



## PROTESTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY AGAINST THE CONSPIRACY OF ANNEXING TRIPURA TO EAST PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

Tripura is located at north-east corner of India. Tripura is a land-locked state and its geographical limits touch both national and international boundaries. The *Tripuri* dynasty ruled this ancient kingdom for several centuries (642-1949) and at last merged with Indian Union in 1949. Few days back to independence of India, it was almost assured that India would be partitioned and rulers of the Native States would be asked to exercise option to join either the Indian dominion or Pakistan or remain independent with their native states. At that time there was a deep conspiracy to annex Tripura State to Pakistan. Conspiracy for annexing Tripura to Pakistan was designed both inside and outside Tripura, immediately before and after independence of India. The civil society of Tripura raised their voice unitedly against the conspiracy and saved the state from annexing with Pakistan.

**Key Words:** Tripura, Annexing, Pakistan, Conspiracy, Resistance.

### Introduction

Modern Tripura is a small hilly state of India. It is located at north-east corner of India. The state lies to the south-west of Assam and to the east of Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan. Its geographical limits touch both national and international boundaries. Most of its land frontiers are enclosed by the Bangladesh districts of Sylhet on the north and the Chittagong Hill Tracts on the south-east, and Noakhali, Comilla on the west; only on its north-eastern border that Tripura meets the states of Assam and Mizoram of India. The *Tripuri* dynasty ruled this ancient kingdom for several centuries (642-1949) and at last merged with Indian Union in 1949.

### Objectives of the study

The primary objectives of the present study are to bring to light the protests of people of Tripura in saving it from annexing with Pakistan; to highlight the complicated situation of Tripura during the process of unification Indian Union immediately after independence.

### Methods and Materials

The present study is analysis of an important political event of Tripura held in 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The study is historical and analytical in nature. For this study data has been collected from secondary source, like, books, articles etc.

### Discussion

After World War II, the British government decided to free India, primarily due to severe post-WW II economic exhaustion, intense nationalist pressure, dwindling administrative control over communal tensions and violent riots like the 1946 Calcutta Killing, which made maintaining the empire unsustainable. In 1945, immediately after the election of the Labour Party in United Kingdom, led by Prime Minister Clement Attlee, the process of transferring administrative power was accelerated, as they were ideologically committed to decolonization. The Indian Independence Act was passed by the UK Parliament on 18 July 1947 and came into force on 15 August 1947. This effectively marked the end of nearly two centuries of British governmental authority in India and its direct dominion over the Indian subcontinent.



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The Indian Independence Act 1947 contained several historic and transformative provisions. The Act legally created two sovereign dominions- India and Pakistan, effective 15 August 1947. Each dominion was empowered to frame its own constitution and govern itself. The provinces of Bengal and Punjab were partitioned between the two new states, based largely on religious majorities, setting the stage for large-scale demographic shifts. The Act transferred legislative sovereignty to the Constituent Assemblies of both dominions. In India governance continued under modified provisions of the Government of India Act 1935, until separate constitutions came into force. British paramountcy over princely states was terminated, allowing them to decide whether to accede to India or Pakistan or remain independent, though political realities forced most into accession.

Under this political transition period, it was almost assured that India would be partitioned and rulers of the Native States would be asked to exercise option to join either the Indian dominion or Pakistan or remain independent with their native states. At that time there was a deep conspiracy to annex Tripura State to Pakistan. The civil society of Tripura raised their voice unitedly against the conspiracy.

The foresighted king of Tripura, *Maharaja* Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya already made up his mind to join the Indian Dominion in the last part of April 1947 and nominated his minister, Girija Sankar Guha on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1947 to represent the State in the Constituent Assembly. The decision was communicated to the Secretary, Constituent Assembly by a telegram on the same date (Government of Tripura (1357 T. E.) (June 1947). Soon after the decision of joining the Indian dominion had been adopted, the *Maharaja* Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya died of brief illness on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1947. By a notification dated 11 June 1947, the Chief Minister, Maharaj Kumar Brajendrakishor confirmed the decision of *Maharaja* Bir Bikram to join the existing Constituent Assembly and the nomination of Baboo Girija Sankar Guha, Minister of Tripura, on 28 April 1947 to represent Tripura (Dr. Gan Chaudhuri, Jagadis, 2004). By another notification dated 3 July 1947 *Maharani* Kanchanprabha Devi further confirmed the nomination of Baboo Girija Sankar Guha to the Constituent Assembly (Dr. Gan Chaudhuri, Jagadis, 2004).

After the sudden death of *Maharaja*, the *Maharani* Kanchan Prava Devi on behalf of her minor son, Kirit Bikram Kishore Deb Burman took over the charge of Hill Tripura State and *Zamindary* of Plain land of Tripura according to the convention of the Royal family. A Council of Regency was formed headed by the *Maharani*, and the Council took over the administration of Tripura on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1947.

On 13 August 1947, the *Maharani* of Tripura and Lord Mountbatten signed the “Instrument of Accession” for unification with the union of India. During June 1947 to 15 August 1947, 562 among 565 Native States (popularly known as Princely States) ruled by native princes signed the “Instrument of Accession”. According to the document, native princes were to continue to rule their native states independently except on the matters related to defence, external affairs and communication; but the native princes had to give assurance to hand over the power to elected public representatives gradually (Chakraborty, Mahadeb, 2013).

Conspiracy for annexing Tripura to Pakistan was designed both inside and outside Tripura, immediately before and after independence of India. “In Tripura, the Anjuman-e-Islamia with Abdul Barik Khan, alias Gedu Miah and Sirajul Islam, alias Pera Mia, President and Secretary of the organization respectively hatched the conspiracy” (Mohanta, Bijan (2004). Besides, reports from East Pakistan began to come in that ‘Ansar Bahini’ (a Pakistani Islam Organisation) was getting ready to attack Tripura. But, there was no force of the India Government present in the State at that time.

It was believed that some pro-Pakistani persons had allured Durjay Kishore Deb Burma, step brother of *Maharaja* Bir Bikram Kishor Manikya, (subsequently became the interim Minister of the State) that if Tripura State could be included in Pakistan, he would be made the *Maharaja* of Tripura.

When the decision of the *Maharaja* regarding his joining the Indian Dominion was made public, the *Anjuman-e-Islamia* reacted sharply. It raised the question, whether the *Maharaja* could decide alone the matter of joining the Indian Dominion. Silent support was given by Durjay Kishore to Anjuman-e-Islamia in this matter.

Big rallies of the Muslim National Guards or ‘Ansar Bahini’ began to take place at various places of East Pakistan bordering with Tripura. Huge processions of hundreds of Muslims, carrying League-flags used to come out almost every evening in the streets of Agartala, Udaipur, Sonamura and other towns. Their passage through the roads and streets used to create terror. In East Pakistan and in Chakla Roshnabad arson, killing, plundering, rape, and conversion would follow dispersal of such meetings and processions (Dr. Gan Chaudhuri, Jagadish, 2004).



The prevailing situation was very alarming which was evident from the telegraphic report of the Intelligence Bureau. The report sent to the private secretary to the Minister of Home Affairs, Delhi, said: "Secret information indicates possibility of Pakistan attack on Tripura state on same lines as in Kashmir. Infiltration of Muslim League supporters and dissemination of propaganda literature have begun within Tripura....."(Das, Durga. ed. (1973).

One astute and brave freedom fighter named Sukumar Bhawmik (1913-1989) found in a momentous vision the communal frenzy of Anjuman-e-Islamia far more dangerous than that of some tribal youths. Prevention of amputation of the motherland became his mission and vision. He established among the Bengali Hindus a patriotic organisation called Tripura Hindu Bengalee Sammilani and galvanised them with *Bande Mataram*, the gospel of fearless strength and force. Thus, Anjuman-e-Islamia no longer found the field clear and soft (Dr. Gan Chaudhuri, Jagadish, 2004).

In the absolutely crucial situation, the Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal launched a strong resistance movement against the conspiracy (Chakraborty, Mahadeb, 2013). The Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal was formed in 1946 by the ex-members of the Tripura Rajya Janamangal Samity, the leaders of Janasiksha Samity and the students and workers of the cultural fronts of the Communists. The Central Committee of the Communist party of India called upon the people of Tripura to resist the conspiracy with all efforts and to retain the State (Datta, Biren (1982).

A big delegation of volunteers of the Praja Mandal, marched on the roads of Agartala town on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1947 raising slogans expressing the determination of resisting the conspiracy for annexing Tripura to Pakistan and a large public meeting was also held after the procession at Umakanta Academy ground. It was addressed by *Yubaraj* Ramendra Kishore Deb Burman (Nani Karta) and others. The speakers demanded immediate removal of S.V. Mukherjee, who was believed to have indulged the conspirators, and pledged to prevent, at any cost, the conspiracy for annexing Tripura to Pakistan.

A Commission known as 'Bengal Boundary Commission' (Rad Cliff Commission) was constituted by the Governor General Lord Mountbatten on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1947 to demarcate the boundary of East Pakistan with India. The Commission presented the report on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, to the Governor General. The award of the Boundary Commission put Tripura State into troubles. It cut of the state from the mainland of the Country.

In this unpleasant situation the regent Maharani was then staying at Shillong to protect the life of the minor prince and herself. Four persons, namely Kalu Chanda, Prabhat Roy, Jaysing Debbarma, and Prafulla Ray rushed from Agartala to Shillong to make her aware the latest situation prevailing in Tripura. The regent *Maharani* immediately reported the matter to *Sardar* Patel, Home Minister, New Delhi.

*Sardar* Patel wrote a letter on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1947 to Akbar Hydari, Governor of Assam regarding the position of Tripura State. In his letter *Sardar* Patel wrote that as per Award of the Boundary Commission, the Chittagong Hill Tracts went to 'East Bengal' which put Tripura 'in a position of great difficulty'. He also added that 'to the north it will have Sylhet, to the West and South East Bengal. There is a small portion of frontier common with Assam and I understand that communication with Tripura State would be possible through this area, in these circumstances; we feel that the interests of Tripura state should be watched with vigilance by us and the State and its *Maharani* should be assured of all protection.

I feel that the best way to do so would be through you and would like to know, before we finalise agreement, whether you have any idea on this subject' (Das, Durga.,1973).

The Tripura State Congress also started hectic activities to prevent the conspiracy of annexing Tripura to East Pakistan. Umeshlal Singha, Secretary, Tripura State Congress Committee, Sachindralal Singha, Sukhamay Sengupta and Anil Chakrabarti rushed to S.M.Ghosh, President of Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, for advice. S.M.Ghosh sent Umeshlal Singha and two other Congress Workers of Tripura to *Sardar* Vallabhbhai Patel with his letter of 29<sup>th</sup> October 1947, in which he wrote that the situation in Tripura was very serious and might take a critical turn at any time. In reply to the letter of S.M.Ghosh, *Sardar* Patel assured him that all possible action would be taken.

Nani Karta and others went to Delhi. A detailed report on the horrible situation of Tripura State was communicated to the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Getting report from various sources regarding the horrible situation of Tripura State, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister, sent a telegram on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1947 to his counterpart in Pakistan. In the telegram he stated that 'Muslim League National Guards' in East Pakistan had been carrying on propaganda that Tripura State belonged to East Pakistan. They had been inciting the Muslims through pamphlets to attack Tripura and annex it to East Pakistan. Stating the situation, the Prime Minister Nehru requested his counterpart in Pakistan to discourage such activities' and 'hostile acts' and anti-Indian



activities and to 'see that no act of aggression is committed on Tripura' (Das, Durga.,1973). Moreover, in a letter to *Sardar Patel*, Nehru expressed his great concern.

In reply to the letter of Nehru, *Sardar Patel* informed him of the steps being taken on the subject. He informed that a programme of improvement of communications had already been decided and steps had been taken to ensure that Tripura have independent communications of posts and telegraphs and wireless with the central authorities. Moreover, he wrote that Assam Government was asked to post a force of the Assam Rifles in the State and that the Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari would be appointed as Agent of the Central government to deal with Tripura State.

Being anxious to hear that tactics similar to those employed in the case of Kashmir were being resorted to by Pakistan for creating troubles in Tripura State, K.C. Neogy, Central Minister for Refugees and Rehabilitation, who was earlier associated with Tripura State as legal and constitutional Adviser, wrote on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1947, a letter to *Sardar Patel*. In his letter he suggested to send a responsible military officer to Agartala for spot enquiry and taking necessary precautionary measures.

In order to deal with the chaotic situation as prevailing in Tripura, the Government of India took some steps towards reformation of the Administration of Tripura. There was a charge against the Chief Minister, S. V. Mukherjee, of having abetted the pro-Pakistani elements in the conspiracy. The Government of India decided to remove him from his office and accordingly he was asked to resign. His resignation was accepted on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1947. Durjay Kishore Deb Burman was also asked to resign and his resignation was accepted 17<sup>th</sup> January 1948. Moreover, he was asked to stay outside Tripura for certain period." (Sen, T. C.,1970).

As a measure to reform the Administration of Tripura, the Government of India abolished the office of the Chief Minister of Tripura State. In its place the office the *Dewan* was introduced and A.B. Chatterje was appointed to the office of *Dewan* of Tripura. He joined in his office on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1947. After his assuming the office, the Council of Regency was desolved on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1948. But *Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi* was allowed to continue to remain as the sole Regent of Kirit Bikram Kishore Deb Burman. She continued in the position till 15<sup>th</sup> October 1949 when the accession of the Tripura State to the Indian Union was accomplished.

## Conclusion

As a result of the protests of civil society members of Tripura and some actions taken by the Government of India, the Anjuman-e-Islamia and other pro-Pakistani elements were cornered. Sensing the danger, they ultimately retreated. Thus, a chapter of conspiracy for annexing Tripura to Pakistan came to an end.

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