



The matrimonial relationship of the manikyas of Tripura with Manipur

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Abstract

Ancient and medieval Indian history, from a perspective, was a history of monarchical rule. It was quite obvious to the monarchical political establishments that two neighbouring kingdoms were adopting different types of diplomatic strategies to safeguard the kingdoms and also to strengthen the relationship between them. In this context, this article tried to chronologically study and analyse the Manikya Kingdom and Manipuri Kingdom of medieval and colonial Tripura and Manipur, respectively, based upon the diplomatic tool of the matrimonial alliance, followed by both the kingdom and the resultant of it in a broader historical-cultural context.

Keywords: Manikya, Manipuri, princess, marriage

Introduction

Matrimonial relationships were considered to be one of the significant tools for both strengthening and consolidation of an empire from the ancient period throughout the world. Starting from ancient India, there were several instances in which matrimonial ties were conducted to strengthen the rule. Even historians claimed that these relationships were nothing less than diplomatic maneuvers. Sometimes such ties even reshaped the character of the relationships between the dynasties. Many animosities have succumbed to friendly bonds. There are quite a few instances of marriage as a diplomatic move within the domestic as well as the foreign sphere of Ancient India. For instance, Ancient Magadha and Koshala kingdoms ended their prolonged disputes with a marriage. Historian Ram Sharan Sharma wrote, The Koshalan king was forced to pay for peace by marrying his daughter to Ajatashatru [king of Magadha] and leaving him in charge of Kashi after Ajatashatru eventually emerged victorious in the conflict. Another very important instance of Ancient India, Magadha, involving a foreign power like Macedonia to settle down boundary disputes between the two empires would be the marriage of the daughter of Seleucus Nicator, the army general of Alexander the Great and Chandragupta Maurya. A clear reflection of this diplomacy can be seen in the writings of Strabo in *The Geography*, in the following fashion that Seleucus Nicator gave them [Indus region] to Sandrocottus [Chandragupta Maurya], upon terms of intermarriage and of receiving in exchange five hundred elephants. With time, there was a consistent increase in the instances of marriage alliances between two kingdoms, dynasties, and empires and gradually transformed into and started to get prominently reflected in the policy-making of different emperors. In medieval India, the example of Akbar the Great, would be very apt in this regard. Akbar framed an official policy to tackle the Rajput problem in the name of the 'Rajput Policy', where he gave prime importance to the marriage alliances between the Mughals and the different Rajput states to keep the Rajputs under check without any bloodshed. The observation of Historian Satish Chandra, in his book *Medieval India from Sultanate to the Mughals Part*

Two Mughal empire (1526-1748) here deserves a special mention, It will be evident that the majority of these unions were the result of distinct settings, such as an attack or the need to get assistance against an adversary. Such unions had not produced lasting relationships between the parties. After getting married to Rajput ruler Bhara Mal's daughter, Akbar made a point of highlighting his unique connections to the family in numerous ways. So, during the Uzbek uprising, Bhagwant Das, the son of Bhara Mal, was always present. Further down the line, there was the proliferation of this tactful concept of 'marriage alliance' to incorporate and expand the periphery to include more and new issues into its coverage. Just like mainland India, the north-eastern ruling dynasties of medieval times also having some resemblance with regards to inter-dynastic marriages starting initially for the protection of self-interests but eventually leading to greater inter-cultural assimilation and adaptation. In the medieval north-east three dynasties, namely the Ahom, the Manikya and the Meitei from Manipur had ruled for a prolonged period and were neighbors to each other. So naturally, there were occasions, when the kings married princesses from neighboring dynasties to strengthen certain claims. The Manikyan kings of Tripura claimed to be belonging to the *Kshatriya varna*, hailing from *Chandra* (Moon) dynasty and therefore marrying the princesses from dynasties belonging to the same *varna* was quite accommodating to validate the *Varna* status. Such actions of the kings substantiated their claim of the *Varna* structure. The Manikyas of Tripura also use to put on the Sacred Thread (*Upanayana*) and thus further strengthen their claim of *Kshatriya Varna*. The Manipuri kings similarly claimed to be *Kshatriyas* by the adaptation of wearing the Sacred Thread (*Upanayana*) and according to these two neighbouring kingdoms, found each other very suitable for marriage alliances to maintain the *varna* prerogative. Thus, the Manikyas in several instances took several princesses as their bride from the Manipuris, which constitute the subject matter of the present paper.

Review of Literature

In the history of Tripura and Manipur kingdoms individually, there are plenty of primary and secondary materials available. On the question of the matrimonial alliance, barring a few sources, the majority of the sources either only made passing references or not referred at all.

The royal chronicle of the Manikya dynasty, '*Rajmala*' is in poetic form, containing myths, legends and full of exaggeration, lacking historical authenticity. Thus, though *Rajmala* contains information about the marriages of the Manikyan and Manipuri kingdoms, due to the absence of historicity, this text is one notch below in the process of incorporating it in history writing. The commentaries on *Rajmala*, Dr. N.C. Nath's *Sri Rajmala*, Sri Kaliprasanna Sen's *Sri Rajmala*, Sri Kailashchandra Singha's *Rajmala Ba Tripurar Itihas* and Reverent James Long's *Rajmala* also plagued with the same issues as the original *Rajmala*, despite having references to matrimonial alliances. '*Cheitharol Kumbaba*', the royal chronicle of Manipur and the commentaries on the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, Nepram Bihari's *The Cheitharol Kumbaba*, *The Royal Chronicle of Manipur* and N. Khelchandra & L. Ibungohal's *Cheitharol Kumbaba* represents the Manipur side of the present discussion but also be clubbed in the same group due to above-mentioned reason.

Secondary sources on the history of Tripura and Manipur, such as government reports, like the *Gazetteer of Manipur* by Captain E.W. Dun, the *Tripura State Administration Report* by Dr. D.N. Goswami and Dr. Debbarma and *Administrative Reports of Tripura State* by Prof. Mahadev Chakraborty provides some contextual passing references about the royal wedlock of the Tripuri and Manipuri kingdoms, without any observations on the same.

Other books like the *Social – Cultural Relations Among States in Pre- Independence India: A Study of Tripura & Manipur* by Dr. Udainarayan Adhikari, *Progressive Tripura* by A.C. Bhattacharyya, *History of Manipur* by Gangmumei Kabui, *The History of Manipur (An Early Period)* by W. Ibohal Singh and *Manipur Past and Present* by Naorem Sanajaoba are all dealing with the political history of the two concerned kingdoms, which includes the marriage alliances too, but only describing the marriages as dispute settlements from a typical male (kings) centric viewpoint. The point of view of the female counterparts of the same is either not properly analyzed from a historical sense or absent.

The fact that articles and journals like "Marup, Sharat Ki Echel," "Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Tripura," and "Sahitya Parishad, Manipur" are considered to be a subset of vernacular literature limits their accessibility even though they contain pertinent information about the matrimonial ties between the two kingdoms. Memchaton Singha's paper entitled "Manipuri Queens in the Royal House of Tripura: A Historical Study" is lacking proper foot noting, despite containing the descriptions of the royal marriages of the two kingdoms.

Objectives

The present paper is trying to prepare a historical narrative of the royal marriage alliance of the Manikyas and the Meiteis, based on chronology and accurate dynastic genealogy. This paper attempts to assess the circumstances of the royal marriage alliances of the two kingdoms and also tries to analyze the outcomes of these marriages with far-reaching impacts.

Methodology

The primary and secondary sources available on this topic, including the vernacular sources both in Manipur and Tripura, have been taken into consideration for preparing this paper. Besides this, this paper also engaged with 'oral history' in the form of interviewing certain individuals for gathering first-hand facts and figures on the topic to write this paper. This paper also refers to *Itihasa* (traditional history) and Government Reports to articulate certain past events intricately linked with the concerned subject matter.

Historiography of the marriage alliances of the Manikya and Meitei kingdoms

Both Manipur and Tripura shared a friendly tie from the ancient period. Though there were instances of conflicts and skirmishes. The Manipuris use to call Tripura, *Takhel* and the word *Takhel* meant south. Both the kingdom enjoyed the advantages of their inter-state trade, commerce, diplomacy and wedlock. The two kingdoms came in more close contact when the Burmese invasion occurred in Manipur. Though particularly in the 17th Century there were more than three instances in which bloody battles occurred between the two princely kingdoms. However, amid such hostilities, matrimonial alliances continued between the two states.

The marriage of Taidakshin to a Mekhali (as the Manipuris were known to the Tripuri) princess is the first occurrence of a matrimonial connection between the two kingdoms that was recorded in the *Sri Rajmala*. However, historical data are scarce regarding this particular marriage as *Sri Rajmala* fails to provide the name of the princess or even the name of the father of the bride. Thus, a big gap is prevalent to find out about the historicity of this alliance. Further, the *Sri Rajmala* also fails to provide the date and exact year of the alliance. It simply mentions that the alliance between the two-kingdom occurred in the 5th Century AD. The royal chronicle of the Manipuri kingdom, *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, also does not provide any references regarding this particular event.

King Rajdhar Manikya II

The first significant alliance between the two-kingdom occurred when king Rajdhar Manikya II of Tripura married princess Harisheswari Devi of Manipur. While Raja Joy Singh was on his route of pilgrimage, he visited Tripura. It is said that while his stay in Tripura, he gave his daughter Harisheswari Devi in marriage with Rajdhar Manikya II. The marriage alliance between the two royal kingdoms strengthened the relationship between the two royal families. Rajdhar Manikya II then arranged boats and other necessary items for the safe pilgrimage journey of Raja Bhagyachandra. Rajdhar Manikya II also gifted seven hundred silver coins to his father-in-law as a token of love and respect. Thus, it seems that the matrimonial alliance between the two-kingdom brought about cordial relationship and tranquillity.

Queen Harisheswari Devi was also equally famous for being as religious as her father. She was a devotee of Lord *Shree Krishna* and brought the famous idol of "*Sri Radhamadhav*" and installed it in the royal complex. The king of Tripura, too made no deficit in the religious aspiration of the queen. He brought high priests for the temple, musicians, and helpers for the queen to carry on with the activities of the temple. On the other hand, the king also invited many noblemen from Manipur and requested to settle near the

royal palace. The area of settlement came to be known as Meklipara or the dwellings of the Mekhlis, which meant Manipuris. The policy of marrying the Manipuri princesses continued through the successors of king Rajdhar Manikya II. King Kashi Chandra Manikya, the son of king Rajdhar Manikya II also married princess Kutilakshi of Manipur. According to the *Rajmala* of Kailashchandra Singha, the monarch was mesmerised by the Manipuri princess's propriety, beauty, and manners. *Rajmala* also further mentioned that during the Burmese invasion of Manipur, many Manipuris had to flee from Manipur and came to settle in Tripura. Such settlements increased the population of the Manipuris in Tripura. The Burmese invasion had a huge effect on the lives of the Meiteis because it trembled the whole foundation of the Manipuri kingdom. The Burmese invasion was full of violence and humiliation. The Manipuris remembered the invasion as *Chahi teret Khuntakpa*, which meant 'Seven Years of Devastation. King Kashi Chandra Manikya later on also married three other Manipuri women from the settlers in Tripura.

Krishna Kishore Manikya

After the short reign of Raja Kashi Chandra Manikya, king Krishna Kishore Manikya ascended the Manikya throne. He also followed the policy of his ancestors and married three Manipuri women. But the episode of king Krishna Kishore Manikya was a little different than his predecessors. Krishna Kishore Manikya married the three daughters of the Manipuri king Marjit Singha. The name of the princesses was Chandrakala, Vidhukala and Akhileshwari Devi. The marriages brought strengthening of ties between the two royal houses. However, a turn of events occurred. King Krishna Kishore Manikya was very fond of hunting. He categorically liked to hunt in a marshy, dump land located approximately five miles away from the royal place. The place was known as Haidra. He was so fond of the place that he built a rest house in Haidra and started spending a considerable amount of time there. However, the king also had another reason behind such long hours of stay at Haidra. The king married a Meitei Brahmin cook named Purnakala. She was hired by the royal palace as a cook. However, the monarch was unable to convene and approve the marriage because, at the time, it was strongly frowned upon for a non-Brahmin groom to wed a Brahmin woman. Even the almighty powerful King of Tripura was not able to dissolve such a taboo and Purnakala was though taken by the king as his chief consort but she could not be kept in the royal palace. The king then constructed houses in Haidra for Purnakala and made her stay there with her helpers and maids. Gradually Haidra became densely populated by the Manipuris and eventually came to be known as Dhaleshwar. To date, a huge amount of Manipuris resides in Dhaleshwar including the famous Sanasham clan. Thus, the Manipuri relations had far-reaching dimensions in shaping the history of Tripura.

King Ishan Chandra Manikya

Maharaja Ishan Chandra Manikya succeeded his father Krishna Kishore Manikya to the throne. King Ishan Chandra also had matrimonial alliances with the Manipuris. He like his father married three Manipuri princesses. He first married Moirangthem Chanu Muktabali Devi, then married Keisham Chanu Jatiswari Devi and then Kumanthem Chanu Chandreswari Devi. Moirangthem Chanu Muktabali Devi

was a devotee of Lord *Narayana*. She built a temple of Laxmi Narayana in Dhaleshwar. The king also brought the brother of Moirangthem Chanu Muktabali Devi to Tripura and asked to settle in Dhaleshwar. Moirangthem Chanu Muktabali Devi was a patron of music and dance. She was also the aunt of the famous musician Moirangthem Babuni. The second Manipuri Maharani of Ishan Chandra Manikya, Keisham Chanu Jatiswari Devi, was the mother of Prince Navadip Bahadur. Prince Navadip Bahadur was the father of the famous music director, singer and winner of Padma Shri award recipient Sachin Dev Burman. Thus, the legacy of the matrimonial relationship between the two kingdoms had its history and fervour on the popular artistic creativities of the state of Tripura.

King Bir Chandra Manikya

Bir Chandra Manikya, widely regarded as Tripura's forerunner of modernity, succeeded Ishan Chandra Manikya. Maharaja of Bir Chandra Manikya also followed the policy of his ancestors and further reinvigorated the progress of the Manipuri ethos in Tripura. Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya married three Manipuri queens. First, he married queen Ningthem Chanu Bhanumati, then Panganbam Chanu Rajeswari or Kaboklai and the king's favourite Chanu Leima Manmohini Devi. Ningthem Chanu Bhanumati was the daughter of Rajkumar Kulendrajit Singha and sister of Rajkumar Ranadhawaj Singha. Both Kulendrajit and Ranadhawaj were close associates of the king. When Maharani Bhanumati Devi suddenly died, the king became highly disheartened and tried to console his ached heart by reading Rabindranath Tagore's various works. But *Bhagna Hriday* of Tagore caught his greatest attention. After reading *Bhagna Hriday*, Bir Chandra Manikya awarded Tagore the title of best poet. In memory of his beloved wife, Maharaja also composed many poems. It is safe to say that Raja Bir Chandra's motivation for his works of art and literature was, again a Manipuri impulse. The mother of the following monarch, Radha Kishore Manikya, was Bir Chandra Manikya's second Manipuri wife. She was so influential that a village after her name was established in Tripura. The name of the village was Rajeswaripur. Maharani Rajeswari or Kaboklei was also a great patron of art and music. Under her initiative, the king introduced the famous Manipuri *traditional* festival, *Lai Haraoba*, in Tripura. She was also instrumental in founding the famous Shree Radhamadhav temple located in Dhaleshwar. She also initiated the foundation of the traditional Manipuri temple of *Lainingthou Pakhangba* in Sanitala near Motorstand in Agartala. Thus, it can be analyzed that the matrimonial relationship or alliance of the Manipuris with the kings of Tripura were not only strategically mention-worthy, but it also encouraged in a big way in incorporating various Meitei traditional culture in the society of Tripura. Such alliances worked as a cementing force of cultural and religious expansion.

The third Manipuri queen of king Bir Chandra Manikya was notable among all. Chanu Leima Manmohini Devi was only thirteen (13) years of age when she was married to the Maharaja. It was said that the monarch loved her dearly. She was a patron of modern technology. She was the niece of Ningthem Chanu Bhanumati. She was the first to choreograph her self-portrait with the Maharaja. She was considered the first Indian woman who excelled in the art of photography.

The king also gifted land to Leima's kith and kins at Mathchowmohoni. The queen then constructed a *Math* or dome in memory of her father and the area formally came to be known as Mathchowmohoni. It was said that it was constructed for her father Kirtidhwaja Thakur and inside the dome, a pitcher made of gold was placed. Lands were donated to the kins of the queen in Mathchowmohoni. To date, the queen's direct descendants reside in Mathchowmohoni and the dome still exists. However, the dome lacks conservation and is on the verge of dissolution. The descendants of the Maharani are from the *Khumanthem* clan and to date, enjoy the property gifted by the king towards his in-laws. Chanu Leima also uses to organize several exhibitions of photography in the palace. The Journal of the Photographic Society of India in the May 1890 issue highlighted their photographs with the title "The Camera Club of the Palace of Agartala". She was regarded as the first female photographer in India. King Bir Chandra Manikya was known to be the architect of the Modern age in Tripura and his consort equally set stride with him.

King Radha Kishore Manikya

The next king of Tripura was Radha Kishore Manikya, whose mother was also a Manipuri princess. Thus, the Manipuri lineage went ahead in the royal house of Tripura. Radha Kishore Manikya married three Manipuri queens. They were Maharani Tulsibati, Maharani Monomanjuri and Maharani Ratnamanjuri. Bir Chandra Manikya once visited British Governor Northbrook in Dhaka in the year 1874. It was reported that the Maharaja paid a visit to the palace of the exiled king of Manipur during his time in Dhaka. Devendra Singha, the exiled king of Manipur was then sustaining in Dhaka along with his few associates and family. Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya observed the young daughter of King Devendra during that visit and was even mildly amused by her appearance. The Maharaja of Tripura then decided to make the princess of Manipur be his daughter-in-law. The princess was Maharani Ratnamanjuri. Maharaja Bir Chandra then, with his initiative, brought Ratnamanjuri to Agartala. He then arranged the marriage of prince Radha Kishore with Ratnamanjuri. Maharani Ratnamanjuri, later on, came to be popularly known as the *Dhaka – e Rani* as she came from Dhaka. She was also more commonly known as *Dhaka – e Rani* among the Meiteis of Tripura. Later on, Maharani Ratnamanjuri gave birth to prince Birendra Kishore, who later on became the King of Tripura. Thus, yet again, the Manipuri connection and the legacy went ahead in the Manikyan history of Tripura.

Maharaja Radha Kishore Manikya, after ascending the throne, first married Maharani Tulsibati. She was a woman of calibre and was virtuous in her deeds. She was a pathbreaker in the field of modernity, especially in terms of women's education in Tripura. She was the precursor of women's education in Tripura. Maharani Tulsibati hailed from Taahrou (presently known as Nalgariya). Though she did not receive any formal education, she, with her extraordinary talent, could compose beautiful Holi songs. Such songs are still in vogue and are sung during the Holy festival of the Manipuris.

Maharani Tulsibati can be portrayed as the successor of the renaissance in Bengal where women's education was given high priority. Maharani founded the first girls' school in Tripura. It was named after her as Maharani Tulsibati Balika Vidyalaya. The school to date runs with her glory and

success. The Maharani also founded a separate women's block in the Victoria Memorial Hospital (presently known as Indira Gandhi Memorial) in Agartala. Maharani Tulsibati also initiated the establishment of markets in Tripura. She requested the Maharaja to found the marketplace for the well-being of the individuals residing in the interiors of the state. Due to her initiative, a huge marketplace was started. The market was named *Ranir Bazar* to commemorate the deeds of the queen. To date, the market runs and also generates huge revenue.

Maharani Tulsibati also initiated land grants and tax-free lands, especially to the Manipuris of Tripura, so that various temples and Mandapas could be built. Maharani was herself a very religious-minded person. She was instrumental in founding the Shri Radhamadhav temple in Nalgariya and also the Lainingthou Puthiba in Abhoynagar. For the first time in the royal palace of the Manikyas, she introduced planting and devotion towards the Basil leave (Tulsi). Tulsi holds an important part in the Manipuri cultural life as it is considered to be one of the most sacred entities in the Vaishnavite tradition. The Manipuri consorts thus not only became a part of the Manikyan legacy but enriched the culture of the state with various traditions and customs that they bore from their paternal side.

King Birendra Kishore Manikya

Maharaja Birendra Kishore Manikya ascended the throne of Tripura after Maharaja Radha Kishore and the new king married ten Manipuri women. However, none of them was entitled to the status of Maharani. At the coronation ceremony of Birendra Kishore, the king of Manipur, Maharaja Churachand Singh visited Tripura for the ceremony. His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur visited the state on January 15th (Magh, 2nd) according to the Administrative Report of Tripura for 1908–09 AD. There was universal joy on the occasion. The Tipperah family and the Manipuri house have been married-related for a very long time, but this was the first time the heads of the two houses interacted as a family. When the heads of the two households first met, they did so as a family. The most significant group of tenure holders in Roshanabad were invited on this occasion, and they all attended the Durbar hosted in his Highness the Maharaja of Manipur's honour.

Findings of the paper

- One of the major findings of the paper is that the Manipuri Queens did not act as humble counterparts of the Maharaja but also had immense contributions towards moulding the cultural hemisphere of Tripura.
- The paper also finds major arguments which substantiate that the Manikyas bound their nuptial ties by keeping their royal claim or *Varna* structure which denotes that they hailed from the 'twice-born' strata.
- In terms of the expansion of women's education in Tripura, the Manipuri Queens of the Manikyan dynasty were crucial.
- Finally, the marriage alliance in between the two kingdoms worked as a bridge to diminish the animosity between the Meiteis and the Manikyas.

In conclusion, the historical analysis of the matrimonial alliance between the Manikyas and the Manipuris showcases a picture that though initially, the marriages occurred for cementing friendly ties but in course of time, it

seems that many Manipuri consorts were not merely an image of diplomatic strategies. They outshined by introducing many developmental and progressive activities in the state. They were also instrumental in enriching the culture of Tripura by introducing classical Manipuri dance and the famous Rash Leela. The Manipuri consorts also elevated the Vaishavite tradition in Tripura. Thus, it can be summarized that the matrimonial alliance between the two kingdoms holds an important chapter of history not only for Tripura or Manipur but much beyond that.

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