

## **INTERFUSION OF PRINCELY STATES WITH ODISHA: A HISTORICAL ASTUTENESS**

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### **ABSTRACTS**

*Before India gained Independence in 1947, India was divided into two sets of territories, one under direct British rule, and the other suzerainty of the British crown, with control over their internal affairs remaining in the hands of their hereditary rulers. The latter included 562 princely states which had different types of revenue-sharing arrangements with the British, often depending on their size, population and local conditions. In addition, there were several colonial enclaves controlled by France and Portugal. After Independence, the political integration of these territories into an Indian Union was declared objective of the Indian National Congress, and the Government of India pursued this over the next decade.*

*Many princes were also pressured by Popular sentiments favoring integration with India, which meant their plans for Independence had little support from their subjects. The Maharaja of Travancore, for example, definitely abandoned his plans for Independence after the attempted assassination of his Dewan, Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer. In a few states, the Chief Ministers or Dewans played a significant role in convincing the princes to accede to India. The key factors that led the states to accept integration into India were, however, the efforts of Lord Mountbatten, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and V.P.Menon. The latter two were respectively the political and administrative heads of the states department, which was in charge of relations with the princely states.*

*After India's Independence, Nilgiri was the first, Gadjat State in Odisha to revolt against any unification. Befriending the tribal against any unification. Befriending the tribal people, the king succeeded in turning the Adivasis against non- adivasis, who they fought*

*with bows, arrows and spears. The King believed this would strike fear in the “ Prajas”, who would turn to him for protection. But the strategy backfired. The ‘ Prajas’ revolted. Mahatab seized the opportunity, flew to Delhi and asked Patel for permission to merge Nilgiri with Odisha. Defeated, the king of Nilgiri surrendered his state to Odisha. Mahatab continued with his merger efforts, calling a meeting in Sambalpur on October 16, 1947 of the princely states’ kings. But he again faced opposition. The kings saw no merit in the merger, arguing that if they acquiesced it would mean giving up the privileges they had enjoyed for generations. Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo, the king of Patna, tried to sabotage Mahatab’s efforts. Singh Deo was instrumental in establishing the Eastern Zone Native States Association, which encompassed the “ Garajat” regions of Chhattisgarh and Odisha.*

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### **KEYWORDS :**

***Independence, Hereditary, Integration, Arrangements, Unification, Acquired, Instrument, Garajat, Encompassed, Merger***

### ***Introduction:***

At the time of Independence, there were more than 500 princely states in India, that were not a part of the British Empire officially. These 500 princely states covered 46 percent of the Pre- Independent Indian area. Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel was given the task of integration of princely states. The Indian Independence Act of 1947 gave princely states the choice to accede to either India or choice to accede to either India or Pakistan or remain Independent. Post- Independence one of the first and major

problems that surfaced was the integration of the princely states into the concept of a single unified, uniformly administered India. Since these princely states were patronized by the British on a large scale during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, they were not comfortable with the idea of giving away their power and prestige. Some of these states that posed problems were Jodhpur, Bhopal and Travancore before Independence and Junagarh, Hyderabad and Kashmir post- independence.<sup>1</sup>

The newly-formed government of India was against the idea of having independent nations within the state would only jeopardize the internal and external security of India. It was speculated that in case of an act of aggression by a foreign power, these princely aggression by a foreign power, these princely states would be used as the staging ground for an attack on the country at large. It was n't just the Indian government trying to woo the princely states but also Pakistan as well. Thus it was necessary to integrate the princely states as soon as possible.<sup>2</sup>

Harekrushna Mahatab took the initiative of merging all the native states with the Odisha administration by putting forth this demand before the Cabinet Mission. On 16 October 1947 he continued a meeting of all the kings of the princely states at Sambalpur. He tried to convince them that for maintenance of peace, discipline, law and order, it was extremely essential that all these native states should merge with Orissa. But this meeting did not yield very positive results. The kings of the native provinces results. The kings of the native provinces put forth a counter argument that yielding to Mahtab's demand implied their losing all privileges they had been enjoying for generations. They conveniently tried to overlook the implications of the Prajamandal Movements in the recent past and tended to ignore the possibility of what shape, it could take in future. For the time being, however, Mahatab felt thoroughly discouraged. Just on the eve of Independence on 10 August 1947, a conference of the Prajamandal was convened. The people of Chhattisgarh and the other native states of Odisha participated in this meeting. In the context of India's attainment of Independence, the role of India's attainment of Independence, the role of this conference was significant. The people unequivocally expressed their desire to merge with Odisha in this conference. But the decision of the people in this conference fell on deaf ears of the concerned kings of the native states. In future, however, the Kings had to bear the consequences.<sup>3</sup>

It was after the attainment of the Independence of India that many statesman, politicians and intellectuals of India including that of Odisha began to think of the integration of the states. The king of Patna Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo tried to foil Mahatab's efforts for the merger of the native states with Odisha. R.N.Singh Deo took the leadership in forming the Eastern Zone Native States Association comprising of the Garajat regions of Chhattisgarh and Odisha. It was inaugurated on August 1947. This new body had its own police force and in case there was any sign of disturbance in any native state its police force was prepared to crush it. Hence at this juncture any possibility of the merger of the Garajat States with Odisha seemed remote. This was a rude shock to Mahatab.<sup>4</sup>

In the state of Nilgiri the current of Prajamandal Movement flowed fast. That was because the Raja was dead against the integration of his state with Odisha. In order to foil the efforts of the Prajamandal, he chalked out a plan. He decided to set the tribals against the non-tribal peasants. Naturally, it led to tussle between the two. The tribals were so much inspired that they took on oath by touching the earth that they would sacrifice their lives for the causer of their Raja. Among them the Bathudis were in the forefront. Some leaders of this community and some leaders of this community and some loyalists of the non-tribal community constituted an organization of the Royal loyalists. They threatened to burn the villages of all those who would not join them. The situation was explosive. So, the Raja called the joint police force from the state of Dhenkanal. Their presence infuriated the peasants. On 29 October, 1947, a group of anti-social young men of the loyalist group of anti-social youngmen of the loyalist group carried away the ripe paddy in the village of Ayodhya. They also tortured the peasants in very many ways.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of this clash even villagers their bows and arrows killed one non-tribal peasant and wounded eight others. This inhuman treatment appeared to be the repetition of the Quit India Movement. In order to prevent the torture and barbarous Sridhar Rath, President of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee, Nanda Kishore Das and other Congress members like Nilambar Das went there. They gave a detailed report which was published in newspapers. Thereafter a provincial Government was set up to be headed by Kailash Chandra Mohanty. These events were reported by the Raja to the Government at the center. The central government instructed the then Prime Minister of Odisha,

Harekrushna Mahtab, to take over the administration of Nilgiri. He did it in the month of November, 1947. For the integration of the other princely states of India, the state of Nilgiri showed the beacon light and paved the way. It was gratifying for Odisha that in the integration of Princely states, Nilgiri was the first in India. The Princely state of Hyderabad was the last in this matter.<sup>6</sup>

In the meantime, the rulers of the princely states of category 'A' were trying their best to maintain the status quo and remain independent. Harekrushna Mahtab chief exponent of the integration of princely states, was watching the dramatic events taking place in Odisha. He realized that the matter was becoming a problem. So, he invited the Home Minister of India, Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel, to come to Odisha. Responding to his invitation Sardar Patel arrived on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 1947 and stayed at the Raj Bhawan. The rulers of the princely states of Odisha were informed earlier to meet Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel. Accordingly all the rulers arrived at government house, Cuttack on the 14 December 1947, Vallabh Bhai Patel discussed with the rulers different issues arising out of the proposed integration of their states. He address the rulers of the princely states thus, 'Free India had to plan the progress of every federal unit and Odisha, free of all problems, communist or communal, was ready to March on the path of economic advancement, particularly as its social fabric had not been disturbed by any commercial animosities.'<sup>7</sup>

The problem of the province, however, which was holding up its legitimate right to progress was the problem of a number of petty states- left as a legacy of British rule- which out across the province and ruined its unity. Odisha as a Federal Unit could only thrive and progress if it was built as contiguous whole and not torn as under by multifarious jurisdictions and authorities which ruined its compactness. The states therefore, which had no resources, no man-power and nothing in which any stable government could be built up could not mark as responsible governments. Patel further said, "in the circumstances if the Odisha government suggested the merger of the states in the province, it was not with any selfish motive to swallow all states but it was designed in the best interests of the people of the states and the provinces as both were determined to March rapidly on the path of progress."<sup>8</sup>

On the other -hand a few rulers of the princely states of Odisha did not agree with the proposal of Vallabhabhai Patel. Patel told them that the central government would give full protection to all. If any ruler did not agree to the integration, the government of India would not give any protection to him. This threat worked well. Except the ruler of Mayurbhanj all other rulers gave their consent for the integration. Sunderam, the secretary of Law at the center, prepared an agreement called the instrument of Accession called the instrument of Accession.<sup>9</sup> On 15 December 1947, the rulers of the princely states of Odisha except that of Mayurbhanj signed the instrument of Accession. The Raja of Kalahandi pointed out that V.P. Menon had put pressure on him to sign this instrument of Accession. No other ruler complained on the issue. On 23 December 1947, the government of India delegated to the Odisha Government the power to administer the princely states in the same manner as the districts in the province. This became effective from 1 January 1948. This day was also observed as the Garjat Mukti Diwas ( Liberation Day of Princely States).<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, largely through the efforts of Harekushna Mahatab 24, A,B, and C category Garajat States merged with Orissa and they signed the instrument of Accession. But the ruler of Mayurbhanj did not sign. He placed an argument before Sardar Patel . He said that his government was a responsible representative government. Sardar Patel considered it to be a more pretext. So, he called the minister of the state of Mayurbhanj had to the instrument of Accession on the 1 January on the drama of integration of the princely states of Odisha.<sup>11</sup>

On the other-hand, though Mayurbhanj merged with Odisha, the twin Garajat states of Sareikella and Kharasuan were merged with Bihar. This resulted in the outbreak of rebellion in these two states. Brutal force was used to crush there rebellion. In spite of the stubborn resistance for the inhabitants of Odisha, the government of India withdrew those two states from Odisha and united them with Bihar. In 1953 in the Odisha Legislative Assembly a proposed for the reunion of Saraikala and Kharsuan with Odisha was adopted.<sup>12</sup> That year the government of India set up a commission for reorganizing states on the basis of language. Sayed Dazl Ali was made its Chairman. The government of Odisha placed before it strong arguments in favour of the union of those two states with Odisha. Saraikala and Kharsuan remained with Bihar. The people of Odisha

remained under the shadow of frustration and anger. Due to Sardar Patel's policy of "Blood & Iron", the people's desire to merge with Odisha remained a distant dream. He desired that these two states remain within Bihar.<sup>13</sup>

The merger of the Garajat states had a slew of consequences. Primarily, by uniting with Odisha, the Garajat kings and people could taste the sweet taste of Independence. Secondly, by embracing democracy, the people and kings of indigenous states gradually become acquainted with a new form of government and its functioning. Thirdly, the accumulated rage of the people of these areas was finally extinguished following the complete merger of Garajat states with Odisha. With the intervention of the Odisha government, the state was able to benefit from the vast deposit of mineral resources in the Garajat areas.<sup>14</sup>

After the merger of the Indigenous princely states with Odisha, a new chapter in the history of modern Odisha began. After generations of oppression at the hands of monarchical tyranny, the 'Prajās' or people could achieve happiness and independence. The barrier between ruler and ruled was irreversibly shattered. The merger of the princely states with Odisha was made possible by Harekrushna Mahatab's sincere efforts and the assistance of Sardar Patel and V.P. Menon of central government of India.<sup>15</sup>

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