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## WAR AND DIPLOMACY IN PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD: THE KINGDOMS OF MANIPUR AND TRIPURA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The relationship between ancient kingdoms of Manipur and Tripura during pre-colonial period was shaped by sustained interaction through warfare, diplomacy, trade and migration. Literary sources such as the Cheitharol Kumbaba, Shri Rajmala and Tripura Buranji reveal early trade exchanges between Tripuris, Manipuris (Mekhalis) and Cacharis showing close economic linkage between them. At the same time, recurrent conflicts during the reigns of Kapompa, Khagemba and Garibniwaz demonstrate a pattern of rivalry marked by invasions, battles and captured of prisoners. Alongside conflict, matrimonial alliances between the royal houses of Manipur and Tripura dating back to around the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE emerged as a key diplomatic strategy, fostering political cooperation, facilitating migration and strengthening socio-cultural ties. These alliances significantly contributed to the spread of Manipuri cultural practices in Tripura. The exchange of emissaries, gifts, and ceremonial visits further underscores the complexity of Manipur and Tripura relations. This study made humble attempt to highlight how war and diplomacy together forged an enduring historical bond between the two kingdoms.*

**KEYWORDS:** Manipur, Tripura, war, Diplomacy, Matrimonial alliances

## INTRODUCTION:

Manipur with its neighbouring kingdoms especially Tripura had an unbreakable bond since the early time in the field of war, diplomacy and trade. The political consolidation of both kingdoms in their respective regions created defined territorial authority that enabled sustained inter-kingdom interactions. Their geographical contiguity in ancient times and position along important land routes connecting Assam, Bengal and Burma encouraged diplomatic contact, trade exchange and strategic alliances. Furthermore, regional conflicts and population movements influenced the balance of power between the two kingdoms. Migration between Manipur and Tripura kingdoms was also happening since ancient times. The earliest phase of migration of Manipuri in Tripura was evident during the proto-historic Meetei monarch, King Kangba.<sup>i</sup> It is evident from numbers of literary sources; Manipur has engaged in trade relation with Tripura since early period. *Tripura Buranji*, the chronicle of Tripura made a reference about the market at Rangrung where the people of Tripura, Mekhali (Manipur) and Cachar engaged in a lively trade.<sup>ii</sup> The Royal Chronicle of Manipur, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* also highlighted that during the reign of King Khagemba, 10 royal market were inaugurated in the name of those who died in the battle and were given particular items to sell. Among them, Kontong market has to sell the basket brought from Takhen.<sup>iii</sup> It also provided a lot of information regarding the trade of elephant between the two kingdoms during various rulers. Tripura was known as *Takhel/Takhen* by the people of Manipur and Manipuri was called *Mekhali/Mogli* by the Tripuri people. In this paper, the relation between Manipur and Tripura had been traced through the war and diplomacy that occurred between the two kingdoms in pre-colonial period.

Manipur was engaged in political conflict with its neighbouring kingdoms since ancient times either to show supremacy or protect the boundary of its kingdom. The Royal Chronicle of Manipur has mentioned numbers of battle fought between the Tripura and Manipur since ancient times. In 1533 CE, during the period of Meidingu Kapompa (1524-1542 CE), the Meiteis defeated Takhen in a battle and captured Aarai Champra, Tolaikuppa, Lonma Thangpa, and Sanongpa.<sup>iv</sup> According to Sarangthem Barmani, in 1534 CE the Takhen (Tripura) captives were ordered to dig a canal called *Takhelkhong*.<sup>v</sup> *Ningthourol Lambuba* stated that Meidingu Kabomba invaded Leimatak and defeated the Takhel invader such as *Chambiyacha Sen yeiba, pung Yeiba, Hachakang Sen yeiba*.<sup>vi</sup> However, it does not allude the details of the event. In the year 1634 CE, during the reign of king Khagemba, there was an incident of Meitei victory over Takhel and captured 200 people in the battle.<sup>vii</sup> In 1696 AD, during the reign of King Paikhomba (1666-1697), Lourempa Sangkhupa the Hanchapa, Huitromba the Keirungpa, and others departed to check the advance of Takhen towards Meitei land and captured 16 Takhen.<sup>viii</sup> *Sri Rajmala Vol I-IV* mentioned that the one among the 18 sons of Danger Fa was stationed at Manipur. It indicated that in 15<sup>th</sup> century AD, during the reign of Danger Fa portion of Manipur's land was under the Tripura ruler.<sup>ix</sup> However,

there are lack of evidence to deals with the details of the statement and royal chronicle of Manipur is silent about this.

During the reign of Garibniwaz, series of conflict with Tripura had occurred. The King of Tripura during this period was Dharma Manikya II (1713-1725). The details of the Tripura invasion in Manipur were narrated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century text called *Takhel Ngamba* which stated that during the reign of Dharma Manikya II in Udaypur, the then capital of Tripura, a general Satrajit Narayan was dispatched to attack on the Meitei over the issue of *Bagavat Gita*, palanquin, elephant and *pung* (drum)<sup>x</sup> which was destroyed by the Manipuris when Takhel army collected a tribute from *Kharam Lampal*.<sup>xi</sup> According to *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the first battle was fought in 1722 AD that Takhel invaded Manipur and captured four *hao Lambus* and 6 *Aimols*. To repel the invaders, Garibniwaz sent Bamon hanjaba and Naharup Shanglen Lakpa. In 1723 AD Haobamcha Ahallup Lakpa was sent to repel the Takhel invaders and the Meitei army defeated Takhel army. They captured 2 persons; however, 39 Meitei army were died in the battle.<sup>xii</sup> As the king of Tripura could not achieve immediate victory over Manipur, he sends an envoy called Panchali to the court of the Burma to make request for a joint military expedition against Meitei.<sup>xiii</sup> In November 1723 AD, the Burmese and Tripuri army attacked Manipur from two directions. Burmese attacked from the east while the Tripuris entered from the southwest.<sup>xiv</sup> After defeating Burmese invaders at Wangjing, Garibniwaz turned his attention towards Tripuri and defeated them in the battle of *Kege Chaopa Pung Ngaite Loukonung* and Takhel army were retreated from *Loklao* in February and 10 Tripuris were captured.<sup>xv</sup> *Ningthourol Lambuba* depicted that King Garibniwaz victorious over Takhel got him the title “Lairen Meidingu Thongnang Mayamba Nongpok Wairang Pamheiba Ke Ke Thambal Nongsha lou Sana Pungthongba Leimayaida Khausaba Thongnang Takhel Lalyam Thaba Huiyel Panchamrai Phaba o”.<sup>xvi</sup> In 1727 AD, to settle the long standing conflict, Garibniwaz advanced towards Tripura (Takhel) with numbers of troops. However, the king of Tripura instead of facing with war and struggle proposed a friendly relation with Manipur leading to the avoid of bloodshed between the two kingdoms.<sup>xvii</sup> Furthermore, in 1734 AD, Garibniwaz again went to attack Takhen. A bridge was constructed by the Meitei troops over the Gwai river and built camp at *Sekchai*, the confluence of three rivers; Gwai, Tuivai and Wangkonok. After the defeat of Takhen by King Garibniwaz, the inhabitant of Charai community within Takhen areas were made tributary. Moreover, all the Takhen subjects who were brought under the control of King Garibniwaz came to pay him respect.<sup>xviii</sup> In this battle, one person was killed and 1100 prisoners were captured.<sup>xix</sup> His successful invasion towards Tripura ultimately got him the high-sounding title *Takhel ngamba* which means the "Victory over Takhel".<sup>xx</sup> As a consequence of the victory over Takhel, Mayang ambassadors along with 80 people came in the royal court of Manipur to presented a gift to the king.<sup>xxi</sup>

Diplomatic relation between the two kingdoms is mainly categorised into two; matrimonial alliances and visit of emissaries. After the death of Garibniwaz, there was a bloodless revolution against the king Chit Sai for his treacherous murder of his father, brother Shyam Sai, Sur Sai (Shyam Sai's Son) and all the followers of Garibniwaz at Tomphang (bank of Brahmaputra).<sup>xxii</sup> Chit Sai was expelled from Manipur by Bharat Sai who was supported by the people of Manipur in 1752 AD to Mayang Land.<sup>xxiii</sup> When there was frequent invasion of Burma during the reign of king Jay Singh, Chit Sai took the opportunity and seek the help of King Krishna Manikya of Tripura (1760-1783 AD)<sup>xxiv</sup> to availed him in securing the British assistance in regaining the throne. However, Krishna Manikya failed to secure the British support for Chit Sai, instead British signed an agreement with Bhagyachandra.<sup>xxv</sup>

Matrimonial alliances have become one of the important diplomatic tools used between Manipur and Tripura kingdoms. It is evident from *Sri Rajmala vol 1-4* that the marriage alliance between Manipur and Tripura has been dated back to around the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. when Taidaksin succeeded his father Dakshin as the ruler of Tripura. It has furnished that Taidakshin wedded a princess from Mekhali and had a son called Sutaksin.<sup>xxvi</sup> However, N. C. Nath does not provide the name of the Mekhali princess who was wedded to Taidakshin. Since then, royal matrimony has been one of the essential diplomatic tools between the two kingdoms. During the reign of King Khagemba (1597–1654), the younger brother of the King, Sanongba, married a Tripuri princess.<sup>xxvii</sup> Additionally, *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: Cheitharon Kumpapa* also mentioned the departure of Akoijam Chanu Yangnu Takhel Leima for Takhen (Tripura) in 1609 AD.<sup>xxviii</sup> It also noted that Meetei Reima Takhembi was married to the Takhen ruler in 1638 AD.<sup>xxix</sup> However, the details of the marriage alliances is not mentioned in the royal chronicle of Manipur. *Manipur Past and Present Vol IV* narrated that Maharaja Bhagyachandra gave the hand of his daughter Rajmala (Sija Tampha) to Krishna Manikya (1748-1783), the King of Tripura. She became the chief queen and ruled Tripura for two years after the king's death in 1783.<sup>xxx</sup> Dwijendra Narayan Goswami's also cited in his book *Rajarshi Bhagya Chandra* that the queen of Krishna Manikya whose name was Janhaba Devi locally known as Champa was believed to be Manipuri lady. She was indicated in the name "Shija Champa" by the Manipuris in Tripura.<sup>xxxi</sup> She built Panchratna temple and installed a deity of Radhamadhaba at Radhanagar of Noor Nagar Pargana which is currently located in Bangladesh.<sup>xxxii</sup> The identity of Janhaba Devi being Manipuri lady is not yet confirmed.

The most significant matrimonial alliance that occurred between the royal house of Tripura and Manipur happened in 1798 A.D. during the period of Bhagyachandra, the King of Manipur and Rajdhar Manikya (1785-1804), the King of Tripura. Bhagyachandra, on his way to Nabadwip for a pilgrimage gave the hand of his daughter Princess Harisheswori to the King of Tripura, Rajdhar Manikya II.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The incident is also highlighted

in Hamilton's *An Account of Assam* that in 1798 AD, King Jaya Singha (another name of King Bhagyachandra) of Manipur visited the King of Tripura in Agartala and had him married one of his daughters to Radan Manikya (Rajdhar Manikya II), King of Tripura.<sup>xxxiv</sup> On this occasion, he presented the idol of Shri Shri Radhamadav to his daughter for daily worshipping deity. It is discussed in Rajkumar Kamaljit Singh's *Tripuragi Meihouolda Meitei (The Manipuris beginning of their settlements in Tripura)* that Sarungbam, Hanjabam, Khumanthem, and Laipubam were notable households who came as retinues of the princess and made a permanent settlement in Agartala.<sup>xxxv</sup> Dr Ch. Jaimini Devi in her book *Daughter of Manipur* gives the names of the King's trusted attendants who remained in Tripura to assist the princess. They are Shrideb Mallik Hidamcha, Nongsu Khumbongcha, Tayung Hidang Shridam, Narayan Laishraba, Tulsishyam, Pheidanai Shanglakpa, Naharup Hajari, Churamani Thiyamcha Nungsung Surya, Naha Cheiteinya of Nongpok Cheitheng, Sanchani Thingujamba.<sup>xxxvi</sup> They were given a village called *Mekhlipara* (Meitei Leikai) located near the palace in Puratan (ancient) Agartala<sup>xxxvii</sup>. It was derived from the term Mekhali/Mogli which was a name of Manipuri known by the people of Tripura.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

The royal matrimony had created huge impact in the socio-cultural and political structure between the kingdoms. As an impact of the matrimonial alliances, the route between Manipur and Tripura were enlarged and occurrence of immigration between the kingdoms become easier. There was also an incident in 1804 A.D that the Meiteis helped the Tripuris to suppress the Kukis raids in the Tripura border.<sup>xxxix</sup> The royal wedding that occurred in 1798 AD was noteworthy from a political perspective since Maharaja Bheigyachandra received financial assistance from Rajdhar Manikya II, the king of Tripura in his pilgrimage.<sup>xl</sup> Maharaja Baghyachandra received 700 silver coins and 15 boats from Rajdhar Manikya II, the King of Tripura for his journey to Nabadwip.<sup>xli</sup> Francis Hamilton also asserted that King Jaya Singh was very poor and the expense of travelling to Bengal was supported by the King of Tripura.<sup>xlii</sup> The royal matrimony had a huge influence on the socio-cultural life of Tripura. Princess Harisheshwori brought with her Radhamadav idol as her personal worshipping God when she married Rajdhar Manikya in 1798 AD.<sup>xliii</sup> Afterwards, the performance of Ras Leela, a popular dance of Manipur was begun in Tripura under the instruction of Princess Harisheswori.<sup>xliv</sup> The continuation of the royal marriages between the two kingdoms on numerous occasions created an unbreakable bond between the kingdoms of Manipur and Tripura.

The royal chronicle of Manipur has mentioned the visit of number of emissaries from Tripura which indicated close political relation between the two kingdoms. The royal emissaries brought with them an elephant and a gift for the ruler of Manipur. An archaic Manipuri literature *Lairikyengbam lol* stated that during the reign of King Kyamba (1467-1508 A.D.) dignitaries coming from Takhel brought a *Praman* book in the Manipur

Kingdom but could not read it. To read the book, a scribe from Takhel (Tripura) named Kabichandra was brought to the royal court during the reign of Lamkyamba (1512-1523 A.D.).<sup>xlv</sup> However, L. Biramangal Singh stated that a Nawab of Bengal sent a letter to Lam Kyamba, the King of Manipur which was written in Pharsi language. Pandit Kabichandra was called from Takhel (Tripura) to read the content of the letter as no one could decipher it.<sup>xlvi</sup> The incident showed the cordial relation between Manipur and Tripura. According to Cheitharol Kumbaba, in 1662 AD, during the reign of King Khunjaoba, a delegate from Takhen along with elephant and women has arrived in the royal court of Manipur. It is further explained that some elephant along with Loukrakpam Moirampa, pheida Takhen and Chongtham Thingla leave the kingdom for Takhen (Tripura). In 1735 AD, during the reign of King Garibniwaz, an envoy from Tripura arrived.<sup>xlvii</sup> However, the royal chronicle of Manipur does not mention about the details of the event. During the reign of King Marampa (Gourshyam) (1761–1763 CE), one elephant was presented by the king of Tripura. During the reign of Baghyachandra, the king of Tripura along with his wife and children were arrived in Manipur.<sup>xlviii</sup> The royal chronicle of Manipur also mentioned about the visit of Takhen by the officials of Manipur which show a cordial relation between the two kingdoms. However, the royal chronicle of Tripura is silent regarding the visit of emissaries.

## CONCLUSION

The political relationship between Manipur and Tripura was neither static nor unilateral but evolved through a continuous process of conflict, negotiation, and accommodation that happened since ancient times. Conflict and diplomacy had been an important facet of the political relation between Manipur and Tripura kingdoms in pre-colonial period. The conflict was occurred either to protect the boundary of their respective kingdoms or to show the political supremacy over one another. Simultaneously, diplomatic strategies such as matrimonial alliances and the regular exchange of emissaries functioned as effective instruments for maintaining balance and dialogue between the two kingdoms. Royal marriages not only strengthened political ties but also encouraged population movement, cultural transmission, and the establishment of Manipuri settlements in Tripura, leaving a lasting socio-political impact. Ultimately, the relationship between Manipur and Tripura kingdoms reflects a historically sustained pattern of interaction in which conflict and cooperation coexisted which contributed significantly to the political stability and cultural landscape of the wider Northeast Indian region.

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