

Shifting capitals in the princely state of Tripura: A historical study of the Manikya rulers

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Abstract

The shifting of political centres was an important event in the political history of the Manikya kingdom of Tripura. The royal centre of Tripura has undergone many changes from Rangamati/Udaipur to Old Agartala and then to New Agartala. These changes were triggered by various political, military, geographical, administrative and economic factors. Rangamati was renamed Udaipur in 1567, during the reign of Uday Manikya. Later, Maharaja Krishna Manikya moved his capital to Old Agartala around 1760–61, particularly in the context of political instability and the conflict associated with Shamsheer Gazi. During the reign of Maharaja Krishna Kishore Manikya (1830–1849), the establishment of Nutan Habeli/New Agartala marked another important stage in the political reorganisation of the kingdom. The paper also discusses the Dampier controversy of 1836 and the political developments of 1838 in the context of Tripura's changing relationship with British India. Using indigenous, documentary, government and historical sources, the paper explores how the shifting of capitals reflected the changing political and geographical requirements of the Manikya state and contributed to the emergence of Agartala as the permanent political centre of Tripura.

Keywords: Tripura, Manikya Dynasty, Rajmala, Udaipur, Old Agartala, New Agartala, capital shifting, political history, Agartala

Introduction

Historically, Tripura was a princely state in North-Eastern India. Its geographical location connected the hill regions of the east with the plains of Bengal. Its political history was closely associated with the Manikya dynasty, which ruled the kingdom for several centuries. According to the traditional account of the Rajmala, Ratna Fa, also known as Ratna Manikya, is regarded as the first ruler of Tripura to assume the title “Manikya.” The traditional chronology places him in the late thirteenth century, around 1279–1280 AD. However, this chronology has been questioned by later historical and numismatic evidence, and therefore the early history of the Manikya dynasty requires careful comparison with other sources. Due to its geographical position, the kingdom experienced different political, military and economic situations from time to time. These situations also influenced the location of the royal centre. The shifting of the capital therefore became an important part of the political history of Tripura.

Rajmala, the royal chronicle of Tripura, is an important indigenous source for studying the Manikya rulers. It provides information about rulers, royal succession, wars, territories and political traditions. However, its early accounts contain traditional elements and therefore need to be compared with documentary and modern historical sources. The political centres of Tripura changed at different stages, from Rangamati/Udaipur to Old Agartala and later to New Agartala.

The traditional chronology associates the early royal centre with 590 AD. This date is treated in this study as part of the traditional chronology of Tripura rather than as an independently established historical date. During the reign of Uday Manikya, Rangamati came to be known as Udaipur in 1567. In 1760–61, Maharaja Krishna Manikya shifted the capital to Old Agartala, while during the reign of Krishna

Kishore Manikya (1830–1849), Nutan Habeli/New Agartala developed as the new royal centre. This paper examines these changes and their political, geographical, administrative and economic significance in the transformation of the Manikya kingdom.

Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this study is to trace the major shifts of the political centres of Tripura and to understand the reasons behind these changes. It also examines the political, geographical, administrative, economic and cultural importance of these shifts. The study is based on historical sources, including Rajmala, Sandys' History of Tripura, Government of Tripura publications and IGNCA materials. These sources are used to understand the history of the Manikya rulers and the development of the different political centres of Tripura.

The study also gives importance to the difference between traditional and documented history. The 590 AD date is therefore considered as part of the traditional chronology of Tripura, while the later events are studied with the help of available historical and documentary sources.

Rangamati and Udaipur: The Early Royal Centre

The early history of Tripura's capital is mainly found in the traditional accounts of the kingdom. Jujharufa is traditionally associated with the establishment of the capital at Udaipur around 590 AD. During the reign of Uday Manikya, Rangamati came to be known as Udaipur in 1567. After this, Udaipur became an important political centre of the Manikya rulers. Its location on the Gomati River also made it an important centre for the development of the kingdom. The city was closely connected with the political and religious activities of the royal family.

The religious importance of Udaipur was strengthened by the establishment of important temples. The Tripura Sundari Temple, traditionally associated with Maharaja Dhanya Manikya and dated to 1501, became an important religious centre. Thus, Udaipur played an important role in the political and religious history of Tripura before the capital was later shifted to Old Agartala.

Krishna Manikya and the Shift to Old Agartala

A major change took place during the reign of Maharaja Krishna Manikya. Historical sources place the shifting of the capital from Udaipur to Old Agartala around 1760–61. Old Agartala was also known as Puran Haveli.

The shift was closely connected with the political situation created by Shamsheer Gazi during the 1750s. According to historical records, Krishna Manikya remained away from the capital during Shamsheer Gazi's rule. After regaining his throne, he shifted the capital northwards to Old Agartala around 1760. The new location provided a different geographical setting for the royal administration.

The movement of the capital also affected people connected with the royal court. Historical accounts mention that Portuguese Christian soldiers who had served the Tripura rulers at Udaipur moved with the court and later settled at Mariamnagar near Old Agartala. The Chaturdasha Devata tradition was also closely connected with the Manikya royal family, and the temple at Old Agartala became an important religious centre. Thus, the shift from Udaipur to Old Agartala was not only a change in the location of the capital. It also involved changes in security, administration, royal religious institutions and the settlement of groups associated with the royal court.

Krishna Kishore Manikya and Nutan Habeli

Krishna Kishore Manikya succeeded to the throne in 1830 and ruled until 1849. His reign was marked by increasing British political influence in the region. Tripura had important interests in the plains, including Chakla Roshanabad, while the Raja continued to maintain political authority in the hill territory.

During his reign, a new royal centre called Nutan Habeli, meaning "New Residence," was established. Historical accounts associate Krishna Kishore Manikya with the establishment of this new centre, which was situated about five miles from the earlier royal centre. It later came to be known as New Agartala and eventually Agartala.

The development of Nutan Habeli was part of the wider political changes taking place during Krishna Kishore Manikya's reign. The year 1838 was particularly important in the political relations between Tripura and British India. On 27 December 1838, Lord Auckland recognised the independence of Tripura in his communication to the Commissioner of Chittagong. During this period, Nutan Habeli developed as the new royal centre. Thus, the development of the new royal centre took place during a period of important political changes in Tripura and its relations with British India.

Dampier Controversy of 1836

The political significance of the changing royal centre can be understood in the context of the Dampier controversy of 1836. Mr. Dampier, the Commissioner of Chittagong, questioned the authority of the Raja of Tripura regarding the collection of duties on cotton and other produce in his

zamindari. His letter of 10 October 1836 raised wider questions concerning the political status and territorial authority of the Raja. The controversy subsequently formed part of the broader political developments between Tripura and British India. On 27 December 1838, Lord Auckland recognised the independence of Tripura in his communication to the Commissioner of Chittagong. Thus, the events of 1836–1838 were significant in defining the political relationship between Tripura and British India.

Geographical, Economic and Administrative Significance

The movement towards New Agartala changed the geographical position of the Manikya state. Udaipur was situated in the Gomati valley, while Old Agartala and later New Agartala were located closer to the western plains and the Bengal frontier. This location provided better opportunities for communication and contact with the neighbouring areas. The plains were also important for the economic interests of the raja. His connection with Chakla Roshanabad and the controversy over duties on cotton and other products show the importance of revenue and trade in the relations between Tripura and the plains. The new royal centre therefore had greater administrative importance for managing these interests. The development of New Agartala gradually made it an important political and administrative centre of Tripura. In the later period, the royal settlement developed into the principal urban centre of the state. Thus, the nineteenth-century relocation of the royal centre provided the foundation for the later development of Agartala as the capital of Tripura.

Conclusion

The shifting of the political centres represents an important aspect of the history of the Manikya dynasty. The traditional chronology associated with 590 AD provides an early background to the political history of Tripura, while 1567, when Rangamati came to be known as Udaipur during the reign of Uday Manikya, marks an important stage in the development of the royal centre. Later, Krishna Manikya shifted the capital from Udaipur to Old Agartala around 1760–61, against the background of political conflict and the rise of Shamsheer Gazi.

During the reign of Krishna Kishore Manikya (1830–1849), the development of Nutan Habeli, or New Agartala, took place within an important phase of Tripura's political history. The Dampier controversy of 1836 raised questions concerning the political position of the Raja, while the developments of 1838 were significant in shaping Tripura's relations with British India. The shifting of the royal centre was therefore not merely a change of location; it reflected the changing political, geographical, administrative and economic conditions of the kingdom. The development of New Agartala subsequently provided the foundation for the growth of Agartala as the political and administrative capital of Tripura.

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