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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PRISONERS AND PRISON LIFE IN THE PRINCELY STATE: A CASE STUDY OF COLONIAL TRIPURA

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the issue of prisoners and their life in the Princely State of Tripura. With the advent of British power in India, the princely state had indirect relations with British power. Due to the contact with colonial power, the indigenous or native rule in India became modified and codification of law and orders, also regulations were introduced in the line of British pattern. It was under the Ministry of Umkanta Babu of Tripura State, for the first time recognized the jails after the British pattern. The primitive systems of jails and prisons confinement were revised accordance with the new light of reformation, and in India especially in the princely rules modified. However, in this content the main aim is to find out the condition of the prisoners in the jails and under the jail custody during the rule of Princely power in Tripura State, over all. To prepare this article primary and secondary sources like administration report are used and it lay in the State archives and library also. We find from this discussion that prisons and their life under the princely rule of Tripura was better than comparison to the other States in British India.

INTRODUCTION

The present paper deals with the history of prisoners in the Princely State of Tripura from nineteenth century up to merger of this State with Indian Union. This Princely State had relations with the British Raj. Due to the impact of western influence, the princely rule then became in the line of British or colonial shape. Naturally, the law and orders of the state, even especially in the field of criminal justice were modified accordance with colonial pattern. The law and orders of the State was codified and some acts were passed in accordance to colonial pattern. The establishment of jail dates back of 5th century B.C. by Justinian in Rome. The purpose was to safe custody of prisoners. Imprisonment as form of punishment was known fact in England. In England used this system of confinement of prisoners by Henry II and Henry III (Howard, 1960). Confinement of prisoners in jail was prevalent during the time of Mughal in India. Offenders in jails were punished severely by the Mughal. But after the advent of East India Company, the predecessors of British Government in India, they undertook to establish law and order in dominions under its control in 1784. Thus, in the year of 1784 was a date back to the beginning of modern Indian prison system (Paul, 2016). Jail department was under Mr. B.C. Dev Barman at the time of council of administration. It was placed under the Minister in charge of Public Health and Sanitation after the formation of *Mantri Parishat* (Council of Minister).

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Prison Discipline: A large number of prisons of varied categories lived and they shared a common space. Therefore, a code of rules and regulations was required for the smooth functioning of that organization. The implementation of these rules and regulations was termed as 'Prison Discipline'. But in the absence of a uniform code of rules, the individual efforts of Magistrates had very little impact on the system of prison discipline (Sen, 2007). The discipline of the jail errs on the side of leniency. Prisoners were, it was said, occasionally allowed to go home for a few days, giving merely a promise to return, and great occasions they were sometimes set free in a body (Hunter, 1876). Juvenile delinquents and political prisoners, whenever there was any, were treated as per provisions of the Bengal Jail Code and the separately from other inmates in wards meant for them and particular care was taken in respect of juvenile delinquents by trained personnel to know and understand their problems in order that they might be helped to be on the right tract social norms again (Menon, 1975).

The extension of the Jail enclosure, the construction of another big Dormitory for the male population and of a separate female ward, as also other necessary improvements-both sanitary and accommodative were in contemplation in view of the growing number of the population (Chakrabarti, IV, 1994). (Cellular system which was we observed the unique feature of jails under the British India. There were altogether two deaths in the year 1910, both in the Central jail at Agartala. One occurred among the convicts and was due to heart complications brought on by affections of the lungs.

The other case was that of an under trial prisoner who succumbed to the effects of chronic heart disease. The general health in the jails was however exceptionally good and there was a total absence of epidemic diseases among the prisoners (Chakrabarti, I, 1994). Some time the prisoners were infected by other diseases. In the year 1911-12, there were 3 attacked of chicken pox in the *Sadar* jail (Chakrabarti, II, 1994). Fever one the major problem in the jail. Two deaths occurred in the *Sadar* jail in the year 1913-14, were fever (Chakrabarti, II, 1994). Four deaths in the *Sadar* jail were occurred, of them one of fever with diarrhea and anemia, one of phthisis pulmonatis, one of chronic dysentery and the fourth of acute (Chakrabarti, II, 1994).

The Reformatory School in the Central Jail continued to work satisfactorily. 18 convicts were trained in the year 1347 T.E (Tripura Era). Of them, one sent up for the *Pathshala* Scholarship Examination passed in second division. 14 convicts were 1348 T.E, and one passed the *Pathshala* Scholarship Examination in the 3rd division. The numbers were also imparted religious instruction by the *Maulavi* of local mosque (T. Administration, 1940). As before the Reformatory school in the Central Jail continued to work during the year 1940-43 under review. The number of convict students was 18 in 1350 T.E. In 1351 T.E. the number of students were 14 of whom 2 were sent up for the *Pathshala* Examination both coming out successful. The number during the year 1352 T.E. was 14 (T. Administration, 1943).

Prison Personnel: There were a Superintendent of Jails and jail was his direct supervision while each one of the rest was under a Jailor. The warders in the jails were generally recruited from the up-country men but their number varied from time to time (T. Administration, 1930). *Jamadars* and warders were employed in the Jails for maintenance of jails (T. Administration, 1933). Senior Warders and warder were kept employed for the jail. It is to be noted that *Jamadars* or senior warder were also recruited for the jails (T. Administration, 1933).

Prison Labour: It was under the Ministry of Umakanta Babu, for the first time recognized the jails after the British pattern. It was Umakanta Babu who also set up for the first time an oil-mill in the prison. The main intension behind this, perhaps the exact oil from mustard seeds by the labour of the prisoners (Menon, 1975). Other labour-works were also introduced in later days, and the jails began to yield some revenue. Generally, day by days the prisoners were employed in "brick-manufacturing, oil mills, wheat grinding, *soorki*-pounding, *khowa*(stone)-breaking, weavings, gardening, bamboo and cane works, tailoring and paddy husking etc (T. Administration, 1946). The prisoners were employed in doing earth-work and in preparing cane baskets. They had also work in the jail gardens (Chakrabarti, I, 1994).

Transportation: Transportation was an important and integral aspect of punishment in colonial India. From a very period of their rule, the British conceived the idea of maintaining penal settlements for Indian convicts far away from their motherland and thus transportation had become an old punishment in the British India law (Sen, 2007). This system was introduced in the other parts of India including Princely States also. But sometime State paid to British Government to maintenance for transpiration for prisoners and even for whole life under the British Jail.

Special Release of Prisoners: On the occasion of the auspicious birth-day ceremonies of His Highness the Maharaja Manikya Bahadur, 12 convicts were released on the 14th *Bhadra* (Bengali no. 5 month) 1347 T.E, 10 convicts on the 3rd *Bhadra* of 1348 T.E, and 8 convicts on the 22nd *Bhadra* of 1349 T.E. The number of convicts released during the occasion in 1346 T.E. was 10 (T. Administration, 1940). Sometimes the prisoners would also escape from the jails, in 1921-22 one prisoner escaped from Dharmanagar jail (T. Administration, 1922) and again in 1922-23 one prisoner escaped from Kamalpur jail (T. Administration, 1923).

Visits of the Jail by Agents of Governor-General: His Highness the Maharaja Manikya Bahadur was pleased to show Lieutenant-Colonel H.W.C. Robson, O.B.E., the Agent to the Governor-General, Eastern States, round the Central Jail on 3rd February 1938, during his first visit to the State. Lieutenant-Colonel H.W.C. Robson, O.B.E, was also good enough to visit the Central Jail on 24th March 1939. Lieutenant-Colonel L.E. Barton, Resident for the Eastern States, was pleased to visit the Central Jail on the 27th March 140 (T. Administration, 1940).

Conclusion

The prisoners of the Tripura State were enjoyed like own home. As we have observed that prisoners occasionally were allowed to go home for a few days, giving merely a promise to return, and great occasions they were sometimes set free in a body. It has been mentioned in the Administration reports of Tripura that dormitory for the male population and of a separate female ward, as also other necessary improvements-both sanitary and accommodative were in contemplation in view of the growing number of the population. The Jail authority not only observed the health of the prisoners but also the hygiene's were maintained by the jail authority regularly. It is observed that a reformatory School in the Central Jail continued to work satisfactorily. Some prisoners were even appeared to Final Examination of Board, and few also succeed in secondary examination. Under the Ministry of Umakanta Babu, for the first time recognized the jails after the British pattern, he also set up for the first time an oil-mill in the jail and the prisoners participate many other woks, were employed in "brick-manufacturing, oil mills, wheat grinding, stone-breaking, weavings, gardening, bamboo and cane works, tailoring and paddy husking etc. On the occasion of the auspicious like birth-day of King or marriage and other ceremonies of the Royal Family the good natured prisoners set free, some time convicts were released. It is appeared from the reports that some time prisoners were escaped from the Jails. And some death of prisoners were happened in the jail during their custody, but was very rare. The political Agents to the Governor-General, Eastern States, some occasions on the request of Maharaja round the Central Jail, observed condition of prisoners, but this practice was not regularly. The overall condition of the prisoners in the State was good than comparison to the other jails in British India.

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prepare this work. I have followed the official spelling of names such places like Tipperah, Tippera, Tripura etc. However, in reference portion the original spelling of the same has been retained for convenience. Non-English words have been given in Italics forms.

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