

The Historical Significance of Tripura's Merger with the Dominion of India

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ABSTRACT

This research paper discusses in detail about Tripura's Merger with the dominion of India, As a matter of fact, this paper makes an attempt to trace the historical significance by which Tripura Merger Act was signed on 09th September 1949 in New Delhi, This paper studies in detail about the political situation which prevailed before and after the merger of Tripura with the dominion of India. This research paper explains all the articles of Tripura's merger with the Indian Dominion. This research paper also justifies the fact that made the Maharaja of Tripura entitled to all personal rights, privileges, immunities and dignities enjoyed by him as the ruler of Tripura. At last, this paper evaluates the historical significance of Tripura's merger with Indian Dominion.

Keywords: *Merger; Dominion of India; Historical significance; personal rights; privileges.*

INTRODUCTION

Tripura is a small state in the North-East India surrounded on three sides by Bangladesh and has only a single access to the rest of India through Assam. It has an area of 10,066 square kilometres which is mainly hilly and is extensively covered with forest. The early history of Tripura has been written by two Court poets, namely Sukreswar and Banerjee. They were two brothers; they wrote in Sanskrit. They got the facts of Tripura from Durlabhendra Chantai. They were engaged by Maharaja Dhanya Manikya (c.1431-62AD.) in the 15th century A.D. The two scholars wrote two books, namely, Sri Rajratnakaram and Sri Rajmala¹.

The actual process of state formation in Tripura began during the reign of the Manikya rulers, which is also known as the medieval period or the pre-colonial period in the history of Tripura. The Tripuri rajas are said to have assumed the title of 'Manikya' from the time of Ratna Fa, who, according to Professor Kalikaranjan Qanungo, was a contemporary of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban². From the end of the Mughal period till India's independence, the kings of Tripura performed a dual role in the two diverse geographical terrain of the state. In the hills, he enjoyed the status of the king and in the fertile plains (acquired from the Nawab of Bengal) his designation was that of a Zamindar. The fertile tract of land was known as Chakalaroshnabad³.

Tripura was one of the Princely states under British India. After the death of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya on 17th May 1947, his minor son Kirit Bikram became the Maharaja of Tripura. A council of Regency was formed under the Presidentship of Maharani Kanchanprabha Devi (widow of Bir Bikram Manikya) to run the administration of the state. Other members of the Council were Maharaj Kumar Brajendra Kishore Deb Barman, Major B.B. Debbarman and Mr. S.V. Mukherjee holding the posts of Vice-president, a general member and a Chief Minister as well as Dewan respectively. Three non-official ministers were selected, who were to be associated with the Chief

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minister and his official colleagues. They were Captain Maharaj Kumar Durjoy Kishore Dev Varman Bahadur, Kumar Nanlal Dev Varman Bahadur and Moulvi Tamizuddin Ahmed Chowdhury Khan.⁴

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Under the review of literature I have gone through many books, which helped me a lot to complete my research paper as secondary sources. The following secondary sources are used while carrying out my research paper. The name of some of the secondary sources are as follows: -

- (1) 'Tripura Through the Ages', written by Nalini Ranjan Roychowdhury proved to be very helpful source material as this book describes in detail about Tripura's Merger with the dominion of India. But this book does not describe complete historical perspective of the merger.
- (2) 'British Relations with the state of Tripura (1760-1947)', written by Dr Hirendra Kumar Sur, also describes in detail about the merger of Tripura with the dominion of India. Really, this secondary Source proved to be fruitful to carry out my research paper.
- (3) A Constitutional History of Tripura, written by Dr Jagadish Gan-Chaudhuri provided lots of information on my research paper. I found this secondary Source quite satisfactory to complete my research paper.
- (4) The book 'Tripura', written by Dr. Ruma Bhattacharya and Dr. Pradeep Kumer Deepak helped me a lot to carry out this research paper. This book is full of facts about the Tripura's Merger Agreement. Truly, the book provided lots of information on my topic.
- (5) The edited book entitled 'Making of the Indian Union : Merger of Princely States and Excluded Areas?' edited by Sajal Nag, Tejimala Gurung and Abhijit Choudhury proved to be very helpful in providing detailed discussion related to my research paper,

As a matter of fact, on the basis of above-mentioned secondary sources I tried my level best to carry out my research paper. I have endeavored to fill-up the research gap wherever I have found it necessary.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TRIPURA'S MERGER WITH INDIAN DOMINION

The British Conquered Indian territories after the disintegration of the Mughal empire. The British India was not a united and integrated entity. Within the British India, these were three distinct categories - (1) British India, 2) Princely India and (3) Tribal India distinguished as Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas. British India was the area directly administered by the British, Princely India had treaty relations with the British. (there were 562 Such states), while certain tribal areas of north eastern and central India were declared outside the purview of the reforms as envisaged in the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Schemes.⁵

As a matter of fact, the attainment of Indian Freedom in 1947 A.D. was a glorious saga, but independence did not signify the end of the struggle for India. As Professor Alfred Cobban said, "It raised more problems than it solved" ⁶. Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya died on 17th May, 1947. But before his death he had decided that Tripura would join the Constituent Assembly. He nominated his Minister Girija Sankar Guha, as the representative of the Tripura State to the Constituent Assembly on the 28th of April, 1947. The fact that he was thus nominated was duly communicated to the Secretary, Constituent Assembly, New Delhi ⁷. After the death of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya on 17th May, 1947 his minor son Kirit Bikram became his successor as Maharaja of Tripura. On the recommendation of the Crown Representative a "Council of Regency" was formed to run the administration of the state and Zamindars on behalf of the minor ruler and of which Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi was President. However, abrogating this 'Council of Regency Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi took full power in her hand as 'Sole Regent' of the state by a proclamation on the January 1948.⁸

Within a few months after the death of Maharaja Bir Bikram, Tripura faced a great crisis. A few leading persons of Comilla launched a conspiracy in coalition with a few important persons of this state to thrust this state to Pakistan. On 3rd November 1947, the Intelligence Bureau of India reported, "This information is confirmed by an independent source which says that the Muslim League National Guards in East Bengal are carrying on open propaganda that Tripura state belongs to Eastern Pakistan and that preparations are being made to invade Tripura. Several pamphlets

inciting Muslims to conquer Tripura and annex it to East Bengal are in circulation in Eastern Pakistan.⁹ On 4th November 1947, the Prime Minister Pandit J.L. Nehru wrote to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, "you are no doubt aware of the reports that the trouble is brewing on the borders of Tripura (Agartala) state. It is said that the Muslim National Guards from East Bengal, Tripura district, have started an agitation against accession of Tripura to the Indian Union and they may well have raids. Tripura State is very feeble and the Raj family itself is divided. If any trouble occurs there, we have no means of reaching it except by Assam. Yesterday I sent a telegram to the Pakistan Government warning them about this matter. I have also informed the Assam Government. I hope that you will deal directly with the Tripura state authority. Evidently the present Dewan is not much good and better and stronger men is needed. Dr. P.C. Ghosh has also written to me on this subject and drawn urgent attention to it."¹⁰ Actually, the conspiracy was plotted specially after Chittagong Hill tract, Chaklaroshnabad Sylhet district had gone to Pakistan leaving Tripura isolated and cut off from the main land. Moreover, success in forcible occupation of a portion of Kashmir and abetment from a corner of the state authority encouraged the Pro-Pakistani group to conspire and hatch a plot for annexing Tripura to Pakistan.

According to census of 1941 AD; the Muslim community had 23% of the total population. But the Muslim Community had different opinions on the issue of merger of Tripura with Pakistan. There were many Muslims who were not in favour of Pro-Pakistan, movement in Tripura State. They were the Muslim agriculturists of Tripura. They rallied round Arman Ali Munshi and Farid Uddin Ahmed to Udaypur and Sirajul Islam of Dhaleswar, Agartala. They formed the Tripura Rajya Praja Majlish in 1946.¹¹

It is noteworthy that the Anjuman Islamia with Abdul Barik Khan, alias Gadu Miah and Sirajul Islam, alias Pyera Mia, respectively hatched the conspiracy in Tripura. The Pro-Muslim League elements in the 'Anjuman Islamia' led by Abdul Barik alias Gadu Mich launched Pro-Pakistan movement in Tripura. Both the Majlish and Islamic were at loggerheads as Tripura's fate was hanging in balance.¹² Besides, the Tripura Sangha, a new Sangha named as 'Bir Bikram Tripura Sangha' also came into effect just after the demise of the king. This Sangha was founded by Durjoy Kishore Debbarma, the younger brother of the deceased king. The aim of this Sangha was to safeguard the tenancy right of the permanent dwellers of the state.¹³ The Sangha had its militant wing styled in local dialect as 'Seng-Krak' (at that time translated as beheading at one blow). It was 'Seng-Krak' by which the cult first appeared in Tripura. Actually, it was the symbol of the cult which always tried to encourage violent clashes between the tribals and the Bengalis in Tripura. The Seng-Krak began to incite the tribal people through the propaganda that the Bengali refugees had grabbed Tripura State. The Muslims and the tribals in Tripura had no means to survive other than supporting the move for merger of Tripura with Pakistan.¹⁴

It is imperative to know that three public meetings were held at Comilla by some Muslim League Leaders demanding the accession of Tripura state to Pakistan. They also demanded redress of grievances of the tenants of Chaklaroshnabad Zamindari. Resolutions were passed in the meetings giving fifteen days' time, urging the Tripura state authorities to concede their demands, failing which 'Direct Action' they said, would be launched. They exhorted the people to get ready for 'No Rent' campaign and the boycott of the Tripura state. Similar meetings were held and leaflets were distributed in Feni Sub-Division of Noakhali District.¹⁵

Abdul Barik Khan Chaudhuri (alias Gedu Mia) was one such local Muslim leader who was an elephant driver of the royal family. Actually, the Muslims of Tripura assisted the Muslims of East Pakistan and of Chakla Roshanbad. They assembled under the green flag of Islam to capture Tripura. Huge processions of hundreds of Muslims carrying league flags and raising deafening cries of "Allah Hoo Akbar", "Naraye Tagdir", "Pakistan Zindabad", "Ladke Lenge Hindustan" used to come out almost every evening in the streets of Agartala, Udaypur, Sonamura and other towns. Their passage through the roads and streets used to create terror.¹⁶

At this period of crisis the Regent with her son took shelter at Shillong. The regent had left her subjects to their fate in Tripura.¹⁷ At this juncture, the 'Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal' launched a strong resistance movement against the conspiracy. 'Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal' was formed in 1946 by the ex-members of the Tripura Rajya Janamangal Samity, the leaders of Tripura Janasiksha Samity, the students and the workers.

On the one hand, the Praja Mandal offered a strong resistance against the pro-Pakistani conspirators and on the other hand, it opposed the anti-Bengalee propaganda of the Seng-Krak. A big contingent of the volunteers of the Praja Mandal, mostly the tribals marched on the roads of Agartala town on 12th July 1947, raising slogans which were expressive of determination of resisting the conspiracy for annexing Tripura state to Pakistan. On the same day, a big public meeting was held at Umakanta Academy ground. It was addressed by Yubaraj Remendra Kishore Deb Barman

(Nani Karta) and others. The speakers demanded immediate removal of S.V. Mukharjee and pledges to thwart, at any cost, the conspiracy for annexing Tripura to Pakistan.¹⁸ The Government of India immediately responded by sending men and material to put end to the inimical external inroads and influences. Tripura was thus saved and strongly protected.

On the advice of the Government of the Government of India, the council of Regency was dissolved and Maharani Kanchan Prava Devi became sole Regent on 12th January, 1948. The resignation of the Chief Minister S.V. Mukherjee was accepted and a new Chief Minister for the state was appointed on the recommendation of the Government of India. It was declared that the Chief Minister hereafter be designated as the Dewan of Tripura state who with the assistance of one adviser and two or three Secretaries will run the administration.¹⁹

During her regency, Maharani Kanchanprava Devi declared "In accordance with the wishes of the Late Maharaja Manikya Bahadur, Tripura will have a fully democratic constitution and the popular representations will be associated with the Government. The interests of the people of Tripura and their economic welfare are our great concern. The ruling family considers, as it has always considered and their welfare is indissolubly linked with the welfare of the people; and the people's happiness is their happiness."²⁰

PRINCELY TRIPURA'S MERGER WITH THE INDIAN UNION

Seeing the overall situation as very critical, and people's demand for a democratic Government in Tripura, the Government of India at long last, asked the Eastern Command to get in touch with the Dewan of Tripura and to arrange for military assistance. Simultaneously, the consultation about the security and merger of Tripura with India was going on. A delegation from Tripura was sent to Delhi for discussing the modalities of merger question. In this delegation, Brajendra Kishore Debbarma, the Dewan and the queen were included at the intervention of C.Rajagopalachari.²¹

During her regency, the Maharani made a proclamation on 11th November 1947, reiterating the decision of the Late Maharaja by saying that Tripura state had joined the Indian Union before 15th August, 1947. 'The accession of this state to the Indian Union was decided by the Late Ruler after due consideration and full consultation with all sections of the people. Thus, she assured that appropriate steps would be taken and all attacks would be resisted firmly for self-defence and existence. She also further stated that, "A strong well-organised internal security force has to be built up, the finances of the state have to be rehabilitated, a scheme of road construction to provide internal communications as well as direct link with the Indian Union has to be put into effect, supplies of essential commodities of which there is an acute shortage have to be made available to the people, and the machinery of the Government has to be generally tightened up. All energies for the present must be directed to the above ends."²²

Finally, 'The Tripura Merger Agreement' was signed on 09th September, 1949 in New Delhi. Maharani Kanchanprava Devi as Regent and on behalf of her minor son, signed the agreement. By this Tripura Merger Agreement, the Maharaja of Tripura ceded to the Dominion Government full and the exclusive authority jurisdiction and powers for and in relation to Government of the state and agreed to transfer the administration of the state to the Dominion Government on the 15th Day of October, 1949.

CONCLUSION

Thus, after lots of conspiracy, internal conflicts, disturbances and agitations Princely Tripura was integrated with the Indian Union on 15th October, 1949 and a Chief Commissioner took over from the Regent Maharani Kanchanprava Devi and it was in the Year of 1950 that Tripura was given the status of a part 'C' State. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the first deputy Prime Minister of India gave the following message on the occasion of the merger of Tripura on 15th October, 1949, "The State of Tripura, with its isolated situation yet occupying a position of strategic importance on the eastern borders of India, has an ancient history and a rich culture. The partition of the country has, however, brought in its train for this small state a host of problems, which, in the present state of its developments, it was impossible for it to solve on its own resources. The state has potentialities and resources, which, if tapped and properly exploited, would be an asset to the country. For all these reasons, the Government of India and Her Highness the Maharani Regent acting on behalf of the minor

rules, came to the conclusion that in the interests of the welfare of the state and of the country as a whole, it was essential that the centre should make itself directly responsible for its administration and its well-being."²³

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