

HUMAN SACRIFICE IN TRIPURA: THROUGH THE CHRONICLE OF RAJMALA

Rohan Ray

Tripura University
(A Central University)
Agartala, Tripura, 799022

Abstract

In human civilization, the concept of human sacrifice originated from supernaturalism. At the earlier stage of survival and existence, mankind was involved in interspecific and intraspecific struggles. As a part of it, they were bound to kill and eliminate their competitors of the opponent band which ensured them to control the limited resources for survival. Later on, agnostic humans could not describe natural calamities with logic and started imagining natural forces as God. Thus, theology, animism, pantheism, totemism, and a full-fledged idea of religion emerged gradually. As a result of these, ideas of human sacrifice to please supernatural entities started taking shape. There were beliefs and instances of sacrificing females to increase the fertility of the soil, beheading captured enemies in front of God & Goddesses to please and secure the win against enemies, and putting victims to death to attain supernatural powers, well-being, salubrity & offspring. Spiritual scriptures and ancient works of literature like the Bible, Vedas, Avesta, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Iliad, and Odyssey contains various instances of human sacrifices. Even historians like Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus and Julius Creaser in their accounts recorded human sacrifice in different forms. Such practices of human sacrifice were prevalent in ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, China, Mesopotamia, Maya, Inca & Aztec civilizations. Various literary resources also testify to the presence of human sacrifice in the various parts of the Indian subcontinent. Tripura is a small hilly state in the northeastern part of India, erstwhile it was a princely state under the Manikya rulers who connected themselves with the Lunar dynasty. To reconstruct & understand the history of Tripura the historical community is largely dependent upon the 'Sri Rajmala,' a chronicle of the kings of Tripura. In this paper, I have tried to track down the events related to human sacrifice depicted in 'Sri Rajmala' and made an attempt to present the Socio-political & religious scenarios as well behind these onslaughts.

Keywords: Human sacrifice, Agnostic, Theology, Animism, pantheism, Totemism, Avesta, Sri Rajmala.

INTRODUCTION

Tripura is one of the seven sisters of northeastern states in India. Before merging into Indian Union in 1949 the state had been ruled by 185 Manikya kings for centuries who claimed their descent from the Lunar dynasty. An adequate number of sources are available to study and reconstruct the historical events of Tripura, among all these, the most important source is 'Sri Rajmala,' a chronicle of the Kings of Tripura. The book consists of six volumes (Lahar) composed and compiled from time to time under royal patronage. The books have been composed in Bengali verse. The composition of Rajmala Started in the reign of Maharaja Dharma Manikya at the beginning of the 15th century. Maharaja entrusted the work of the first volume to Chantai (high priest) named, Durlavendra Narayan and court-poets, Sukresvar & Banervar. Subsequently, five other volumes were composed during the reign of Maharaja Amar Manikya, Maharaja Govinda Manikya, Maharaja Ramganga Manikya, Maharaja Kashi Chandra Manikya & Maharaja Krishna Kishore Manikya. Composers of these aforesaid five volumes were Rana Catur Narayan (Vol. II), Gangadhar Siddhanta-Vagisa (Vol. III), Durgamani Uzir, Jaydeb Uzir (Vol. III) & Durgamani Uzir (Vol. IV & V) respectively. In the 20th century, all these books were systematically arranged & published (1341 T.E.) under the editorship of Shri K. P. Sen, who named it 'Sri Rajmala' though, 'Sri' does not occur in any colophon. Unfortunately, the last two volumes of this series are lost. The book starts with the legend of Yayati and continues with Daitya, Tripur, Trilochana and so on. The names of the Kings, their reigns and their deeds were depicted vividly in Bengali verses which are indeed a celebrated literary work & authentic source to track down the evolution of the Bengali language. Apart from providing information regarding the monarch and his administrative setup, it draws a picture of the common masses, their day-to-day life, and socio-economic conditions including religious faith. Here our main objective is to extract the information regarding human sacrifice in the religious aspect and events related to the same described in 'Sri Rajmala.'

We encounter the first instance of bali or sacrifice in the 'Tripur Khanda' of the first volume (Pratham Lahar). Where after the demise of Tripur the poor subjects of Tripura worshiped lord Shiva for 7 days & 7 nights and performed animal sacrifice to get rid of anarchy and destitute. After that Shiva granted a boon and blessed them with a great & pious king named, Trilochana. He also commanded them to offer puja to fourteen deities in the month of Asadha on the eighth day of the bright fortnight. The fourteen deities are Hara, Uma, Hari, Laxmi, Saraswati, Kartik, Ganesh, Bramha, Prithvi, Samudra, Ganga, Agni, Kam dev & Himalaya. From then the fourteen deities have been considered as the '*Kul Devata*' of the royal family. Every year Kharchi Puja¹ is celebrated on the 'Shukla Ashtami Tithi' with great pomp and show. Chantai², Deorai³ & Galim⁴ are the people who were entrusted with the duty to offer worship on behalf of the King.

Instances of Human Sacrifice in the First Volume

]

¹ Kharchi puja: The annual festival of worshipping the fourteen Deities.

² Chantai: Royal priest and prime worshipper of fourteen deities.

³ Deorai: Deputy priest.

⁴ Galim: They are also a priestly class and performing sacrifice during puja is one of their duties.

Abdication of S'iksma-raja

After King Nagpati his son S'iksma-raja ascended the throne. It was told that once he went on a hunting excursion but no game was available. Being hungry after a tiring day he ordered his cook to prepare meat and left for a bath. It was Ashtami or the Eighth lunar day when human was sacrificed at the shrine of Chaturdas Devata (fourteen Deities). The cooking staff got afraid and collected the sacrificial human flesh, cooked it with various aromatic spices and served it to the king. King consumed the meat and being astonished by its taste, inquired about the same. Fear-stricken cooking Staff admitted the truth and depicted their evil deed to him. Knowing the truth, the king was greatly shocked. He abdicated the throne immediately and retired to the forest to practice the life of a Yogi.

Anecdote of King Maichili

After the demise of Rajesvara his elder son became the ruler. With the desire to have a son, he worshipped the deity for years. But unfortunately, no son was born to him. Then on the eighth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Asadha, he entered the shrine along with the Chantai and witnessed fourteen deities with his own eyes. Each deity accepted his offerings from their own seats. After the completion of puja, the king asked for a boon in the form of a son. "If Thou shall have no son," said the three-eyed Shiva. Being refused by deity the king lost his temper and took a shot of arrow angrily upon lord Shiva. The arrow hit Shiva on the leg. Lord Shiva cursed him angrily as a result the king became blind immediately. In such a situation chantai intervened and begged for mercy on behalf of the king and inquired about the remedy to get rid of the curse. Benevolent Shiva dictated that he would be cured if he collected human blood by incision with a knife and performed bhuta-bali⁵ with that & live separate from his wife. The royal messengers were sent to distant places to collect the human blood. The king employed a special community of tribe named, Maichili⁶ for this purpose. All subjects of the country fell into a state of suspicion & terror. It is told that if a man was captured by these blood-hunters he was lost without trace. People became desperate to save themselves from the Maichili tribe. Distrust prevailed among the close ones like husbands-wives, parents-sons and so on. Out of horror people stopped visiting forests & roads. Misfortune prevailed in the kingdom of Tripura. At last king managed to offer human sacrifice in bhuta-bali, and his eyes were cured. From then he came to be known as the Maichili king.

Instances of Human Sacrifice in the Second Volume**Dhanya Manikya Khanda**

In the 1435 S'ska era, the great king of Tripura Dhanya Manikya conquered Chattogram or Chittagong. To commemorate his victory, he struck a new mohur (gold coins). Tripura army compelled Gauda⁷ forces to retreat and set up an outpost there in Chattal (Chittagong). As soon as the news reached to Hossain Shah, the ruler of Gauda, he deployed a huge army under the

⁵ Bhuta-bali: Perform puja for the followers of the lord Shiva.

⁶ Maichili: One of the sects of Tripura tribes who are endowed with the responsibility to collect humans for the purpose of sacrifice.

⁷ Gauda: it is a historic city, which remained capital of Bengal till 1565.

command of Gaud Mallik to conquer Tripura. The regiments of Bar-Bangala⁸ accompanied by Gaud Mallik. The invading army had a vast fleet journeying upstream by the river Gomati including horses, elephants and well-equipped infantry. At Meharkul⁹ both armies encountered each other & after bloodshed, Meharkul was captured by the Mughals¹⁰. Being defeated the troops of Tripura retreated and took a strong defensive position at Chandigarh¹¹. Under the stiff Resistance of Tripura's soldiers, Gauda Mallik failed to capture the fort and the advancement of his troops was halted. Gauda Mallik had a eunuch khoja, who presented his plan to destroy and drown the enemies of Gauda by constructing a dam across the Gomati downwards of Sonamura as the subjects of Tripura used to reside on the bank of the river and their capital was situated there as well. Gauda Mallik proceeded with the plan and erected a barrage across the river Gomati by his troops. After three days of commissioning the dam, the river became turbulent and it washed away the dam. It was enough for Dhanya Manikya, he then requested his Guru to perform 'avichar-karma'¹² or destructive rites. The dwija or Brahman then started the destructive rites. In the courtyard, he constructed a mandapa. A good canopy was put up over the sacrificial pit or kunda. A one-year-old Chandal boy with dark complexion was procured. The boy was kept there for seven days and seven nights. After the ceremony, he was beheaded. The head was handed over to raybar¹³ with secrecy, who buried it in a place occupied by the troops of Gauda Mallik.

Then at night a terrible hue and cry was heard. The Pathan troops assumed that they were under attack by the Tripura forces. The terrified Gaud army dispersed and retreated to a safe distance defying their general. Hossain Shah rebuked Gauda Mallik for this cowardly retreat. Being ashamed and afraid, Mallik became greatly penitent. Thus, being defeated Gauda Mallik took his steps back and Maharaja Dhanya Manikya conquered Chatigram & placed an outpost (thana) there under the command of Gen. Rasangamardan Narayan. The story didn't end here, the rivalry between Maharaja Dhanya Manikya & nawab Hossain Shah continued, which was depicted extensively in the 'Dhanya Manikya Khanda' of the second Volume.

Royal Decree Prohibiting Human Sacrifice

It is mentioned in 'Sri Rajmala' that formerly the kings of Tripura had the custom of human sacrifice. Every year thousands & thousands of Bengalee people were beheaded. Shri Dhanya Manikya prohibited this practice. Since then, human sacrifice had been banned with some exceptions. Only one human sacrifice was allowed to fourteen gods every three years. Also, one victim was allotted to goddess Kalika, (Tripurasundari Devi) when it was easily available. In the Shrine of Daucha Pathar, two human sacrifices were allowed, but the victims were to be collected from the enemy of Tripura. And when possible two human sacrifices to be made to the

⁸ Bar-Bangala: Twelve provinces of Bengal, ruled under the Bhowmik.

⁹ Meharkul: Comilla city and its adjacent area.

¹⁰ According to K. P. Sen here the word 'Mughal' is wrongly used for 'Pathans' by the scribe.

¹¹ Chandigarh: This used to be a fortification of Tripura Army, Situated eastward of Sonamura and in the middle of Melaghar & Kakraban.

¹² Avichar-karma: Destructive rites. It is mentioned in Atharva Veda. There are six types of 'avichar-karma' mentioned in tantrism, i. Maran ii. Mohan, iii. Sthambhan, iv. Videshwan, v. Vashikaran, vi. Ucchatan.

¹³ Raybar: Messenger.

river Gomati¹⁴. The king forbade human sacrifice more than these. From then onwards subjects lived a life without worry.

Human Sacrifice in the Shrine of Tripurasundari

Dhanya Manikya was a pious king, he devoted his mind to religious activities. He built an idol of the goddess Bhubaneswari with one mound of gold and kept it in such secrecy that even the prince could not able to see it. He commissioned a shrine & dedicated to lord Vishnu in a sattavik or enlightened state of mind. Then he started constructing another shrine & performed Vaastu puja and made Sankalp all in the name of lord Vishu. However, he received a commandment in a dream by the goddess Bhagavati to bring her idol from Chattogram & install her in this under-construction temple. The king will get ample rewards if he brings her idol here & worships with devotion, she added. After consulting with Brahmanas Gen. Rasangamardan was deputed to Chattal & the idol was carried to the state with great festivity. After completion of the construction, King Dhanya Manikya dedicated this temple to goddess Kalika on an auspicious day and made his worldly life successful. Various offerings were made to the goddess Kalika including the human sacrifice, fish and animal's meat. Apart from these, he constructed many more temples including a new shrine for the Chaturdas Devata and excavated several lakes. All of these are recorded extensively in 'Sri Rajmala'.

Human Sacrifice during the Reign of Deva Manikya

Deva Manikya ascended the throne after the death of his father Dhanya Manikya. He came in touch with a Brahman named, Lakshmi-Narayan who belonged to Mithila and was conversant with the various tantras like a sanyasi. He gave diksha to Maharaja & initiated with the mantras of all the Mahavidyas¹⁵ one after another. Then he practised purashchana (automatic utterance) of the mantras with the wrong impression that he had attained Divya bhava (divine state) after this, he practised Vira-bhava (heroic state). He performed tantric Chakra¹⁶ and indulged in unlawful activities. The king was then made to take his seat in a crematorium to perform Samsana sadhana (occult rites in the crematorium). In the meantime, a basuya¹⁷ was taught by Lakshmi-Narayan, to impersonate a Devi & make some oracles in the dark. The basuya climbed upon a tree & called out to the king, "Sacrifice an army commander, then you will be able to have a vision of Devi." The king took one of his commanders at night there & sacrificed him. After that, the basuya asked for more army chiefs to be sacrificed impersonating the voice of the Devi. The king beheaded eight of his commanders one after another, but still, he failed to get a vision of the Devi. As a result of the killings of his generals, his skin tone turned dark.

One day someone addressing the king while he was in the bathroom said, "Your enemies, the Mughals & the Pathans, are now, jubilant, in as much as you have put to death many of your

¹⁴ At the time of Ganga puja human sacrifice was performed in the bank of river Gomati.

¹⁵ Mahavidya: Mahavidya or great wisdoms are group of ten Hindu Tantric goddess namely, Kali, Tara, Tripura Sundari, Bhubaneswari, Bhairavi, Chhinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi & Kamala.

¹⁶ Chakra: Here it denotes the Bharavi Chakra mentioned in Tantra, apart from it there are five types of chakras in Tantrism like Rudrayamale Maha chakra, Raj cakra, Vidya chakra, Vira chakra, pashu chakra.

¹⁷ Basuya: Gulam or slave of brahmanas who belongs to Sudra class. In ancient capital of Udaipur there was a village named, 'Basuya Para'.

Generals who were in service from the days of your father. The capital is made destitute of heroes by you. Listen, O Ruler of the people, you are now devoid of valiant warriors. The Brahman has led you to this miserable state. All subjects of the country are frightened, who on what night will be led to the cemetery? O King, you have broken your power with your own hand. You have ruined the whole kingdom for the sake of that Brahman”.

The king listened to all these quietly & went straight away for ‘Smasana Sadhana’. Knowing all these, the Brahman became doubtful & slaughtered him in the cremation ground. After that Lakshmi Narayan mongered rumours about the death of the king that during sadhana he became frightened and was killed by Yakshas & Kinnaras. Then the Brahman became the virtual ruler of the state and put elder prince Vijay into prison. He indulged in unethical practices with the youngest queen of the deceased king and tried to consolidate his power by installing Indra Manikya as a puppet king. But later on, a conspiracy was hatched against him by General Daitya Narayan. As a result of the plot the Brahman was killed & Vijay Manikya became the King of Tripura.

Human Sacrifice During the Reign of Vijay Manikya Pathan Rebels

Vijay Manikya was a contemporary of the Mughal emperor, Akbar - the Great. He was an imperialistic ruler. He subjugated the neighbouring Kings and zamindars and extended the borders of his territory. After leading several successful campaigns, Maharaja Vijaya Manikya marched towards Chatigram along with a powerful army consisting of two thousand men. His rival the king of Chatigram had one thousand Pathan soldiers. At the same time the wazir of Tripura, named, Prachanda led a regiment of thousand mercenary Pathan Soldiers of Bengal. But the mercenary Pathan soldiers had not been paid for the last two months. As a result, they became rebels and killed Wazir. Pratap Narayan, the son of Wazir saved his life somehow by fleeing into woods. The Pathans turned strangers (be-gana) and attempted to plunder the royal palace at Rangamati. However, their attempt ended in vain as the guards defended the castle with great valour. Again, those Pathans hatched another conspiracy to kill the king of Tripura at Chatigram. But their plot came to light due to their quarrel which happened as a result of alcohol intoxication. Knowing about their evil intentions the king enquired about the rebels. After being confirmed he rounded up & slaughtered one thousand Pathan horsemen as a sacrifice to Fourteen deities.

Beheading of Mamarak Khan

After knowing the onslaught of Pathans the nawab of Gauda became enraged and sent a campaign to Chatigram led by Mamarak Khan, who was his brother-in-law as well. Mamarak Khan was a valiant warrior. His accompanying army consisted of 3000 horses and 10000 infantry holding shields and bows. Mamarak Khan won Chatigram and Tripura troops were compelled to retreat. Hearing this news, the king, Vijay Manikya became furious and rebuked his generals bitterly. After that, Gen. Kala Nazir was posted on the southern frontier that was Shrihatta (Sylhet) where he tasted victory. But the troops in the left frontier (southward provinces of Capital) fled for fear of Pathan. The royal Pathan cavalry of the Tripura army had turned disloyal. In the absence of cavalry in the Tripura Army the Pathans were able to conquer the Chatigram Thana. The king managed to send a cavalry regiment which fought with Pathans for eight long months but could not recapture Chatigram. Hearing this Vijay Manikya Sent

Charkha¹⁸(spinning wheel) to his generals with anger. He at once summoned Kala Nazir from Shrihatta. After felicitating Kala Nazir as his son, he sent him against the Pathans in Chatigram. Both armies met on the battlefield. Events of the conflicts were noted extensively in Rajmala. Amidst the conflict, the fourth division (prahara) of the day was gone in a crucial battle and only four dandas in the afternoon remained. On the battlefield, Nazir set himself on the frontline and placed his troops behind him. The other generals gave up resistance treacherously, Nazir got surrounded and killed by Pathans. The exhausted and wounded Pathans took it for victory and went back to their fort. Being thirsty, hungry, wounded and awfully tired the Pathans started preparing food. In the meantime, a conference was held by Tripura troops. One Gajbhim said, “The King’s adopted son Nazir had fallen. What answer will you all give”? After much discussion, the army decided upon a plan. They dug a tunnel below the Pathan camp after dusk. Through this tunnel, three thousand Tripura soldiers, armed with swords and bucklers entered the Pathan camp. A bloody conflict took place but the exhausted Pathans without much resistance fled from the camp leaving behind heavy casualties. Gen. Mamarak Khan and his mother were seized at the end. All belongings of the Pathans were sacked. Their elephants, horses and such like booties were reserved for the King. All other things were bagged by those who could find them. The soldiers put Mamarak Khan into an iron cage and abused him verbally as he was a Kafer.¹⁹

On reaching Rangamati the Tripura troops placed the cage of Mamarak Khan just outside the Suvarna dvar or golden gate. Later on, he was produced in front of the King. Maharaja Vijay Manikya then presented a lot of fine robes to the Khan. Khan saw the king but did not make a salute. But the King did not hold any grudges against him. Khan was boasted of being the brother-in-law of the Nawab of Gauda. The king, Vijay Manikya had no intention to kill him. But the head priest (Chantai) of the King, named, Durlabh, then said to the King, “I will sacrifice this Khan to the fourteen Gods”. The King replied, “O Chantai, this is not proper for everyone says that Mamarak Khan is a nobleman.” The Chantai again said to the king, “I have the divine behest to sacrifice Mamarak Khan.” The king became silent then. Thus, convincing the King, the Chantai took Khan to Ratnapur,²⁰ where he passed the night. In the morning the Head Priest (Chantai) and his deputy (Deorai) bounded Khan’s hands from behind and made him bathe. After dressing him up in yellow robes, He was made to sit before the fourteen deities facing towards the East. But he turned westward of his own accord. He was forcibly turned to face the east. But again, he turned to the west. Again and again, he turned away his neck. A servant of Mamarak Khan was presented there, he said to Khan, “We know that you are a brother of Hazrat Ani. You are Mamarak Khan by name and an army General of the kingdom of Gaud. A man of such status, you have fallen into the clutches of the heathens (kafir). Now, God is in the West. Is he not in the East as well? Why should you make a distinction at such a crucial moment? If the heathens kill you, you will fare well afterwards. You will reach heaven without hindrance. Please turn to the east and expand your neck. Get out of this body as early as possible”. Hearing all these Khan recited a Koranic verse called Kalima, turned to the east and placed his neck ready (for the blow). The Head Priest named Khitung dedicated him (to the deity) and his deputy of the

¹⁸ Charkha: charkha is spinning wheel. To expel soldiers from military service charkha was given to them in past times.

¹⁹ Kafer: A non-believer or infidel.

²⁰ Ratnapur: The shrine of fourteen Gods was situated here.

Lika tribe took a varana²¹ and beheaded the enemy of Tripura, Mamarak Khan. The Chantai performed everything according to rules and rituals. When the victim's heart was cut open, a terrible scene caught their eyes. A doll made of gold was found inside his heart. The Chantai gave it to the King. The King assumed it to be a sign of good fortune and kept it in the inner apartment. Seven days after this incident, a letter came from the King of Gaud containing the message. "You are a friend of mine. Please set free Mamarak Khan. I will give you a big chunk of my territory by extending your frontier up to the river Padma. This will include the land of Yatrapur". Maharaja Vijay Manikya was surprised and rebuked Chantai before his courtiers. Because of Chantai Vijay Manikya earned a bad reputation and missed a chance to control the King of Gaud. Later on, he stopped repenting and sent a written message about the death of Mamarak Khan. An officer called Visvasa²² wrote the letter on a gold sheet. On hearing the contents of the king's letter, the Gauda king rose (and retired for the day). The later political events of the reign of Vijay Manikya were noted extensively in Rajmala. A verse from 'Vijaya Manikya Khanda' mentioned the Mughal emperor, Akbar which also reconfirmed that they were contemporary.

Instances of Human Sacrifice in the Third Volume

Amar Manikya Khanda

Amar Manikya played a pivotal role in restoring the old dynasty of the Tripura royal family, which was ousted by Uday Manikya in 1567 C.E. Through his military might he made Tarap a tributary state. He also defeated the ruler of Bhulua and took a large number of men and women as prisoners who were sold as slaves in Tripura and Sylhet. Amar Manikya had four sons named, Raj-Durlabh Narayan, Rajdhar, Amar-Durlabh Narayan and Yujhar Singha. They all had the title of Narayan.

Amar Manikya spent many of his years fighting against the Magh. Ralf Fitch, a European traveller on his way to Chittagong visited Tripura during the Reign of Amar Manikya and made the following remarks: "From Satagan I travel by the country of the king of Tippera with whom the Mogen have almost continual wars. The Mogen which be of the kingdom of Recon and Rame, be stronger than the King of Tippera; so that Chittagong or porto-grando, is often times under the King of Recon".²³ From the testimony of 'Sri Rajmala' it is visible that Amar Manikya had Portuguese as his ally. But the later treacherously deserted Maharaja and joined hands with the Magh. Apart from control over Chittagong, another reason for the conflict was the surrender of Adam Shah, a fugitive of Arakan who took shelter in the court of Amar Manikya. During this timeline, several battles were fought between the Magh King Sikandar Shah (Meng Phalaung) and Maharaja Amar Manikya. Though the Maghs had the last smile. Maharaja Amar Manikya lost Jujhar Sing, one of his sons and capital Udaipur as well in the hands of the Arakan army and took refuge in the forest of Tetaiya on the bank of river Manu. In 1584 the Arakan army plundered Udaipur and committed a massacre. Even during his exile his brother-in-law, Chhatra Nazir, raised arms against him with the help of Kukis. He was able to suppress the revolt. Being heartbroken and mentally depressed, Amar Manikya committed suicide by taking poison.

²¹ Varana: One kind of big sword which was used in human sacrifice.

²² Visvasa: Officers who were entrusted with the responsibility to write letters of the royal court. They were endowed with the titles like, 'Visvasa' and 'Patranawis'.

²³ Roychoudhury, Nalini Ranjan, Tripura Through the Ages, p. 23.

Human Sacrifice before Goddess Durga

Initially the Maghs after joining hands with foreign adventurers able to defeat Tripura's army and conquer Chittagong. But in the second phase of the war Amar- Durlabh, his friend Pratap Narayan and Sura-Rastra- Narayan incurred a crushing defeat upon the Maghs and gave them a hot chase. A large number of Maghs were butchered and the rest of them ran for their life leaving a heavy causality behind.

On hearing the defeat suffered by the Maghs the Magh King sent a messenger named, Udiya Raja. The messenger came to Rajdhar and said, "We will give you a fight next year." Rajdhar reported the same to King, Amar Manikya.

On receiving this letter King Amar Manikya wrote a reply and dispatched it to Rajdhar.

"What you have written is right.

The Durga Puja Festival is coming near.

please come here again.

Bring some Maghs with you, if you

have captured any in the battle,

for the purpose of sacrifice

in the worship of Bhavani."

The Mischief of Ghosts & The Reign of Rumours

Once a Brahman was returning to home, after reading out the Chandi with a piece of meat, presented by the King, during the time of Durga puja. On the way, he encountered an evil spirit who wanted a share of meat. The Brahman refused by saying that the meat was granted to him by the King himself and rebuked the evil spirit addressing it as 'wicked fellow'. The ghost couldn't harm the Brahman because he was holding the sacred Chandi text at that time. Whenever a way-farer passed by the way, the demonic spirits dwelling in the banyan trees shook the branches over them. The youngest son of the King, Yujhar Narayan, commissioned a dwelling house by the banyan trees. The king visited the house and praised the same for its architecture. People told him that the nearby trees were infested with evil spirits. The King recalled his fearless experience of an early age when he encountered and suppressed the evil spirit. So, saying that the King nodded, and both the trees were cut down in no time. The roots were dug up and also the soil around them was thrown away from that day onward, the passers-by travelled undisturbed by that way. As a result of digging at the roots of the trees a spacious pit was created. The water soon got up there and it looked like a big pond. The river current flowed into it from the stream Fulkumari. Earlier the kings used to perform ghostly human sacrifices. The worship in that place required eggs and flowers. A Tripur priest (deodai) had to perform the worship at dawn. After cutting down the trees the king was infested with a disease in his ear. The king's sufferings were grievous, and even his life was in peril. During this time his sons were about to be involved in a war of succession. Maharaja Amar Manikya prevented the upcoming conflict by setting him up on the throne.

At that time ghosts and ghouls and all sorts of evil spirits spread a rumour among the subjects which was much discussed. It was that if one hundred twenty-five children were taken to Fulkumari stream in a boat and drowned there, then the king would certainly get rid of the disease. Along with this, other rumours caught speed in bazaars. People of Udaipur spoke of ominous days ahead. They said: Udaipur will turn turtle; the population will leave for far-off

destinations; tigers will devour men in the King's palace; jackals and dogs will feast on human flesh; the capital Udaipur will be flooded with water; only two hundred and fifty souls will survive including some cows; then after a time another king will appear; that king will be the saviour of the entire royal dynasty, the baby is already born, and is living unnoticed; he will become king thirty-four years hence (or at the age of thirty-four). Frightened people who were having children moved them to distant places. They were kept concealed under the care of relatives. Most of the male children of the capital were kept hidden. The King came to know about all these through his spies and asked to arrest rumour mongers whenever found. In a few days, Maharaja Amar Manikya recovered from his illness and made ceremonial gifts. Then he resumed administrative duties. But historian Kailash Chandra Singha made the following remarks: "It was told that in Udaipur nuisance was done by ghosts and to get rid of this Maharaja Amar Manikya offered human sacrifice."²⁴

Analysis

In different volumes of 'Sri Rajmala' instances of human sacrifice are mentioned several times. "At that time many of the Kings of Bharat Varsha used to worship their Kul-devatas with great pomp and show by offering human sacrifice. For example, the kings of Manipur and Tripura can be mentioned."²⁵ If we analyse these incidents of human sacrifice which are mentioned in 'Sri Rajmala' we find that maximum sacrifices were performed either in religious ceremonies like various pujas before the deity or in tantric rituals.

Indeed, human sacrifice was widely practised in Tripura. But consuming human flesh was not permissible. Cannibalism was seen as a great sin. In the first volume of 'Sri Rajmala' S'iksha Raja was made to eat human flesh unknowingly by his panic-stricken cooking staff. As a result of this, he abdicated his throne and chose to live a life of yogi in the forest out of repentance. From this act, it is clear that cannibalism had no relation with those human sacrifices, made in shrines or other rituals. If anybody consumed human flesh, he was subjected to punitive measures like, exile and the king himself was not above the law. The verse also indicates that human sacrifice was performed regularly in the shrine of fourteen gods on every Ashtami or eighth lunar day.

From the anecdote of King Maichili, it is clear that human sacrifice was a regular phenomenon in the state of Tripura. That is why a special community of the tribesmen named, 'Maichili' was employed by the state to collect human victims and to meet with the demand of the same in different occasions and rituals. If sacrifices were not made regularly, then, there was no need to employ such a special community. From this part, it is also understood that human sacrifices were often made to get rid of curses or the rage of gods.

During the time of Maharaja Dhanya Manikya, we came to know about 'avichar-karma' or destructive rites which were performed by his Guru to destroy the invaders. The sacrifice of a man was an essential part of this ritual. So apart from getting rid of the curse or rage of gods sacrifice with human flesh was offered to secure win against the enemies. In this context, we came to know about a special kind of messenger who was called 'raybar'. It was the duty of the raybar to implant the sacrificial head in the enemy camp. 'Dhanya Manikya Khanda' talks about a royal

²⁴ Singha, Kailash Chandra, Rajmala, p. 186.

²⁵ Chattopadhyay, Durgapada, Narabali Itihash, p. 120.

decree that prohibited human sacrifice with exceptions. In the verse, it is told that before this decree the Kings of Tripura used to offer human sacrifice yearly with thousands of Bengalee. Though the number seems exaggerated. The list of exceptions depicted in the verse gives a clear hint of where and how many numbers of human sacrifices were allowed. One human was allowed to slay in three years in the shrine of fourteen deities, one victim was allotted to goddess Kalika (Tripurasundari) when easily it was available, two human scarifies were allowed in the shrine of Daucha pathar who were to be collected from the enemy and when possible two humans were to be sacrificed in the river Gomati on the occasion of Ganga puja. From these arrangements, it is clear that human sacrifice was arranged and sponsored by the royal authority. Also, at the time of the inauguration of the Tripurasundari temple, Maharaja Dhanya Manikya offered various animals including humans to goddess Kalika. Offering human flesh and blood to goddess Kalika was a common practice. A shloka from 'Kalika Purana' goes like this: "The goddess satisfied for a thousand years with one human sacrifice as prescribed, and with three human sacrifices, the goddess is satisfied for a million years."²⁶

Maharaja Dev Manikya came under the influence of a Maithili Brahman named, Laxmi Narayan. It indicates the connection of Tripura with Mithila Pradesh in the medieval period. The Brahman provoked Maharaja Dev Manikya to perform tantric rituals and butcher eight of his Senapati or Generals one after another to attain salvation or a supernatural state. Though the consequence was miserable. One interesting fact is to be noted here that while he was bathing somebody warned him secretly about his foolish misdeeds and the intention of Brahman. This incident in the bathroom reminds me of the 'Gushalkhana' of the Mughal emperor from the contemporary period. "The Gushalkhana was a place of retirement for the King where important business was transacted. It was only the highly placed officials who were allowed to come to this place. The commanders of the expedition about to leave, or Governors proceeding to their appointments were called there to have a confidential consultation with the King."²⁷ Maybe at that time in Tripura such a system was also grew and prevalent replicating the Mughal administration.

Vijay Manikya was a capable ruler of Tripura. He was a contemporary of Akbar. The Ain-i-Akbari of Abul Fazal refers to his reign in the following words: "Adjoining Bhati is an extensive tract of territory inhabited by the Tipperah Tribes. The name of the ruler is Vijay Manik. Whoever obtains the chieftainship bears the title of Manik after his name and the nobles that of Narayan. He has a force of two hundred thousand footmen and a thousand elephants. Horses are Scarce."²⁸ In the 'Vijay Manikya Khanda', the second volume, 'Sri Rajmala' is mentioned about Akbar. It seems that Maharaja Vijay Manikya recruited Pathan cavalry to make his army strong. But later on, they turned into rebels and hatched a conspiracy to kill Maharaja. The revolt was crushed by the King with strong hands. The rebellious Pathans, captured by the Tripura forces, were beheaded before the Chaturdas Devata or fourteen gods. It seems that slaying rebels publicly before the gods was done intentionally to spread terror among the rebels and to convey a strong message about what could be the consequence of revolting against the throne. The second instance of human sacrifice in the reign of Vijay Manikya was related to the Tripura-Afghan contest. Where Afghan Gen. and brother-in-law of Gauda King, Mamarak Khan was taken as a prisoner of war and later on, beheaded before the Chaturdas Devata under the provocation of

²⁶ Chattopadhyay, Durgapada, Narabali Itihash, P. 22.

²⁷ Mahajan, V.D. History of Medieval India, p. 673.

²⁸ Roychoudhury, Nalini Ranjan, Tripura Through the Ages, p. 21.

Chantai (Head priest). Initially, Maharaja Vijay Manikya presented various gifts and honoured Mamarak Khan which showed generosity and the high principle of the King. At first Maharaja Vijay Manikya tried to save Mamarak Khan against the will of Chantai and was reluctant to pass the order to slay him. But the Head priest pressurised the King by saying that he had a divine behest to kill Mamarak Khan. Thus, the king was made silent. It indicates that, when differences arose between the Crown and the commandments regarding religion, the Head priest enjoyed more power than the crown. Finally, after the completion of the rituals Mamarak Khan was beheaded in the shrine of fourteen gods. But interestingly, the Chantai did not stop after beheading Khan. He proceeded further and cut open the heart of Khan, a golden doll was found inside the heart which was kept by the King as a sign of good fortune. Except this, no instances were found in 'Sri Rajmala' where the victim's heart was cut open. In ancient times Aztecs of Mexico used to offer human sacrifice in a similar manner which had much resemblance with this. From the accounts of 16th-century Spanish travellers, we come to know that native Americans used to worship Sun God. A fresh human heart was the main ingredient of this worship. Prisoners of war were mainly chosen for this. A knife made of jade stone was used to cut open the chest of a slaughtered person. The chief priest of the Sun God was endowed with the responsibility to perform this cruel rite. Here in this part, we also learn about an officer who was entrusted with the duty to write royal letters. Their title used to be 'Visvasa' or 'Patranawis'. It seems that this post resembled to 'Diwan-i-Insha'²⁹ of the Sultanate period and 'Sachiv' or 'Shuru Nawis'³⁰ of the Maratha administration. The verses of 'Vijay Manikya Khanda' also give us hints about the prevailing Mughal-Afghan contest of that time. Another distinct and interesting custom was dismissing Generals and soldiers from military service by presenting them with Charkha or spinning wheel. It signified that the military personnel were not capable of raising arms, so they should give up as a soldier and live the rest of their life spinning the wheel at home.

According to Kailash Chandra Singha during the reign of Amar Manikya, he performed human sacrifice to get rid of the nuisance created by the ghosts. Later on, he had a disease in his ear which couldn't be cured by his physicians. Due to this, he suffered miserably and his life was at stake. At that time a rumour was spread that if one hundred and twenty-five children were taken to Fulkumari stream and drowned there, then the king would certainly get rid of the disease. It was a rumour which was never done in reality. But, from this rumour, we are acquainted with another form of human sacrifice where victims were killed by drowning in the river. This form of sacrifice was similar to a great extent to a custom that prevailed in ancient Egypt. "Until 642 A.D. the custom of tying a young woman and throwing her in the water of the Nile was still in practice."³¹ So, based on this rumour it can be said that sometimes the Kings made human sacrifices to get rid of diseases. 'Amar Manikya Khanda' of 'Sri Rajmala' gives us a vivid picture of the political scenario of that time. It talks about the tripartite struggle among the states of Arkan, Gouda and Tripura to establish control over Chittagong. The presence of European adventurers was mentioned in this part. It is clear from the Maharaja's letter that Maharaja Amar

²⁹ Diwan-i-Insha: He dealt with royal correspondence. All correspondence between the sovereign and the rulers of other states or his own tributaries and official passed through his department.

³⁰ Sachiv or Shuru Nawis: Home secretary whose duty was to look after the correspondence of the King. He was to see all the royal letters and dispatches were drafted in proper style. He had the authority to revise them.

³¹ Chattopadhyay, Durgapada, Narabalar Itihash, p. 128.

Manikya used to worship the goddess Durga annually. To offer human sacrifice in the worship of goddess Durga he asked his son to capture and bring Magh from the battlefield. In ancient times enemies who were captured on the battlefield were beheaded before the god and goddess publicly. It was done intentionally to induce fear and break the morale of the enemy forces.

In the fourth volume of 'Sri Rajmala' there is no instance of human sacrifice. It is said that during the reign of Maharaja Govinda, he forbade sacrifice in temples, which dissatisfied the priestly class of the state. On the question of sacrifice, the opinion of the crown varied from the priest. As a result of this, a conflict of interest started between them. Based on this story Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore composed a drama and a novel named, '*Bisharjan*' and '*Rajarshi*' respectively.

Conclusion

So, it is evident from the discussion that human sacrifice prevailed in Tripura from ancient times. The Kings of Tripura used to offer human sacrifice at the altar of Gods. The literary pieces of evidence show that maximum sacrifices were made in the shrine of various gods and goddesses, especially, before the fourteen gods and goddess Kalika. Apart from direct religious sacrifice, humans were slayed to get rid of curses, attain salvation in a tantric way, defeat enemies or recover from diseases. Rebels and enemies, captured in war were also beheaded before the god publicly to break the morale and induce terror among the enemy.

Regarding the human sacrifice in Tripura, Rev. James Long remarked, "Human sacrifice prevailed at an early period in Tripura, and even of the late years strong suspicions have been entertained at the shrine of Kamakhya in Assam and Kalighat in Calcutta. But in no part of India were more human victims offered than in Tripura which appears to have been one of the strongest holds of Hinduism."³² 'Sri Rajmala' which is one of the principal and primary literary sources to reconstruct the history of Tripura is recognised and adorned by the historian community. But it should be taken into account cautiously. While considering facts from 'Sri Rajmala' we should keep in mind that it was composed under royal patronage. Exaggeration of a few numerals, theories regarding divine intervention and a few chronological errors should be avoided. Undoubtedly it cannot be denied that the practice of human sacrifice prevailed in Tripura for a long period. But it is also an established truth that with time such cruel practices faded away and were finally abolished.

References

1. Chattopadhyay, Durgapada, 2022, Narabalir Itihash, Kolkata: Kamalini Prakashani Bibhag.
2. Gan-Chaudhri, Jagadis, 2019, A Constitutional History of Tripura, 2nd Edition, Agartala: Parul Prakashani.
3. Mahajan, V.D. 2018, History of Medieval India, New Delhi: S Chand and Company Limited.
4. Nath, N.C. 2020, Sri Rajmala, Vol- I to IV, Agartala: Tribal Research & Cultural Institute.
5. Roychoudhury, Nalini Ranjan, 1983, Tripura Through the Ages, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers and PVT LTD.

³² Roychoudhury, Nalini Ranjan, Tripura through the Ages, p. 101.

6. Sen, K.P. 2020, Sri Rajmala, Vol. I, 3rd Edition, Agartala: Tribal Research & Cultural Institute.
7. Sen, K.P. 2020, Sri Rajmla, Vol. II, 3rd Edition, Agartala: Tribal Research & Cultural Institute.
8. Sen, K.P. 2020, Sri Rajmala, Vol. III, 3rd Edition, Agartala: Tribal Research & Cultural Institute.
9. Sen, K.P. 2020, Sri Rajmala, Vol. IV, 3rd edition, Agartala: Tribal Research & Cultural Institute.
10. Singha, Kailash Chandra, 2018, Rajmala, Agartala: Parul Prakashani Private Limited.