



Initiatives of Janasiksha Samity to educate the tribal people of Tripura

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Abstract

Tripura is situated in the north-eastern corner of India. The Tripuri dynasty ruled over Tripura for centuries (642-1949) and at last merged with Indian Union in 1949. Most of the rulers of Tripuri Dynasty were illiterate and were totally dependent on the educated Bengali officials for running the administration of their state till 18th century. After Maharaja Rajdhar Manikya education was introduced in the Royal house. The training of Royal male children was started in the palace by the Bengali private tutors. But, education for subjects of the king was abandoned for long. Gradually, in the process of modernization, many schools including primary and secondary schools were established. A group of young educated tribal felt that efforts should be made primarily for saving the tribal people from the curse of illiteracy and poverty. They came forward out of this urge and formed the Tripura Janasiksha Samity in 1945 and taken steps for establishing schools in remote areas of Tripura.

Keywords: Janashiksha, samity, education, literacy, school

Introduction

Tripura is situated in the north-eastern corner of India. *Sri Rajmala*, the multi-volume official chronicle of Tripura, has drawn a long list of Tripura kings deriving ancestral relations with the famous *Lunar* dynasty of the *Mahabharat*. The Tripuri dynasty ruled over Tripura for centuries (642-1949) and at last merged with Indian Union in 1949. The merger of Tripura with India manifests the ending of the monarchy and the foundation of democracy in modern Tripura. The path of transition from monarchy to democracy was not so easy. The people of Tripura aroused with solidarity and enthusiasm and fought against restrictions on political activities, illiteracy, oppression of *Diwani Rule* after the signing of the Instrument of Accession (1947) by the Regent *Maharani* for joining the federation of India.

Objectives of the study

The primary objective of the study is to explore the contribution of Janashiksha Samity of Tripura for educating tribal people of Tripura.

Methods and materials

The study is historical and analytical in nature. The secondary sources of date have been consulted for this study.

Discussion

Educational status of Tripura during Tripuri Dynasty

Most of the rulers of Tripuri Dynasty were illiterate and were totally dependent on the educated Bengali officials for running the administration of their state till 18th century (Singha, 1390 Bangabda) [8]. After Maharaja Rajdhar Manikya education was introduced in the Royal house. The training of Royal male children was started in the palace by the Bengali private tutors.

But, education for subjects of the king was abandoned for long. So, the literacy rate of the state was very poor. The Tripura District Gazetteers shows that in the year 1874-75, there were about 103 boys undergoing education at the two schools in Tripura. In the next year, two more schools were

opened and in all 173 boys were on the attendance rolls and half of them were regular in their attendance (Menon, 1975) [5]. In the year 1879, there were about 25 nos. schools in Tripura and in 1881, the no. of schools increased to 31. However, due to infrastructural scarcity and administrative negligence the number of schools came down to 27 in the next year (Menon, 1975) [5]. Except few sub-divisional schools, most of schools of periphery were mere 'Pathshalas' (Report on the Administration of Bengal 1885-86, 1887) [7].

Table 1: Educational Institutions in Tripura (1894-95)

Subdivision	No. of schools			No. of Students		
	For Boys	For Girls	Total	For Boys	For Girls	Total
Sadar	10	0	10	448	0	448
Sonamura	08	0	08	189	0	189
Belonia	05	0	05	137	0	137
Kailashahar	12	0	12	306	0	306
Total	35	0	35	1080	0	1080

Source: Government of Tripura (2004) [4] The Administration Report of Tripura State for the Years (1894-95, 1914-15, 1918-19), **Agartala:** Tribal Research & Cultural Institute

The education situation was though gradually upgraded, but mass education was neglected for many decades. Gradually, in the process of modernization, many schools including primary and secondary schools were established. In the year 1922, the number of schools were 168. Among them 6 nos. were of Primary English schools, and 5 nos. of English High schools. In the next ten years 56 nos. of new schools were established and among those new schools, there were 6 nos. of English High schools and 2 nos. of Primary English Schools (Devarma, 1997) [2].

A courageous measure had been taken by the royal administration in 1931-32 when compulsory primary education was introduced in Agartala, under the State Act 2 of 1932 and later it was decided to expand its scope upto the Howrah valley and to the Sub-divisional town (Menon, 1975) [5]. Tripura had no facilities of collegiate education before merger with India. Table No. 2 depicts the number of primary schools from the year 1907 to 1946.

Table 2: Number of Primary schools in Tripura from 1907 to 1946

Year	No. of Schools	No. of Pupils
1907-08	137	4011
1916-17	125	4842
1926-27	139	4215
1937-38	111	5110
1943-46	123	5105

Source: Menon K.D. (1975) ^[5]: Tripura District Gazetteers, **Agartala:** Department of Education, Government of Tripura

Inception and initiatives of Janashiksha Samity

The educational facilities provided by the royal administration were not sufficient in the geographically difficult state of Tripura. Still, education remained beyond the reach of many rural people. A group of young educated tribal felt that efforts should be made primarily for saving the tribal people from the curse of illiteracy and poverty. They came forward out of this urge and formed the Tripura Janasiksha Samity in a meeting held at the residence of Hemanta Debbarma at Durga-chaudhury para on 27th December 1945 (11 Pous 1315 T. E.). The Communists played a vital role in giving birth to the Janasiksha Samity (Mohanta, B. 2004) ^[6]. The movement was confined to the tribal people of Sadar, Agartala, Khowai, and Kamalpur Divisions.

In the aforesaid meeting, an eleven-member Executive Committee with Sudhanwa Debbarma, Dasarath Deb alias Dasarath Debbarma and Hemanta Debbarma as President, Vice-President and Secretary respectively was formed. A printed pamphlet, signed by Sudhanwa Debbarma and Dasarath Deb stating the objectives of the Janasiksha Samity and calling upon the tribal people to come forward, was first distributed at Agartala and thereafter in the villages and hills of Tripura.

The manifesto of the Tripura Janasiksha Samity proclaimed: "Tribal youths-boys and girls, educated and half-educated shall have to take active part with full initiative in the task of emancipating the tribals from the curse of illiteracy and poverty that have descended on the tribal society of Tripura during thirteen hundred and fifty years of princely regime in the state. Help of the state authority shall have to be sought in this matter and demand for this shall have to be placed. But total dependence upon the administration will not serve any purpose. Efforts must have to be taken at private initiative and by private means unitedly by the students and youths towards setting up of primary schools in the tribal inhabited villages" (Deb, D. 1987) ^[1].

The aims and objectives of the Janasiksha samity created a sensation and great enthusiasm among the tribals of the Tripuri society. With a firm resolution to organise a movement against illiteracy and poverty, the workers of the Janasiksha Samity got down to work with right earnestness.

The good response which the Janasiksha Samity received was evident from 400 schools which came up at different places of Tripura within a year (Chanda, S. 1983) ^[3]. It had to its credit an account of 488 primary schools having been established in all (Deb, D. 1987) ^[1] and getting 300 of them recognised and aided by the state authority. The official recognition and financial grants were available at the behest of D.A.W. Brown, the then Education Minister of the Princely State. The rest of the schools run on donations of the poor tribal people.

Besides removing illiteracy, the Janasiksha Samity also embarked on a mission to remove poverty. It steered a

movement against squeezing of the tribals by the *Mahajans* (businessman/moneylenders). Not only this, it also worked for preservation and promotion of the age-old tribal culture which had hitherto been neglected and on the verge of extinction. The Janasiksha Samity thus pioneered a movement for the development of Kok-Borak language and literature.

Conclusion

The Janasiksha Samity was ceased to exist in 1948, when its chief architects had to go underground to evade arrest, as the Communist party, to which they were inclined, was banned by the government. Later, its aims and objectives were carried forward by the "Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad". It linked up people's education movement with the economic and social reforms. In fact, the Janasiksha movement is the most important milestone in the history of tribal transition in Tripura. The mass awakening caused by the Janasiksha movement prepared the ground for later movements of the Mukti Parishad which again laid the base of Communist movement in Tripura.

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