

RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

The Evolution of Education in Princely Tripura: A Chronological Study

Pradip Debbarma¹ Daniel Debbarma²

Assistant Professor, ¹Department of History, ²Department of Education, Government Degree College, Khumulwng, Tripura, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.67060/jssl.vol.1.issue.2.6>

Pages 84–94

ABSTRACT

This comprehensive history traces the evolution of formal education in the Princely State of Tripura from its pre-modern indigenous and Sanskritic roots to the establishment of a modern, state-sponsored system culminating in the mid-20th century. Through a detailed chronological and thematic analysis, it examines the pivotal role of the Manikya monarchs—particularly Maharajas Birchandra, Radhakishore, and Bir Bikram—as architects of educational modernization. It also explores the transformative impact of external influences, including British colonial administration, the philosophical guidance of Rabindranath Tagore, and the pioneering work of Christian missionaries. A critical focus is placed on the seminal, bottom-up Jana Siksha Samiti (People's Education Committee) movement of 1945, which represented a mass democratic awakening for tribal literacy. Drawing on state archives, colonial records, and scholarly historiography, this work argues that Tripura's educational journey was a unique synthesis of royal paternalism, cultural synthesis, and grassroots populism, creating a distinctive legacy that shaped the region's socio-intellectual landscape long after its merger with India in 1949.

Keywords: *Princely Tripura, Manikya Dynasty, Educational History, Birchandra Manikya, Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, Vidyapattan, Jana Siksha Samiti, Tribal Education, Umakanta Academy, Maharani Tulsibati School.*

The Princely State of Tripura, nestled in the northeastern frontier of the Indian subcontinent, represented a unique socio-political entity. Ruled by the Manikya dynasty claiming lineage from the Mahabharata era, it was a Hindu kingdom with a predominantly tribal (Tipra) population, later incorporating a significant Bengali-speaking populace (Bhattacharya, 2018). Its geography, characterized by dense hills and river valleys, fostered relative isolation but also distinct cultural traditions. For centuries, knowledge systems here evolved along two parallel tracks: the oral, community-based pedagogy of the indigenous Tipra communities and the Sanskrit-based, textual learning of the Brahminical and royal courtly circles (Debbarma, 2009). The advent of British paramountcy in the 19th century, however, initiated a period of profound transformation. The monarchy, recognizing the imperative of modernization for political survival, strategically adopted Western-style education as a tool for administrative reform and social engineering (Chakraborty, 2003). This narrative, therefore, is not merely a chronicle of school foundations but a complex story of state-building, cultural negotiation, and the fraught journey toward mass literacy in a heterogeneous society.

THE PRE-MODERN ERA (PRE-1862): INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS AND SANSKRITIC LEARNING

Before the watershed reign of Maharaja Birchandra Manikya, education in Tripura was informal, localized, and deeply stratified along social and ethnic lines. This era was defined by the coexistence of autochthonous knowledge systems and imported Sanskritic pedagogy, with no centralized state role in educational provision.

Indigenous Tipra Oral Pedagogy

For the native Tipra communities (including Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, and others), education was an organic, lifelong process embedded in the material and spiritual fabric of everyday life. There existed no formal institutions; the clan (khel), the family, and the community served as the primary sites of learning (Debbarma, 2009). Knowledge was transmitted orally and through practical apprenticeship. Critical domains of knowledge included:

Agro-Ecological Wisdom: The intricate knowledge of jhum (shifting cultivation) cycles, forest flora, soil types, and seasonal rhythms was passed from one generation to the next (Bhattacharjee, 1994).

Artisanal and Craft Skills: Weaving (notably in cotton and eri silk), bamboo and cane craftsmanship, pottery, and house-building techniques were taught within familial and communal settings.

Martial Training: Skills in archery, dao (sword) handling, and traditional combat were essential for community defense and were imparted to youth in designated communal spaces.

Oral Literature and History: Epic narratives, folk tales, songs (hojagiri, lebang boomani), and genealogies were preserved and transmitted by community elders and religious functionaries like the Chantai (priest) and Ochai (spiritual healer) (Datta, 2017). This constituted the historical and cultural memory of the people.

Medicinal Knowledge: Herbal remedies and traditional healing practices were the purview of specific clans and were carefully guarded and passed down (Das, 2005).

This system was holistic, integrating practical skills, ethical norms, and cosmological understanding. However, it was non-literary and location-specific, lacking the standardized, text-based format of formal schooling.

The Tols and Pathshalas: Sanskrit and Vernacular Learning

With the gradual influx of Bengali Brahmins and administrators into the royal court from the 15th century onwards, a formal, text-based educational tradition took root, primarily serving the non-tribal, Hindu populace (Chakraborty, 2003).

The Tols (Chatushpathis): These were advanced centers of Sanskrit learning, often attached to temples or supported by royal grants. Typically residential and led by a learned Shastri or Nyayaratna, they catered to Brahmin students. The curriculum was classical and rigorous, focusing on Vyakarana (grammar, especially Panini), Darshana (philosophy), Jyotisha (astrology), Smriti (law), and Kavya (literature) (Sengupta, 2001). The aim was to produce priests, astrologers, and scholars for the royal court and the Hindu community. These institutions reinforced social hierarchy and were almost entirely male-dominated.

The Pathshalas: These were elementary vernacular schools, more widespread than the Tols. Operated by a Gurumahasaya or Pathshala Guru, often in a village shed or the teacher's home, they provided basic functional literacy and numeracy to boys (mostly from Kayastha, Vaishya, and other non-Brahmin Hindu families). The curriculum included the alphabet (Barnaparichay), elementary Bengali reading and writing, and Lekha (arithmetic) for keeping accounts (Bhattacharya, 2018). Instruction was individual, not collective, with students progressing at their own pace. Fees were paid in kind (grains, vegetables, cloth). These schools represented the most widespread form of formal, though rudimentary, education available before the modern era.

1.3 Royal Education: The Andarmahal as a Classroom For the princes and the scions of the nobility, education was a private, palace-bound affair. Conducted within the Andarmahal (inner quarters) by appointed tutors (Raj Pundits and Ustads), it was designed to create competent rulers and courtiers (Datta, 2017).

Core Curriculum: The emphasis was on statecraft (Rajneeti), military arts (archery, swordsmanship, horseback riding), and Sanskrit literature. By the 18th and early 19th centuries, the administrative and cultural influence of Bengal led to the inclusion of Bengali language and literature. Furthermore, given the need for diplomatic correspondence with the Mughal and later the British administration, Persian—the language of diplomacy—also became a crucial part of the royal curriculum (Chakraborty, 2003).

Exclusivity and Purpose: This education was highly exclusive, separating the ruling elite from both their tribal subjects and the Bengali commoners. Its goal was not enlightenment for the masses but the cultivation of leadership and the perpetuation of dynastic power. There is no recorded instance of formal education for royal women in this period; their learning was confined to domestic arts and religious rituals within the zenana.

Thus, on the eve of Maharaja Birchandra's accession, Tripura's educational landscape was a patchwork. The majority tribal population relied on a robust but non-formal oral tradition. The Bengali Hindu minority had access to a network of traditional Pathshalas and elite Tols. The royal family received a tailored, comprehensive education aimed at governance. Crucially, the state played no active, organizing role. There was no public education system, no standardized curriculum, and no concept of education as a tool for universal social mobility. This would change dramatically with the coming of the "Modernizer Maharaja."

THE DAWN OF MODERNITY (1862–1896): THE BIRCHANDRA REVOLUTION

The accession of Maharaja Birchandra Manikya Bahadur in 1862 marked a definitive rupture from the past. A shrewd and forward-looking monarch, Birchandra recognized that the survival and effective administration of his state within the framework of British paramountcy necessitated a bureaucracy trained in modern, Western knowledge (Datta, 2017). His reign inaugurated the state-sponsored, modern education system in Tripura.

2.1 The Catalyst: British Paramountcy and Administrative Necessity Following the British annexation of adjacent Bengal, Tripura became a princely state under the suzerainty of the British Crown. The traditional administrative apparatus, reliant on oral communication and customary law, proved inadequate for dealing with the colonial bureaucracy, managing land revenue records, and implementing "modern"

governance (Chakraborty, 2003). Birchandra realized that a cadre of clerks, accountants, and junior administrators proficient in English, accounting, and modern law was indispensable. This pragmatic administrative need was the primary driver for educational reform.

2.2 The Watershed: Establishment of the First Modern School (1872) The most seminal act of Birchandra's reign was the founding of the Agartala Higher English (H.E.) School in 1872. This was not merely another Pathshala; it was an institution conceived on a fundamentally different model.

Curriculum: It introduced a Western curriculum, with English as the medium of instruction for advanced subjects, alongside Bengali, Sanskrit, Mathematics, History, and Geography (Roy, 1977). This broke the monopoly of traditional Sanskrit and vernacular learning.

Model: The school was consciously modeled after the English-medium schools emerging in British India. It represented the institutionalization of colonial modernity within the heart of the princely state.

State Sponsorship: For the first time, the King took direct financial and administrative responsibility for an educational institution, setting a precedent for state intervention in education (Bhattacharya, 2018).

Simultaneously, a second school was established in Kailashahar, the headquarters of the northern division, indicating a vision (however nascent) for education beyond the capital.

2.3 Early Expansion and State Policy The 1870s and 1880s saw the gradual systematization of Birchandra's educational policy.

Budgetary Allocation: By 1874-75, a specific grant for education—£135 per annum—was recorded in state accounts, signifying its formal inclusion in governance (Roy, 1977).

Supervision of Pathshalas: The state began to bring existing traditional Pathshalas under a degree of supervision and support, attempting to upgrade them into vernacular primary schools. By 1879, the number of such recognized schools was reported to be around 25 (Chakraborty, 2003).

Social Reform as Context: Birchandra's historic abolition of slavery in 1879, though not directly an educational act, was a profound social reform that theoretically opened avenues for lower social strata to aspire to education, even if immediate access remained limited (Debbarma, 2009).

2.4 Institutional Cornerstones: Umakanta Academy and Girls' Education Two foundations towards the end of Birchandra's reign had enduring impacts.

Umakanta Academy (1890/1904): The Agartala H.E. School was formally reorganized and strengthened in 1890. In 1904, it was renamed Umakanta Academy by Birchandra's successor in honor of Minister Umakanta Das, but its genesis lies firmly in Birchandra's reign (Sengupta, 2001). It became the premier feeder institution for the state's bureaucracy, the "Eton of Tripura."

Maharani Tulsibati Girls' School (1894): Perhaps the most radical social intervention of the era. Established under the patronage of Queen Tulsibati, this was the first formal school for girls in Tripura's history. It directly challenged deep-seated orthodoxies that confined women to the domestic sphere. Starting with a modest curriculum focused on literacy, needlework, and music, it

represented a revolutionary first step toward female emancipation through education (Datta, 2017).

2.5 Assessment of Birchandra's Legacy

By his death in 1896, Birchandra had laid the unshakable foundation of modern education in Tripura. He transformed education from a private/communal concern into a state responsibility. The institutions he founded were elite-oriented, concentrated in urban centers, and served the immediate need of creating a modern administrative class. Yet, the principle was established: the future of Tripura was tied to modern knowledge. The literacy rate remained abysmally low (estimated at under 3% in 1901), and tribal communities were largely untouched by this new system, but the trajectory was irrevocably set. As Bhattacharya (2018) notes, "Birchandra planted the seed; it would be for his successors to nurture the tree and attempt to spread its branches" (p. 112).

THE ERA OF CONSOLIDATION (1896–1909): RADHAKISHORE, TAGORE, AND A HUMANISTIC VISION

Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya, a benevolent ruler and aesthete, inherited a nascent modern system. His reign was characterized not by radical new departures, but by consolidation, philanthropic expansion, and, most importantly, the infusion of a humanistic educational philosophy influenced by Rabindranath Tagore.

3.1 Post-Earthquake Reconstruction and the Free Education Policy

A devastating earthquake in 1897 destroyed much of Agartala. Radhakishore prioritized the reconstruction of schools alongside palaces, signaling their importance in his vision for the state (Roy, 1977). His most significant policy announcement came in 1899: the declaration of free education in all state-run schools. This removed the financial barrier of tuition fees, a progressive measure that preceded similar policies in many parts of British India and dramatically increased accessibility, particularly for the lower-middle classes (Chakraborty, 2003).

Engaging with the Tribal Population: Early Interventions

Radhakishore made the first conscious, though limited, state effort to include the tribal population in the formal education framework.

Boarding Houses: He established boarding facilities (chhatrashalas) in Agartala specifically for tribal students, providing not only free education but also hostel accommodation to overcome geographic barriers (Debbarma, 2009).

Purpose: This was partly paternalistic—an attempt to "civilize" and assimilate tribal youth into the mainstream administrative structure—and partly pragmatic, to create a loyal indigenous cadre. The impact was limited in scale but symbolically important.

3.3 The Tagorean Influence (1900 Onwards)

Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Agartala in 1900 and his growing friendship with the Maharaja profoundly influenced Tripura's educational ethos. Tagore, critical of the soulless, mechanical education of British India, advocated for a synthesis of Western scientific rationalism with Indian cultural and spiritual values, emphasizing harmony with nature, creative freedom, and mother-

tongue instruction (Datta, 2017). While Tripura could not replicate Santiniketan, this philosophy softened the purely utilitarian focus of Birchandra's system. It encouraged a more holistic approach, evident in Radhakishore's support for arts, music, and culture within the educational sphere.

3.4 Quality Control and Vertical IntegrationRadhakishore's reign focused on strengthening the system's quality and reach.

University Affiliation: In 1901, the Agartala H.E. School (soon to be Umakanta Academy) received permanent recognition from Calcutta University, allowing students to sit for the matriculation examination locally. This integrated Tripura's elite education into the pan-Indian university system (Sengupta, 2001).

Technical Education: Recognizing the limitations of a purely literary education, Radhakishore established an Artisan School attached to the palace workshops to teach carpentry, smithy, and weaving, acknowledging the value of vocational training (Roy, 1977).

Support for Higher Education Outside: In 1905, he provided a generous grant to Victoria College in Comilla (now Bangladesh), which served as the nearest degree college for Tripura's students, showing a commitment to higher education even outside his kingdom's borders.

3.5 The Missionary Entry: A New Axis of Education

A development with long-term consequences was Radhakishore's granting of land to the New Zealand Baptist Mission (NZBM) in 1907. The missionaries, beginning their work in the remote hill areas among the Kuki and Lushai tribes, introduced a new model: education as an instrument of evangelization and social service (Bhattacharjee, 1994). Their schools, often in local languages using Roman script, provided the first formal education to many hill communities, creating a parallel, faith-based educational network that operated independently of the state system.

3.6 Consolidation Achieved

By the end of Radhakishore's reign in 1909, the modern educational system was consolidated. It had a policy (free education), a quality benchmark (university affiliation), a nascent tribal outreach, and a broadening philosophical foundation. The literacy rate, as per the 1901 Census, was a mere 2.47%, but the infrastructure for growth was now firmly in place. The system, however, remained urban-centric and its benefits were yet to percolate to the villages and the vast tribal hinterlands.

THE ERA OF EXPANSION (1909–1923): BIRENDRA KISHORE AND THE RURAL PUSH

Maharaja Birendra Kishore Manikya's reign was a period of quantitative expansion and administrative systematization. Building upon the consolidated foundation, his focus shifted from the capital to the subdivisions, aiming to create a wider network of primary and secondary schools.

4.1 Administrative SystematizationOne of Birendra Kishore's first acts was to professionalize the educational administration.

Inspectors of Schools: He appointed full-time Inspectors of Schools, whose responsibility was to travel across the state, monitor the quality of teaching in rural Pathshalas and primary schools, ensure attendance, and submit regular reports (Chakraborty, 2003). This introduced a layer of bureaucratic oversight crucial for maintaining standards in an expanding system.

Incentivizing Rural Education

The King actively encouraged the establishment of schools in sub-divisional towns and larger villages.

Grants-in-Aid: The state introduced a system of grants-in-aid to local communities or zamindars who took the initiative to start schools, matching local contributions with state funds (Roy, 1977).

Key Towns: Schools were established or significantly upgraded in Khowai, Dharmanagar, Belonia, and Sonamura, transforming them into educational hubs for their respective regions (Bhattacharya, 2018).

Stagnation in Girls' Education and a Failed Initiative

Despite overall expansion, gender disparity remained stark. By 1914-15, out of 154 schools in the state, only 12 were for girls, almost all located in Agartala and major towns (Datta, 2017). An ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful initiative was the 1916 draft proposal to introduce compulsory primary education within the Agartala Municipality. This was a visionary idea, inspired by similar movements in British India, but it foundered due to logistical challenges, lack of enforcement mechanisms, and insufficient funding for the necessary explosion in school building and teacher recruitment (Chakraborty, 2003).

Statistical Progress and Persistent Challenges

The quantitative progress was undeniable. The number of schools grew, and the literacy rate showed a significant jump to approximately 8.2% by 1920 (Roy, 1977). However, this growth masked persistent inequalities:

Urban-Rural Divide: Quality education remained concentrated in Agartala and subdivision headquarters.

Tribal Exclusion: The state's boarding houses and the missionaries made limited inroads, but the majority of the tribal population remained outside the formal system.

Gender Gap: Progress in female literacy was agonizingly slow.

Birendra Kishore's reign successfully widened the base of the educational pyramid. He created the administrative machinery and geographic spread that made education a more visible presence across the state. Yet, the system awaited a transformative vision to achieve qualitative leap and genuine inclusiveness. This would be the task of his successor, Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya.

THE GOLDEN ERA: VIDYAPATTAN AND THE VISION OF BIR BIKRAM KISHORE (1923–1947)

Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Debbarman, often hailed as the "Architect of Modern Tripura," possessed a grand, transformative vision for education. His reign represented the apex of princely ambition in the field, characterized by a drive for institutional self-sufficiency, architectural grandeur, and a synthesis of tradition and modernity.

5.1 Early Reforms and the Impact of Global Exposure

Upon his accession in 1923, Bir Bikram immediately reorganized the Education Department, giving it greater autonomy and resources. His worldview was shaped by extensive travels to Europe,

Japan, and the United States in the early 1930s. He was particularly impressed by the collegiate systems of Oxford and Cambridge, and the concept of a self-contained "university town" captivated him (Datta, 2017). He returned determined to create a similar center of learning in Tripura—a Vidyapattan (City of Learning).

5.2 The Vidyapattan Scheme (1937): A Master Plan for Higher Education Conceived in 1937, the Vidyapattan scheme was Bir Bikram's magnum opus in education.

The Site: He earmarked 254 acres of picturesque, undulating land (tillas) with natural lakes in the eastern part of Agartala (the area now known as College Tilla) for this dedicated educational complex (Sengupta, 2001).

The Vision: It was to be a holistic campus housing a first-grade college, a library, separate hostels for boys and girls, residential quarters for professors, botanical gardens, and sports facilities. It was designed to be an intellectual and cultural oasis, insulated from the bustle of the town.

Governance and Funding: A high-powered Vidyapattan Governing Committee was formed, and a substantial budget of Rs. 50,000 was allocated for initial construction, a huge sum for the time (Roy, 1977).

5.3 Modernization of Traditional Learning

Unlike some modernizers, Bir Bikram did not neglect traditional scholarship. In 1932, he initiated reforms in the Sanskrit Tols. Modern subjects like English, Mathematics, and History were introduced into their curriculum alongside traditional shastras. This bold move aimed to prevent the marginalization of Sanskrit scholars and create a bridge between traditional knowledge and the modern world (Chakraborty, 2003).

5.4 The Disruption of World War II and the Birth of MBB College

The outbreak of World War II severely disrupted the Vidyapattan dream. Tripura became a critical forward base for Allied operations against Japanese forces in Burma. The unfinished college building was requisitioned by the British Army, and its ground floor was converted into a military hospital (Bhattacharya, 2018). Despite this, Bir Bikram's determination was unwavering. He continued the affiliation process with Calcutta University. Finally, in 1947, the Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) College commenced operations, becoming the first degree college within the state. This fulfilled a long-standing aspiration, freeing students from the need to travel to Comilla or Calcutta for undergraduate education.

5.5 The People's Movement: The Jana Siksha Samiti (1945)

While the Maharaja was building his ivory-tower vision in Agartala, a powerful, grassroots educational revolution was brewing in the hills. The slow pace of state expansion into tribal areas, coupled with rising political consciousness under the influence of communist and socialist ideologies, led to a historic mass movement.

Formation: On December 27, 1945, under the leadership of legendary figures like Dasaratha Deb, Sudhanwa Debbarma, and Aghore Debbarma, the Tripura Jana Siksha Samiti (Tripura People's Education Committee) was formed (Debbarma, 2009).

Philosophy and Method: Operating independently of the royal government and relying on community self-help, the Samiti mobilized villagers. They contributed labor, bamboo, and straw to construct school huts overnight. Teachers, often barely literate themselves but fired by zeal, volunteered their services.

Explosive Growth: The movement was phenomenally successful. Within a year, it established an estimated 488 primary schools across remote tribal areas, a feat the royal administration had not achieved in decades (Chakraborty, 2003). This was education for empowerment, for class consciousness, and for asserting tribal identity.

5.6 The Dichotomy and the Legacy

The final years of Bir Bikram's reign thus presented a stark dichotomy: the majestic, top-down, brick-and-mortar vision of Vidyapattan and the chaotic, bottom-up, bamboo-and-thatch revolution of the Jana Siksha Samiti. Both were transformative. Bir Bikram provided the pinnacle of the educational structure—higher education. The Jana Siksha Samiti created its most extensive base—mass primary education. Bir Bikram passed away on May 17, 1947, just as his college began and as the Samiti's schools were flourishing. His legacy is the infrastructure of high-quality institutions; the Samiti's legacy is the democratization of the very idea of literacy. As Debbarma (2009) argues, "The Jana Siksha Samiti did not just build schools; it built a political community around the demand for knowledge" (p. 204).

The Regency and Merger (1947–1949): Transition to a New Order

The period between Maharaja Bir Bikram's death and Tripura's formal merger with the Indian Union in October 1949 was one of transition and uncertainty, managed under the Regency of Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi.

6.1 The Regency's Pragmatic Approach

The primary focus of the regency was stability and continuity. The state machinery worked to maintain the institutions bequeathed by Bir Bikram, particularly the fledgling MBB College. The most significant educational decision of this period was the formal recognition by the state of many Jana Siksha Samiti schools in 1948 (Roy, 1977). This was a pragmatic and necessary acknowledgment of a *fait accompli*. It brought a large number of schools and students under a semblance of state supervision and potential funding, bridging the gap between the popular movement and the royal administration.

The Merger and the Snapshot of Educational Attainment

On October 15, 1949, Tripura acceded to the Indian Union. The educational landscape at this historic juncture can be summarized as follows (compiled from Roy, 1977; Chakraborty, 2003; Bhattacharya, 2018):

Higher Education: 1 degree college (MBB College).

Secondary Education: Approximately 9 high schools (including premier institutions like Umakanta Academy, Maharani Tulsibati, and Bodhjunga School).

Primary/Middle Education: Several hundred schools, a number dramatically inflated by the absorption of Jana Siksha Samiti institutions. The exact count is debated but represented a significant network.

Literacy Rate: Estimates vary between 15% and 20%, a remarkable improvement from 2.47% in 1901, but still low by national standards. Stark disparities persisted: literacy was higher among males, Bengalis, and urban residents.

Dual System: A structured, quality-conscious (but limited) state system coexisted with a vast, enthusiastic, but pedagogically uneven network of community-run Samiti schools.

The Princely Legacy at the Moment of Handover

The Manikya dynasty handed over an educational system that was, in many ways, more advanced than those in many other princely states of comparable size. It had a clear institutional hierarchy, a history of progressive policies like free education, and had just witnessed a powerful mass literacy movement. The legacy was a mixed one: of enlightened royal paternalism creating islands of excellence, and of a delayed but explosive popular demand for education as a right. The challenge for the post-merger administration would be to integrate these two strands into a unified, equitable, and expanding system under the new democratic republic.

Conclusion: Phases, Synthesis, and Enduring Legacy

The evolution of education in Princely Tripura was not a linear progression but a multi-stranded process evolving through three distinct, overlapping phases:

The Phase of Royal Enlightenment (1862-1920): Initiated by Birchandra, this phase saw the state arrogate to itself the responsibility of modern education. Driven by administrative pragmatism, it established elite, Western-style institutions (Umakanta Academy) and made tentative forays into female education (Maharani Tulsibati School). It was a top-down project of limited social reach.

The Phase of Infrastructure and Vision (1920-1945): Under Bir Bikram, the state attempted to build a self-sufficient educational ecosystem. The Vidyapattan scheme and the founding of MBB College represented the ambition to create a center of higher learning that would negate dependence on outside institutions. This phase added vertical depth to the system but continued to lack horizontal breadth in the tribal hinterlands.

The Phase of Mass Awakening (1945-1949): Represented by the Jana Siksha Samiti, this was a bottom-up, democratic upsurge. It shifted the paradigm from education as a royal benevolence to education as a popular right and tool for socio-political empowerment. It forcefully addressed the tribal exclusion that state policies had failed to overcome.

The ultimate narrative is one of a delayed but powerful synthesis. The royal state provided the model, the institutional framework, and the pinnacle institutions. External actors like Tagore and the missionaries provided philosophical depth and alternative networks. Finally, the people themselves, through the Jana Siksha Samiti, provided the mass energy and demand that truly democratized the project of literacy.

The enduring legacy of the princely era is etched into Tripura's landscape. Umakanta Academy, Maharani Tulsibati School, MBB College (now a university), and the very campus of College Tilla are living heritage sites. More importantly, the historical experience created a societal consensus on the value of education, a consensus that would fuel expansion in the post-1949 period. The story of education in Princely Tripura is, in the end, the story of a kingdom's complex negotiation with modernity, where the palace's plans and the people's movements eventually converged to lay the foundation for a literate society.

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