

A Century Of Urban Development And Planning In Agartala: With Special Reference To The Contribution Of Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya.

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ABSTRACT: *The history of Tripura's capital city of Nutan Agartala is interesting. While the former capital like Udaipur, Amarpur and Puratan Agartala had revolutionary background, Nutan Agartala has an evolutionary background. Sudden change of circumstances for the worst caused by foreign attacks forced the Tripuri dynasty to hastily shift the capitals to Udaipur, to Amarpur and to Puratan Agartala during the medieval period. No such radically abnormal situation forced Maharaja Krishna Kishor Manikya (1830-1849) to shift the capital from Puratan Agartala to Nutan Agartala in 1838. A low, marshy, riverine land took the efforts of several king and citizen to assume the character of Mahanagar. The efforts of Radhakishore Manikya (1896-1909) stand out prominently for urban planning as well as drastic development. The major thrust of this paper is on the contributions of Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya. For this, certain methods have been followed.*

KEY WORDS: *capital city, Agartala municipality, Tripuri dynasty, planning, development.*

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I. Introduction

Attacks and invasions forced the kings of Tripura (a small state of north-east India) to Shift their capitals several times. It was the year 1838AD, when the humble foundation of New Agartala (present capital city of Tripura) was laid down¹. Situated at the downstream of the Haora River, the selected marshy land came to be known as Nutan Haveli. Subsequently, Nutan Haveli came to be known as Agartala. Since its inception, several kings have lended their patronage for developing a marshy land into a municipality. Still, this city has been suffering from certain natural calamities and man-made problems.

II. Objectives

The work has in its view certain objectives, such as-

1. To trace the history of urbanization of Agartala.
2. To point out the contributions of several kings for development of Agartala.
3. To highlight the contribution of *Maharaja* Radhakishore in this respect.
4. To narrate the history of Agartala Municipality.
5. To point out the urban problems of Agartala.
6. To comment on the rapid growth of Agartala urban population.

III. Methodology

A few methods like historical method, comparative method, statistical method and field survey method have been diligently followed. The twin cities of Puratan Agartala and Nutan Agartala have been surveyed and compared. The pioneering works of the elderly scholars have been studied. The history of Tripura has been read. The census reports have been consulted. I got a lot of information from those books.

IV. Location And Boundary Of Agartala

Agartala is located in between the crossing of Latitude N25°-50` and Longitude E91°-22`.² Initially the capital was situated on the northern bank of the river Haora, but today, with the expansion of the capital the town has spread on both the banks of the river Hoara. Agartala is about twelve feet above sea level. To the east of Nutan Agartala lies the previous capital, Puratan Agartala. To the west of Nutan Agartala lie the indo-Bangladesh border and the towns of Mogra and Brahmanbaria of Bangladesh. To the Northern side lie the Agartala Airport, Lichobagan, Shalbagan, Kunjaban etc. To the south, the river, Haora flows westward; beyond the river, to the south lie Arondhotinagar, Bordoali, Badharghat, Pratapgarh, Jogendranagar, Railway station etc.

V. Topography

Hundred years back, Agartala was not at all a habitable land. It was a marshy land, full of water – hyacinth, aquatic plants, fishes, crabs, snakes, toads, mosquitoes etc. It was a paradise for the fishermen. Obviously, there was no roads, no human settlement. The river Haorah would meander through this marshy land.

VI. Demography

The early population of Agartala municipality mostly consisted of the royal family’s members, relatives, ministers and subordinate staff. The population went on very rapidly increasing after 1947. The following table will illustrate it:³

Year	Population	Variation
1874	875	
1881	2,655	+1,780
1891	4,723	+2,068
1901	6,415	+1,692
1911	6,831	+416
1921	7,743	+912
1931	9,580	+1,837
1941	17,693	+8,113
1951	42,595	+24,902
1961	54,878	+12,283
1971	59,625	+4,747
1981	1,32,186	+72,561
1991	1,57,636	+25,450
2001	188,540	+30,904
2011	399,688	+211,148

Source: CRI (Tripura)

The statistical figure of the demography indicates interesting information about the demographic growth of Agartala municipality. The figures of 1874 to 1941 do not indicate any abnormal growth rate but right from 1951 the growth rate are abnormally high. This abnormal growth rates can be explain with the help of historical method. In other words partition and independence of the country were followed by large scale migration and movement of the Hindus of Meghnavelly. Though they were the subjects of the kings of Tripura, they were called refugees. The influx of thousands of refugees led to the rapid growth of the population of Tripura in general, and Agartala in particular.

PRINCELY CONTRIBUTION TO THE URBAN GROWTH:

Agartala had been formerly a shallow but large swamp filled with aquatic plants, weeds, grass, snakes, crabs, iquana, tortoise, frogs etc. Krishna Kishore Manikya had only selected the unhygienic site; and did nothing else; he left an empty treasury and chaotic administration. but his successors took care to set the administration in order and to improve the swamp piece by piece. the efforts of the next five kings carried the work forward.

MAHARAJA KRISHNA KISHORE MANIKYA (1830-1849): BEGINNING OF NEW AGARTALA.

Krishna Kishore Manikya was an extravagant, irresponsible and wayward king; he was least concerned about the welfare of the subjects. Had he not selected a site for the shifting of the capital, his name would have passed into oblivion. J.G Cumming provides us very useful information about the shifting of the capital from old Agartala to new Agartala, Cumming writes “New Agartala or Nutan Haveli was founded in 1838 in the time of *Maharaja Krishna Kishore Manikya*” (Cumming, 1907, p.65). The probable cause of shifting towards the west was the fear of Kuki raids. The Royal court along with the family was shifted in 1844.⁴ Sometimes, after the site selection a pond was dug and a temporary bridge was constructed at the direction of Maharaja Krishna Kishore Manikya.

MAHARAJA ISANCHANDRA MANIKYA (1849-1862): CONSTRUCTION OF NEW ROYAL HOUSE

Maharaja Isanchandra Manikya was much disturbed by Kuki raids and horrible massacres, empty treasury, mismanagement in the administration and domestic politics. At that critical moment Guru Bipin Bihari Goswami came forward to resque the Kingdom and to relieve the administration on 15 Ashar 1265 T.E (=June-July 1855).

After that the king ordered to build a pucca palace at new Agartala. It took a few years to build the palace. The opening ceremony was scheduled to be held on Wednesday 16 *Sravan* 1272 T.E (=31 July 1862). The king was suffering from illness long before the inauguration of the new place. As per the pre-planned

programme, the inaugural ceremony was held on 31 July 1862. On thursday, 1 August 1862 Maharaja Isanchandra died. A plot followed it.⁵

MAHARAJA BIRCHANDRA MANIKYA AT (1862-1896): FORMATION OF MUNICIPALITY IN AGARTALA; APPOINTMENT OF BRITISH POLITICAL AGENT.

During the reign of (1862-1896) Maharaja Birchandra Manikya, Agartala witnessed remarkable changes like appointment of the British Political Agent, Introduction of Agartala Municipality, establishment of one school and one hospital.

The first Political Agent, Mr. A.W.B. Power, took up duties on 1st August 1871. Another note worthy reform was the introduction of municipality at Agartala in 1871.⁶ In 1873 one school was opened at Agartala. In May 1873 one hospital was opened at Agartala. A municipal Act was formed and the Act came into operation from the first day of *Baisakh* 1284 T.E (= 9 April, 1874). In 1875 the first post office of Tripura was opened at Agartala.⁷ Maharaja Birchandra Manikya added a few rooms to the old palace built by Maharaja Ishanchandra Manikya.

MAHARAJA RADHAKISHORE MANIKYA (1896-1909): URBAN PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Never before in the history of local urban development, urban planning had receipt due attention by the former kings of Tripura. The credit of urban planning goes to Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya. It is an axiom that development without planning may lead to disorder first and developed next. He made remarkable contributions for the development of the capital.

1) Urban planning including town Planning:

Radhakishore Manikya took drastic step to fill the marshy land of Agartala; huge quantity of dry soil was brought from Kunjaban hill to Agartala through trolley. The idea of consolidating the administrative buildings under one roof came to the mind of Radhakishore Manikya. Formerly, various departmental offices were scattered here and there in Agartala. Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya realizes the necessity of bringing those offices under one roof for administrative convenience. For this purpose, the same martin and Baren Company was asked to build a spacious secretariat building.⁸ This building had several rooms to accommodate many offices.

2) Construction of New royal palace:

An earthquake of 12 June 1897, terrible shocked almost the whole of the North-East India. In Tripura, The royal palace at new Agartala was completely damaged. Radhakishore Manikya calmly undertook austerity measures to save money for the construction of the new palace. Martin and Baren Company of Calcutta was entrusted the duty of building the new palace (Ujyanta Raj palace). For the extension of the township he started constructing some buildings on the hills situated to the Northern side of the town (now known as 79 Tilla). In 1908 two out of the four new buildings on the *Rajbari* were completed, these are i) New residence building and ii) *Jubaraj Bahadur's Baitakhana*. Besides this, a new building for the stables at the palace was begun. In the same year, the combined post and telegraph office building was completed at the capital.⁹

3) Road and Bridges:

In the year 1902 some of the old embankment roads were raised and some were newly constructed by the P.W.Department of Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya. These have saved the town from being overloaded; formerly it was subject to inundation almost every year during the rains. Road from Agartala to Akhaura was constructed by Radhakishore Manikya.¹⁰ In the year 1905, one bridge was constructed across the Dabda on the Agartala-Birendranagar Road. Besides this, the king repairs various bridges and roads.¹¹

4) Water supply for domestic and other purposes:

During the reign of Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya, various water tanks were preserving to supply drinking water. During the year 1908-09, 20-21 tanks and ponds were under Municipal Supervision. The river Haora, with the municipal area was regularly washed as a safeguard against the possibility of contamination.¹²

5) Public health:

During the reign of Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya, the health of the town was on the whole satisfactory. There was a tendency to outbreak of cholera towards the year 1905-06 but never in an epidemic form.¹³ On all the occasions timely precaution was taken to check this spread and the course of disease was thereby arrested. Doctor Miss Aiz was appointed as women doctor in the palace, with monthly salary of Rs.150 only in the year 1900, who attended female patients in the hospital and looked to midwifery cases when required.¹⁴ In the memory of the Late Queen Empress Victoria, a new building for hospital was completed at Agartala in the year 1903. It was named as Victoria Memorial Hospital. Her Highness the *Maharani* Tulasibati

Mahadevi, the queen of *Maharaj* Radhakishore Manikya, very generously added a wing to the Hospital building at her own expense for the exclusive use of female patients. It has been named as the Tulasibati Female ward.

6) Educational Development:

In spite of natural calamity and financial stringency, the king paid due attention to the educational needs of the people of Tripura in general and the citizens of Agartala in particular. In 1896, the king desired granting stipends to the boys of thakur families for education.¹⁵ In April 1899, one Sanskrit tol was opened at Agartala. In 1901, the king established a collage at Agartala; there were a few scholarly professors and only 16 students.¹⁶ In 1903, the king also sanctioned stipend for FA passed (First Arts Examination) meritorious students of Agartala college. In February 1903, one technical school named Woodburn Artisan school was established.¹⁷ It was greatness of Radhakishore Manikya to bring back and appoint an efficient Dewan, namely Baboo Umakanta Dasgupta. Not only that, the oldest Agartala High School was renamed as Umakanta Academy on February 1905.¹⁸

7) Drainage and Sanitation:

The principal work of the PWD in the year 1903-04 was the drainage of the town. The Municipality undertook the cleansing of certain tanks and drains with a view to improve the sanitation of the town. In the year 1903, the king sanctioned an amount of Rs.3 lakhs for the development of Agartala.¹⁹ The old *kalapani khal* was diverted and re-excavated and a pucca culvert was put upon it. In the year 1908, seven masonry culverts on roads were constructed in the Agartala town.²⁰

8) Digging of Ponds:

The King response to the problem of ensuring drinking water for the citizen of Agartala was to dig a number of big tanks in different parts of the town. It may be recollected that Maharaja Krishnakishore Manikya took a meager step to dig a small pond in front of the old palace. Radhakishore Manikya took a bold step to enlarge the old tank, and to dig another big tank to the Eastern side. These tanks had been named as Krishnasagar and Radhasagar. In other words, the old western tank is called Krishnasagar, while the new Eastern tank is called Radhasagar. These two tanks have added to the beauty of the Agartala. These two tanks survived even today.

9) Construction Temples:

The popular expectation for the construction of places of worship did not escape the attention of the King. The King was considerate enough to respect the popular deities and their worship. So, honouring the wishes of the queens and ladies, the King built Mangalchandi Mandir in front of the Ujjyanta Raj palace. In addition in response to the demand of the Manipuri Society of Agartala, the King built the Pakhamba temple at Dhaleswar. Another famous temple known as Jagannathbari Mandir, was built to the western side of the Krishnasagar by the King.

10) Street Lightning:

Another innovation of Radhakishore Manikya was the setting of several posts and pillars at Agartala for arranging street lights during night. Many kerosene hurricane lamps would be kept hanging at the top of the posts and pillars in the year 1900.²¹

MAHARAJA BIRENDRAKISHORE MANIKYA (1909-1923): DIVERSION OF THE COURSE OF THE HAORAH RIVER.

Inundation of Agartala during the rainy season was a recurrent problem. Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya could not solve the problem because of his sudden demise. It was Maharaja Birendrakishore who took a bold and costly attempt to divert the course of the Haorah river south-west ward beyond the Jagaharimura. These Attempt save the city from the sufferings of flood.²² The planning and execution of the idea of building another palace at Kunjaban go to the credit of Birendrakishore Manikya. He constructed Malancha Nivas, Birchandra Library, Calcutta Mahal, Carmichael Bridge and Laxmi Narayan Temple. Agartala to Bishalgarh road was also constructed by Birendrakishore Manikya. In 1913, Birendrakishore laid the foundation of a pucca bridge (popularly known as Haora Bridge or *Lohar pol*) over the river Haora near Battala.²³

MAHARAJA BIR BIKRAMKISHORE MANIKYA (1923-1947): MODERNIZATION DURING THE TIME OF EXCITEMENT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

The remarkable contribution of *Maharaja* Bir Bikramkishore Manikya is to broaden and straighten the roads of Agartala. For this purpose, the King took drastic steps to demolish many huts and shop. It was not an easy task; even the King had to face opposition from his own relatives. But the King desperately went ahead.

Not only that the King allotted several plots from the princes and barons in different parts of the city.²⁴ He had vision and mission towards modernization of the capital. He set up a number of committees and councils to improve his kingdom. He built M.B.B collage, Swet Mahal, Malanchanibas, Buddha Mandir, extension of Kunjaban Palace and town-planning.

MAHARAJA KIRIT BIKRAMKISHORE MANIKYA (1947-1949)

After the death of Maharaj Bir Bikram, his son and successor Kirit Bikram became the Maharaja of Tripura. He was a minor, so a council of Regency under the President ship of Kirit Bikram's mother Kanchan Prava Devi was formed to run the administration.²⁵ But after the administration faced tremendous troubles of communal riots and influx of thousands of refugees. The crisis shook the very foundation of the kingdom. So, the monarch hastened to hand over the kingdom to the Government of India on 15th October 1949. Implicitly, during this short tumultuous time, the last monarch could not afford to do anything for the Agartala municipality.

VII. Conclusion

Organised along lines somewhat similar to the British model, and initially chaired by the first Political agent, the history of Agartala municipality goes back to 1871. Agartala municipality, since its inception, has long sought and obtained governmental aid and advice for its development. It has never seen a surplus budget. During the princely period (1871-1949) of its existence, a few kings namely-Radhakishore Manikya, Birendrakishore Manikya, Bir Bikramkishore Manikya played a decisive role in its development. During the princely period, there was very little of corruption in the work of the municipality. There was value orientation (efficiency, economy, paternal care) in the work of the municipality. The character of its administration has been changed remarkably since 1949.

In any way, the city has been suffering from the perennial problems of occasional flood particularly during the rainy season and depredation by flies, insects and mosquitoes, and unplanned growth of certain congested habitations.

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This study, '*A century of urban development and planning in Agartala: with special reference to the contribution of Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya.*' has been undertaken with a view to assess the great contributions of several kings of Tripura specially *Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya Bahadur* for the development of Agartala municipality. A work of this nature requires cooperation and help from numerous persons. Many persons have extended their kind cooperation. It is my duty to acknowledge the contributions of all the people who helped directly or indirectly in this study.

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