

## CHAPTER – II

### **HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF TRIPURA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

Tripura stands between Assam and Bengal. The history of the kingdom of Tripura is long, extending over several centuries. The ruling dynasty of Tripura is believed by some to have its ancestral relations with the lunar dynasty of the Mahabharata. This is in pursuance of Rajmala which is totally unhistorical in the view of R.C. Majumdar, the eminent historian. Tripura passed through several vicissitudes of history.

The ancient period of Tripura was one of peace and prosperity. It was a period of nation-building. Many temples were built and tanks dug at the orders of the kings of Tripura. The famous rock-cut images at the Unakuti hills were engraved during this period. Sanskrit learning was patronized. Many Brahmans were brought from Mithila and Kanauj for sanskritisation. So long as Bengal was ruled by the Pala and the Sena kings, Tripura was safe from the fear of external aggression. The dethronement of Lakshman Sen of Bengal in 1204 A.D. by Ikhtiyar-ud-din Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji was a great turning point in the history of north-eastern India. After that, Tripura became exposed to attacks and aggressions by the Afgans and the Mughals. The methods adopted by the foreign hordes were uncharitable. Tripura had to shift its capital several times and to incur heavy loss in men, money and materials. It was a time of troubles. Tripura was never at rest. The incursions and invasions of the Afghans and the Mughals, destructive though they were of life and property could not completely shatter the kingdom of Tripura, which survived the passing storms. The battle of Plassey in 1757 was another turning point in the history of India. It was a great transitional period; it

marked the eclipse of the freedom of Bengal, and the rise of the foreign rule of the British East India Company. During this period and the period of British rule in India, Tripura was influenced by the patterns of administration introduced elsewhere by the British Government. Administrative decentralization, legislation, establishment of schools and hospitals, maintenance of proper records, introduction of rule of law was the main features of this period.

With the demise of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kisor Manikya Bahadur on 17.05.1947 there was a virtual end of Monarchy i.e. the Raj in Tripura . A regency under the leadership of the Queen was established in 1947 and accession to India was accomplished by her only on September 9, 1949. Merger with India did not immediately bring in its wake a responsible government of Tripura. Relentless popular movements spearheaded by political parties resulted in responsible government in Tripura.

On 9.5.1948, the Gana Mukti Parisad, a tribal platform for fighting was formed under the political leadership of Dasarath Deb, Sudhanaya Deb Barma, Aghor Debbarma and Hemanta Debbarma in Sadar North Agartala. The main objective of the conference was to highlight the demand for a responsible government among other demands. Gana Mukti Parisad organized a big rally of Tribal people followed by a conference on August 15, 1948 and observed a demand day. After some time the leaders went underground and demanded independent Tripura instead of responsible government as sought earlier. After a huge loss of life and property through oppression and repression they returned back to the main-stream of life and raised their voice for a responsible government again on some date in the middle of 1951. <sup>1</sup>

Since its merger in 1949 down to 1972, the tiny state of Tripura went through the following phases:

- a) Period under Chief Commissioner's rule,(15-10-1949 to 14-4-1953) <sup>2</sup>
- b) Period under Chief Commissioner with Advisory Council,(14-08-1959 to 14-10-1959) <sup>3</sup>
- c) Period under Tripura Territorial Council,(15-10-1959 to 01-07 -1963) <sup>4</sup>
- d) Union Territory,(01-07-1963 to 20-01-1972) <sup>5</sup>
- e) Period under Statehood status since 1972 <sup>6</sup>

A brief narration of each phase is not out of place to mention here in order to understand why and how transition from one phase to another took place. This will help as well as bring into focus the nature and character of political movement which took place in a given period. By and large, it is true that both the political parties, Congress and C.P.I. ( after 1964 ,CPI (M)) led the people to contribute to the upholding panorama of political development in the state of Tripura .

#### **PERIOD BETWEEN ( 1949 TO 1953 ): the Chief Commissioner's Rule:**

The agreement of merger of Tripura with Indian Union was signed by the Maharani Kanchan Prava Devi, the regent, on September 9, 1949 . An administrator was appointed by the government of India who took up the administration as Chief Commissioner of Tripura which was a part "C" state of India on October 15, 1949 . This was in contravention of the wishes of the people who sought for democratic system of government under the leadership of various political outfits.

So at Agartala a “ Protest day” was observed on February 25 ,1951 by holding a big rally of the people of all shades of opinion and colour, under the Chairmanship of the learned Advocate Nibaran Chandra Ghosh and others, expressing resentment to the decision of the government of India to make Tripura a part “c”state. It was decided in the meeting to form an organization , namely “ Tripura Rajya Ganatantrik Sangha”, as a common platform of the people of all shades of opinion and colour for fighting against the undemocratic decision. The T.R.G.S. organized many meetings in different parts of Tripura . At the call of T.R.G.S. ,15 August,1951 was observed as a “Demand Day” , for introduction of a responsible government in Tripura . The same demand was also voiced in the T.R.G.S. meeting held on the 16 August,1951 at its Khowai conference. <sup>7</sup>

Thus different political parties fought unitedly, under the banner of T.R.G.S., for a responsible government. But this unity did not last long. As the first general election came near in 1952 , the Congress dissociated itself from the T.R.G.S. and participated in the general election in 1952 , as a separate political party. <sup>8</sup>

In that general election, in absence of the provision for a Legislative Assembly or a valid title to rule the state headed by a democratic set up, participation in the election by voters was not direct in the true sense of the term. The participation in the governance of the state was , therefore, indirect and limited in electing two representatives for the Loksabha and one for the Rajya Sabha through the Tripura Electoral College constituted with 30 members directly elected by the people of Tripura . Its only function was to send one representative to the Rajya Sabha . The members had no such power as enjoyed by members of a Legislative Assembly. The political pattern emerged out of the election remained valid only as a sharp relief for electoral

battle between Congress and C.P. I. This period of Chief Commissioner's rule lasted till 14 April, 1953. <sup>9</sup>

At that time only one organization namely Tripur Sangha (formed earlier during the Maharaja of Tripura in the month of March, 1947) would hold its conference at Agartala. It was patronized by the Maharaja to safeguard the Tribal Interest and to secure some privileges for the Tribals in the state. But with the advent of the Tripur Rajya Gana Mukti Parisad, an organization dominated by the Communists which secured popularity among the Tribals, Tripura Sangha lost its hold among them. <sup>10</sup>

#### **PERIOD BETWEEN (1953to 1959): The Chief Commissioner with Advisory Council:**

On April 14, 1953 a three member Advisory Council was appointed by the President of India to aid and advise the Chief Commissioner in the discharge of his duties. It was an attempt to counter-poise the demand of the "Left wing", "Joint front" for the establishment of an Assembly in the state. The formation of Advisory Council with its members nominated primarily from a political party, in disregard to poll verdicts could hardly meet the political aspiration, recently generated by Parliamentary politics.

The State Reorganization Commission (1954 to 1956 ) envisaged Constitutional changes in the structure of the states. On the basis of its recommendations, in November, 1956, Indian Constituent States were reclassified as, (a) the state , and (b) Centrally Administered Territory. Tripura was re-grouped as a centrally administered territory in 1957, with an Advisory Council at the centre to advise the Union government in regard to:

(a) General questions of policy relating to administration,

(b) All Legislative proposals pertaining to the Territory,

(c) Matters relating to annual FINANCIAL STATEMENTS of TERRITORY.

As a measure of democratization in the administration of the Territory, THE TERRITORIAL COUNCIL ACT 1956(NO.103) was passed in keeping with the structural changes of the states. Consequent upon the second general election in 1957 the Tripura Territorial Council was formed on August 15, 1959.<sup>12</sup>

**PERIOD BETWEEN ( 1959 to 1963): Tripura Territorial Council:**

The Tripura Territorial Council (TTC) formed under Territorial Council Act, 1956, on August 15, 1959 consisted of 32 members in all 30 of them were elected on the basis of adult franchise and 2 were nominated by the government. The Congress party, in the election of T.T.C held in 1957 secured 15 seats out of 30 seats while the C.P.I. and its alliance got 15 seats. With 2 additional members nominated by the government, the Congress party could somehow achieve majority in the Council since 2 nominated members belonged to the congress. As a result Congress leader Sanchindra Lai Singha was elected chairman of the T.T.C. The 2 Lok Sava seats were equally shared by the 2 major contesting parties.

But the subsequent election of the T.T.C. held in 1962 marked a sign of improvement in the position of the Congress. In that election Congress secured 18 seats.

Under the dispensation a sort of diarchical government was introduced u/s 28 of the T.T.C. Act. Some of the wings of the Education, P.W.D., Medical and Agriculture departments of the Tripura Administration were transferred to the T.T.C. to be Administered by its Authority.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly all primary and Secondary Schools of the Education Department( except 5 senior Basic



schools, which were retained by the Tripura Administration),<sup>14</sup> all Hospitals and Dispensaries, all major District roads, bridges and buildings under the P.W.D. and the Animal Husbandry wing of the Agriculture Department came under T.T.C. to be administered and managed under the direct guidance of the T.T.C. Thus some Autonomy status was granted in local matters but with the provision of Central interference at every stage. The executive business of the T.T.C. was transacted through the committee system, presided over by the chairman of the council. The council somehow resembled an Autonomous corporation, except with a wide electoral backing. The Chief Commissioner still wielded the long arm of power in the Administration. The new arrangement, though partially fulfilled the demand for a popular government, could not satisfy the people's aspiration for self-government. Yet the T.T.C. provided the extended training background in democracy which really proved worthy for the people of the state for achieving further democratic outlook.<sup>15</sup>

#### **PERIOD BETWEEN: (1963 to 1972): Union Territory:**

The Territorial Council held its last meeting on June 24, 1963 and with that a chapter in the history of democratization of Tripura was concluded. On July 1, 1963, the "Union Territories Act came in to force. Under this Act a Union Territory shall be administered by an Administrator appointed by the President of India under article 239 of the Constitution".

"There shall be a Legislative Assembly for this Union Territory. All the seats to the Legislative Assembly shall be filled by persons chosen through direct election. Such members shall be 40 in Himachal Pradesh and 30 in each other Territory". So Tripura got 30 members. The Central Government might nominate not more than 3 persons as members of Legislative Assembly.

In respect of the extent of the Legislative power, the Legislative Assembly of a Union Territory, like Tripura might make laws for the whole or any part of the Union Territory with respect to any matters defined in the state list or the concurrent list in the 7<sup>th</sup> Schedule to the constitution. When a bill would be passed by the Legislative Assembly of such Union Territory like Tripura, it would be presented to the Administrator who would reserve the right for the consideration of the President.

There would be a council of ministers in each Territory with Chief Minister at the head to aid and advise the Administrator. The Chief Minister would be appointed by the President and other ministers would be appointed in the same way on the advice of the Chief Minister by the President. The council of ministers would be collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory. Like other Union Territories, Tripura was also placed under this status. With the introduction of government Union Territories Act, the diarchy in the Administration of Tripura came to an end.

The popular ministry of Tripura was inaugurated on July 1, 1963 and Tripura Legislative Council was converted in to the Tripura Legislative Assembly. The former Chief Commissioner became the Administrator as head of the state.

During the intervening period between the fourth and fifth general election in 1967 and 1972 some notable changes were discerned ----

- a) The expansion of the state cabinet;
- b) The change in the designation of the Administrator;
- c) The re-organization of the District Administration.

The composition of the first popular ministry in Tripura was confined to two ministers and three Deputy Ministers. The strength of the second ministry was expanded to five ministers including the Chief Minister and one Deputy Minister. The designation the Administrator was changed to Lt.



Governor in the early part of 1970 without initiating any change in the basic structure of the Administration in Tripura.

January 21, 1972 was a “red letter day” in the political history of the state, when Tripura became a full-fledged state. It was a day of fulfillment of hopes and aspirations of the lakhs of people in Tripura . The attainment of statehood of Tripura signified some changes namely:-

The membership of the state Assembly was raised to 60--- double the strength of the elected members prescribed for the Union Territory. It had no provision for the nominated members. The 60 members Assembly is still in vogue. Under the provision the Lt. Governor was re-designated as the Governor since that time. <sup>16</sup> The political transformation of Tripura was gradual and peaceful. It attained full-fledged statehood status through a series of constitutional changes.

### **PERIOD UNDER STATEHOOD STATUS, 1972**

The people of Tripura were not fully satisfied with the introduction of the democratic set-up --- Legislative Assembly and the Ministry under the government of Union Territories Act 1963. The Marxist Communist Party launched movement demanding full-fledged statehood under the Indian Union. Sri Nripen Chakraborty, the then Leader of the Opposition of the CPI (M) in Tripura Assembly , wrote at the end of 1971 that Legislative Assembly was introduced when the Communists were kept in detention without trial. The power of that Legislature under the Union Territories Act were also limited , the Council of Ministers, being dependent on the mercy of the Chief Commissioner. Thus the machinery of respective government under such disposal was too inadequate to meet the increasing responsibilities. So the struggle began again. This time Tripura was not alone. Manipur and Himachal Pradesh also came in the same line. The Communist party (Marxist) took the

leading part of the movement in Tripura. There were also demands from the Congress M.P. elected from Tripura who spoke in the Lok Sabha demanding for a full-fledged statehood for Tripura where a fully responsible government could be installed.

Meantime , Bangladesh war started in 1971 and Tripura had a large contribution to play at that time. The role it played was unfathomable. It bore the burden of responsibility of a large number of refugees almost equal to its whole population along with facing the horrors of war.

Agitational movements in the demand of statehood started and continued in Manipur and Mizoram also. At the pressure of the movements in Tripura , Manipur and Mizoram, the Centre became lenient. As a result, the North Eastern Areas (Re-organization) Act,1971 was passed in the Parliament and assented to by the President on December 30 ,1971. According to this Act Tripura , Manipur and Meghalaya attained the statehood of the Indian Union. In Tripura the Act was given effect to and from January 21, 1972. The people of Tripura thus won the long-drawn battle.

After Tripura's attainment of statehood the first election of the state Assembly was held in 1972. In that election Congress secured 41 seats out of 60. The swearing in ceremony of the new Ministers took place on March 20 and 31, 1972. The Council of Ministers was assisted by a well-organized secretariat headed by a Chief Secretary, having up-graded status of joint Secretary of the Union government from 21.1.1971. It had a Finance and Judicial Secretary also besides development Commissioner and Chief Engineer. Director of Education and Director of Rehabilitation used to function as the ex-officio secretaries of their respective departments.

The political development and the administrative improvement were rapidly changing the face of the state. The political changes led to

consolidation of the two main parties, Congress and C.P.I. (M). After the introduction of statehood a common cadre of I.A.S, I.P.S. and I.F.S. were created under the title of "Joint Tripura Manipur Cadre". A stable political executive was established after the election in 1972. The whole of the administrative setup of the state was tuned up after the British Administrative system. With the publication of daily news papers from Agartala the channels of communication between the people and the government were developed to a large extent. The political consciousness of people became very responsive. With this, the transition of Tripura from absolute Monarchy to Parliamentary democracy was complete.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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