

History of Mata Tripureshwari Temple

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Abstract: *The Mata Tripureshwari Temple, located in Udaipur, Tripura, stands as one of the 51 Shakti Peethas of Hindu mythology, specifically revered as the site where Sati's right foot fell. This paper explores the historical, architectural, and cultural evolution of the temple, which was constructed in 1501 CE by Maharaja Dhanya Manikya of the Manikya Dynasty. Through an analysis of the Rajmala (the royal chronicles of Tripura) and archaeological evidence, this study examines the unique synthesis of Bengali "Ek-ratna" architectural style with local tribal influences. The research further discusses the temple's role as a unifying site for both tribal and non-tribal populations, its significance during the Dewali festival, and its preservation under the modern administration of the Tripura government.*



Keywords: Mata Tripureshwari, Shakti Peetha, Manikya Dynasty, Udaipur, Tripura History, Hindu Architecture, Matabari

I. INTRODUCTION

Situated atop a small hillock resembling the back of a tortoise (known as Kurma Pitha), the Mata Tripureshwari Temple—popularly called Matabari—is the spiritual heart of Tripura. It is not merely a religious site but a historical monument that bridges the gap between ancient legend and documented royal history.

For centuries, the temple has served as a focal point for the socio-religious identity of the region. Tripura, historically a princely state, maintained a unique cultural autonomy where the Manikya kings blended Vedic traditions with indigenous customs. This paper delves into the origins of the temple, the legends surrounding the deity Tripurasundari, and the structural transformations the site has undergone since the 16th century.

1. Mythological Origins and the Shakti Peetha Legend

The sanctity of the temple is rooted in the Puranic legend of Daksha Yagna. According to the Shiva Purana and Kalika Purana, Sati, the consort of Lord Shiva, immolated herself after her father Daksha insulted Shiva. In his grief and rage,



Shiva performed the Tandava with Sati's body. To stop the destruction, Lord Vishnu used his Sudarshana Chakra to cut the body into pieces.

It is believed that the right foot of Sati fell at this location in Udaipur. The deity is worshipped here in two forms:

Tripurasundari: A 5-foot-tall image of the goddess.

Chhotima: A smaller, 2-foot-tall idol that the kings used to carry with them during hunting trips and battles.

The "Kurma" (tortoise) shape of the hillock is considered highly auspicious in Tantric traditions, making it one of the most potent centers for Shakti worship in Eastern India.



2. Historical Foundation by the Manikya Dynasty

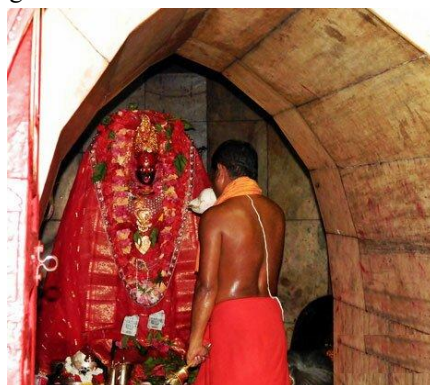
While the site's spiritual history is ancient, the recorded history of the current structure begins with Maharaja Dhanya Manikya (reigned 1490–1515 CE).

The Vision of Dhanya Manikya

Legend suggests that the King was instructed in a dream to move the idol of Tripurasundari from Chittagong (now in Bangladesh) to Udaipur. At the time, the site already housed a temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu. Despite initial hesitation about placing a Shakti idol in a Vaishnava shrine, the King proceeded after a second divine intervention.

Inscriptional Evidence

An inscription found within the temple premises confirms its completion in the Bengali Era (BE) 907, which corresponds to 1501 CE. This makes it one of the oldest living operational temples in Northeast India. The Manikya kings, who claimed descent from the Lunar Dynasty, viewed the goddess as their family deity (Ishta-Devi), and no major state decision was made without her blessing.



3. Architectural Significance

The architecture of the Mata Tripureshwari Temple is a fascinating study in regional adaptation. Unlike the towering Shikharas of North India or the ornate Gopurams of the South, this temple follows the Ek-ratna (single-spire) style of Bengal, but with distinct modifications.



Structural Features:

The Dome: The temple features a high conical dome resting on a square sanctum.

The Roof: It mimics the thatched huts of rural Bengal (the chala style), characterized by a curved cornice.

The Stupa Influence: Some historians argue that the semi-circular dome reflects a subtle influence of Buddhist Stupa architecture, which was prevalent in the neighboring regions of Arakan and Chittagong.

Kalyan Sagar: On the eastern side of the temple lies a massive lake called Kalyan Sagar, dug by Maharaja Kalyan Manikya in the 17th century. It is home to ancient, giant tortoises (Bostami turtles) that are revered by pilgrims.



4. Socio-Cultural Integration

One of the most significant aspects of the temple's history is its role in the integration of tribal and non-tribal communities.

Tripura's population consists of diverse indigenous tribes (such as the Reang, Tripuri, and Jamatia) alongside Bengali settlers. The goddess Tripureshwari is worshipped by all, transcending ethnic boundaries. The Manikya kings, though patrons of Sanskrit and Vedic rituals, incorporated tribal elements into the temple's festivals.

The Diwali Mela

The annual Diwali festival is the temple's largest event. Thousands of pilgrims from across India and Bangladesh gather at the site. The historical significance of this fair lies in its role as a "melting pot" for the region's diverse ethnic groups, fostering a shared Tripuri identity.



5. Challenges and Restoration

Over the centuries, the temple faced threats from both natural disasters and political shifts.

Earthquakes: The region is seismically active. The temple underwent major repairs under Maharaja Radha Kishore Manikya after the devastating earthquake of 1897.

Modern Governance: After the merger of Tripura with the Indian Union in 1949, the administration of the temple eventually transitioned to a government-led trust. In recent years, the "PRASHAD" scheme by the Government of India has been utilized to develop the site as a major national pilgrimage destination.



II. CONCLUSION

The Mata Tripureshwari Temple is a testament to the enduring legacy of the Manikya Dynasty and the spiritual resilience of the region. Its history is a blend of sacred mythology, royal patronage, and architectural unique. As a Shakti Peetha, it remains a bridge between the ancient Tantric traditions of the East and the modern cultural fabric of Tripura. The preservation of its history and the surrounding ecosystem of Kalyan Sagar remains vital for the heritage of Northeast India.

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