajas of the Sikam agreed to send 600 soldiers- 300 each under the leadership of Changkuala and Chandra Akar. The combined forces of the Maharaja and the Sikam soldiers marched towards the Jamatia villages and fought against the Jamatias for a month. Ultimately Parikshit was captured by the combined forces and as war booty 200 heads of the Jamatias were brought by the Sikam soldiers and

placed before the Maharaja. In the report of the Tripura District Magistrate, it is mentioned that the heads of these Jamatias were cut off and are now hanging up in terrarium at Agartala.<sup>19</sup>

The entire confusion and genesis of the revolt revolves round around the extravagance life of the ruler, no proper law of succession and tyranny of the officials who represents the Maharaja. Thus it becomes clear from the report of Hunter in 1876 "The Jamatias were the fighting caste of the Tipperahs, and were well fitted for the jungle warfare. They were exempted from forced coolie labour, a privilege of which were very tenacious, the infringement of which was the cause of sanguinary rebellion some years ago".<sup>20</sup>

The Reangs were also one of the subjects of the Maharaja of Tripura. They like other tribes were also ruled through their Chiefs who were known as Choudhuries. The head of the Choudhuries were known as Rai. The contest for the Rai between Khagendra Choudhuri and Debi Singh was also one of the factors for the rebellion. The Reang were highly dissatisfied with the unequal taxation system of the Maharaja.<sup>21</sup> From a statement made by Shri.Umakanta Das in 1903 observed that the Reangs were already over-taxed.<sup>22</sup>

As the Second World War broke out, the Maharaja was like his father Krishankishore Manikya committed to help the British with men, money, and materials as was done during the First World War. As a part of the commitment and War preparation vigorous propaganda measures all round were initiated for facilitating recruitment and generating a spirit of co-operation among the people the II World War in 1939. There was also sudden rise in price and food crisis due to War. All available paddy was purchased from the hills and hording by some selfish Choudhuries was responsible for the famine in villages dominated by Reangs- Amarapur, Udaipur, Belonia and Subroom. of The Maharaja ordered the two Choudhuries of Udaipur- Khagendra and Krishnaprasada to gather Reang youth for recruitment for military purpose. The Choudhuries could not carry out the order of the Maharaja as Ratanmoni<sup>23</sup> and his followers were creating hindrances.( The matter was reported to the Maharaja by the two Choudhuries. Further they also reported that Ratanmoni and his followers were preparing for a rebellion against the Maharaja<sup>24</sup>. On getting the report the Maharaja immediately dispatched a strong army against the rebellious Reangs. The Reangs villages were set on fire and their leader Ratanmoni was captured and brought as captive to Agartala. Along with Ratanmoni thousands of Reangs were brought as captives and many of them were killed. Their leaders claim that 20425 people were altogether arrested but the officer-in-charge of the office of the then Government asserts that the number was below 3000, including 200 women and 12 children.<sup>25</sup> The Reang rebellion was forcibly suppressed with in a short time. Ratanmoni was brought to the royal palace and met with unnatural death.<sup>26</sup> Later those detained in jails were released and the rebellion came to an end.

The background of the rebellion suggests that it was socio-economic in nature and the most important factor being the excessive torture and oppression of the Choudhuries. In order to do away with the oppression of the Choudhuries, the Reang found Ratanmoni Noatia as saviour. The activities of the Reangs who were follower of Ratanmoni were later reported to the Maharaja by the Choudhuries. The Maharaja on hearing the entire incident from the Choudhuries ordered for the arrest of Ratanmoni. Accordingly Ratanmoni was arrested but later somehow managed to escape but was later captured.

The nature of the rebellion indicates that it was not against the Maharaja but was directed against the officials or leaders or Chief of their own respective communities. It is interesting to note that the rebellion of the Jamatias was confined to the Jamatias themselves and the Reangs rebellion among the Reangs. None of the other tribes were involved nor did support in the rebellion. There was no significant administrative change that was brought out after both theses rebellion took place. However, in 1871 British Political Agent was posted at Agartala in order to assist the Maharaja in his administration. Thus we can conclude that there were many factors were responsible for the rebellion of the Jamatias in 1863 and the Reang in 1942. The historical analysis of the movement revels that it has its deep roots in the political, socio-economic conditions prevailing during that time and it was a natural responses on the part of the people under study to response to such extreme social stress and strain under the pressure of the forces of the ruler.

### Notes and References

1. Desai A.P. (ed.), The peasant struggle in India, New Delhi, p.12.
2. International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Vol. 9-10 p.95
3. Hunter W.W., A Statistical Account of Bengal, p.460
4. The indigenous hill people of Tripura were dependent on shifting cultivation. No land tax or revenue was levied from them. However, each family was liable to pay a tax called *Gharchukti* or house tax or family tax. The rate of such tax levied varied from tribe to tribe. The Kukis were sometime exempted from the tax on the understanding that that they would render military service as and when required. The *Binindias* or special types of police of the Maharaja were exempted from paying the house tax or family tax.
5. Chaudhuri, Dipak Kumar, The Political Agents and the Native Raj p.119.
6. Mackenzie, Alexander, The North- East Frontier of India p.286.
7. Due to the absence of proper transport and communication network, movement in the hills and village to village was rather difficult for the officials of the Maharaja. In order to overcome this huddles a system known as '*Taithung*' was introduced whereby any of the officials visiting the villages in the hills- the hill people had to provide guides and free labour for luggage bearers for the officials while passing through the hills on duty. Apart from that the villagers were also to arrange for food etc. for which no payment was

made. Some of the tribes were from time to time free from such system as in the case of the Jamatias in 1863. It is pertinent to mention that *Pothang* system or forced labour system was also one of the causes for discontentment of the Kuki people which led to the Kuki Rebellion 1917-1919 in Manipur.

8 War Supplement to the Tripura State Gazette, Dated 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1942

9. Tripura State Gazette Sankalan, 1903-1949, Education Department, Government of Tripura p.415.

10. Jamatia Nagendra, Jamatia Chaba Bakharak Parikshit (Kokborok) Tripura Tribal Research Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala, 1999, p.15.

11. Besides being the ruler of Hill Tipperah, the Raja is also the holder of a large Zamindari- Chakla Rosanabad situated in the plains which covers 589 square miles.

12. Bhattacharyya, Suchintya, Genesis of Tribal Extremism in Tripura, New Delhi, p.104

13. Hajari or Hazari was a title conferred to those officials who are the chief of the Brindia

14. Mackenzie, Alexander, Memorandum on the North East Frontier of Bengal, 1869, Gordon's Report, p.54

15. Choudhury, N.R. Roy, Tripura Through the Ages, Agartala, 1977, p.79

16. Jamatia, B.K The Jamatias of Tripura: A Historical Study 1863-1985, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Tripura University p.65

17. Ibid. p.69.

18. Ibid, p.69.

19. Sikam: term by which the Kokborok speaking people refer to the Halam-Kuki group viz. Darlongs/Lushais or Mizos.

20. Debbarma, Somendra, Census Bibarani 1340 T.E. (Bengali) Tripura Tribal Cultural Research Institute and Museum, Government of Tripura, Agartala 1997. p.71

21. Jamatia K.B, The Jamatias of Tripura: A Historical Study 1863-1985, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Tripura University p.67.

22. In the Annual Report 1874-75 of the Political Agent, the family tax in the hills were as follows:

Tribe	Rate per family
Tipperahs	Rs.3.80
Jamatyas	Rs. 3.80
Nowatyas	Rs.10.00
Riangs	Rs.10.00
Halam	Rs.2- Re.1
Kookees	Rs.5.40

23. Roychoudhury, N.R.op.cit. p.88

24. Ratanmoni Noatia was resident of Chittagong Hill Tracts, was a social reformer, and could not tolerate the misdoings of the atrocities committed by Choudhuries on the simple Reangs. Many of the Reangs became his disciple and in order to do away with the atrocities committed by the Choudhuries and asked his followers to abstain from paying to taxes.

25. Roychoudhury, N.R.op.cit. p.90

26. Sen, Tripur Chandra: Tripura in Transition, p.18

27. Ibid. p.18

