

Birchandra Manikya (1862-1896)

Bir Chandra Manikya is considered to be father of modern Tripura. The social, Political and cultural thinking of the princely state started from his time. Birchandra was the son of Krishna Kishore Manikya and brother of Ishan Chandra Manikya. It was not easy for him to seize the throne of the Kingdom, he had to be fallen in controversy with his brother and nephews. However, in view of the decision of the Privy Council on 15 March, 1869, he was proclaimed king on 9th March 1870 and on 28 November, 1877, the British government conferred on him the title of Maharaja. During his tenure, various significant steps were taken in the administrative, social, economic and another fields of the state. Various administrative reforms were carried out during his tenure with the help of Political agents.

Tripura entered the modern era during the reign of Bir Chandra Manikya. Efforts to modernize Tripura begins in all aspects of administration, law, education, social reform etc. Now we will discuss the various reforms in details that were taken by him.

Bir Chandra as an administrative reformer:- The contribution of Bir Chandra Manikya as an administrative reformer is significant. The appointment of Political agent of Tripura started from his time. Although the British government hired political agent for their own purpose. The British government assured the King that political agent would not affect the king's power in the kingdom. A.W.B Power is appointed as first political agent. Bir Chandra Manikya took initiative to bring about the constitutional change. He also carried out court reform. He set up a tribunal the "Khas appellate court in imitation of the Privy council of Britian. There were two judges in this court. He set up the excise department and the stamp department in the state in imitation of the British administration and introduced the rules of document registry. During his regin, Tripura was divided into three parts for the convenience of administration- North section, Middle section and South section. The departmental workplaces of these sections were Kailasahar for North Section, Agartala for middle section and Udaipur for south section. Apart from these he brought out another administrative reforms also performed by him.

- A noteworthy reform was the introduction of municipality at Agartala in 1871. In this institution, Political agent was appointed as chairman. And in 1874 municipal laws were enacted.
- For the first time in this state budget system was introduced. However the credit went to a royal administrator Baboo Nilmani Das.
- On 1 october 1875 one postoffice was opened at Agartala. It was the decided that the expenses would be borne by the state government and would be managed by the Indian postal Authority.
- The census operation was completed during his time in 1881. This was the first attempt of modern census of India and also for this state.

- A noteworthy achievement was enacted during his time was to pass three acts relating the police, the excise and the landlords and tenants.
- The king took a wise step to organize a small “Byabasthapak Sabha” (legislative council). This decision was taken when he felt absence of energetic and veteran officer to steer affairs of the state

As a social reformer:- Bir Chandra Manikya was a prominent social reformer. By a judicial order in July 1878 the age old Practice of slavery was abolished and by a similar step, the feudal practice of Joolai was also abolished in 1878. He banned the practice of Sati in 1889, in the interest of sahib and umakanta. As a social reformer, he was in favour of abolishing caste system.

His role as reform in education:- Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya took the responsibility of improving education system of the inhabitants of Tripura. To improve the education system, he established the first high school of Tripura named “Agartala Government High School on 15 December 1890. Later it named as Umakanta Academy. In 1894, another big school especially for girls was established at Agartala and it was named after Tulashibati, the Manipuri queen of Radhakisor now it is known as “Maharani Tulashibati High secondary school.

His contribution to the improvement of the royal army:- Maharaja Birchandra tried to modernize the armed forces. Those who had the power to control the army and who were loyal to the King were appointed captains. They hired people in the armed sector with the permission of the king.

His contribution to the field of literature:- In addition to administrative knowledge, he also had considerable experience in the field of literature. He showed his literal quality by writing “Prem Marichika”, “Akal Kusum”, “Uchchhas”, “Jhulan”, “Hori” and “sohag” etc. He was also quite a patron of other contribution on literature. He spent fifty thousands rupees at that time to publish a Bengali Version of “Srimad-Bhagavatam. He arranged to print the book, “Sri Sir Haribilas” at his own expense. He was acclaimed in the society of that time for printing the book “Govindabhasya of Brahmasutta”. Prominent Educationist Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen was able to publish his own books due to Bir Chandra Manikya. Moreover it was during his tenure Bengali was used as the official language in the administrative field.

Moreover he also paid attention to the health of the state. The first hospital was established in the city of Agartala in May 1873. He started vaccinating in the state when the state was affected by the cholera epidemic.

Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya passed away in 1896. His contribution in taking Tripura on the path of modernity is highly admirable. In fact his contribution to the development of Tripura in every field is not to be forgotten.

