



TRIPURA'S MERGER WITH INDIA: HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Abstract

The merger of the Kingdom of Tripura with India in 1949 was the outcome of a complex political and constitutional process that unfolded during a period of profound transformation in South Asia. This paper examines the circumstances that shaped Tripura's transition from princely rule to integration with the Indian Union. It argues that the merger cannot be understood as a single administrative decision but as the culmination of developments beginning with the end of British paramountcy, the death of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur, the accession of his minor successor Kirit Bikram Kishore Manikya, and the establishment of the Regency under Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi. The study also examines the effects of Partition, the disruption of Tripura's traditional economic and communication links with Bengal, refugee movements, internal political mobilisation, and security concerns arising from the kingdom's vulnerable frontier position. Particular attention is given to political developments during 1947, including contemporary concerns regarding activities associated with Muslim League organisations across the border and the responses of the Regency and the Government of India. The paper distinguishes between Tripura's Instrument of Accession in August 1947 and the Tripura Merger Agreement of September 1949, which provided for the transfer of administrative authority to the Government of India from 15 October 1949. It further traces the subsequent establishment of Chief Commissioner administration and Tripura's constitutional status as a Part C State from 26 January 1950. The paper concludes that Tripura's integration was a negotiated constitutional transition shaped by the interaction of internal political circumstances, regional insecurity, administrative pressures, and the wider process of Indian state formation.

Keywords: Tripura, Manikya Dynasty, British Paramountcy, Maharaja Bir Bikram; Regency, Merger Agreement, Princely States.

Introduction

The integration of the princely states into the Indian Union after 1947 represented one of the most significant constitutional transformations accompanying the end of British rule in South Asia. The Indian Independence Act, 1947 brought about the lapse of British paramountcy and fundamentally altered the political position of the princely states (*Indian Independence Act, 1947*). Rulers who had previously maintained treaty relationships with the British Crown were confronted with the question of their future constitutional relationship with the newly established Dominions of India and Pakistan (Copland, 1997; Ramusack, 2004).

Within this wider transformation, Tripura occupied a distinctive position. The kingdom had maintained a long tradition of monarchical rule under the Manikya dynasty and possessed an administrative history that differed from that of directly governed British territories. Its political relationship with British India had developed through the system of paramountcy, while the plains territory associated with Chakla Roshnabad had a different administrative and territorial history. By the middle of the twentieth century, Tripura had nevertheless developed a relatively modern administrative structure, particularly during the reign of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur (Gan-Chaudhuri, 1985; Roychoudhury, 1983).

The death of Maharaja Bir Bikram on 17 May 1947 brought an additional element of uncertainty to an already unsettled political situation. His successor, Kirit Bikram Kishore Manikya, was a minor, and the administration of the state consequently passed to a Regency headed by Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi. The Regency had to operate at a moment when British paramountcy was ending, the political map of the subcontinent was being redrawn, and Tripura's established economic and communication links with Bengal were being transformed by Partition.



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The subsequent history of Tripura's integration is sometimes presented as though accession and merger were a single event. They were not. Tripura entered into a constitutional relationship with the Dominion of India through an Instrument of Accession in August 1947. The subsequent Tripura Merger Agreement, signed on 9 September 1949, constituted a separate and more comprehensive constitutional settlement. Under that Agreement, the Maharaja ceded full and exclusive authority, jurisdiction and powers for the governance of the state to the Dominion Government, with the administration to be transferred on 15 October 1949 (Government of India, 1949).

The period between these two constitutional stages was politically important. The Regency confronted economic difficulties, demographic pressures, political mobilisation and security concerns. Contemporary Indian communications also recorded apprehension about activities of Muslim League National Guards in East Bengal and propaganda asserting that Tripura belonged to eastern Pakistan. A communication from Jawaharlal Nehru to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on 4 November 1947 referred to trouble developing around the borders of Tripura, while another communication to Liaquat Ali Khan reported activities associated with the Muslim League National Guards and propaganda concerning Tripura. These contemporary records are important because they establish that security concerns were not merely retrospective interpretations of the period, although the precise nature and extent of the alleged attempts to influence or destabilise Tripura remain matters requiring careful historical treatment.

Existing scholarship has examined Tripura's historical development, its relationship with the colonial state, and its place within the political history of north-eastern India. However, the interaction between the constitutional developments of 1947-49, the internal political crisis following the death of Bir Bikram, the security environment created by Partition, and the eventual negotiated merger deserves further attention. This paper therefore examines Tripura's merger as a historical process rather than as an isolated constitutional event. It focuses on the political circumstances within the kingdom, the changing regional environment, and the negotiations that culminated in the transfer of administration in October 1949.

Objectives of the study

The study aims to examine the historical, political and constitutional circumstances that shaped the merger of the Kingdom of Tripura with India in 1949. Specifically, it seeks to trace the political developments following the end of British paramountcy and the death of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya; examine the effects of Partition, refugee movements, internal political mobilisation and security concerns on Tripura's political situation; distinguish the constitutional significance of the Instrument of Accession of 1947 from the Tripura Merger Agreement of 1949; and analyse the administrative and constitutional consequences of the merger for Tripura.

Methods and Materials

The study is historical and analytical in nature. It is based primarily on documentary and secondary sources. Primary materials include the Tripura Merger Agreement of 1949, the Government of India's *White Paper on Indian States*, relevant constitutional and legal documents, and contemporary correspondence relating to the political and security situation in Tripura during 1947-49. Secondary materials include books, scholarly articles and historical studies dealing with Tripura, the princely states, Partition and the integration of the Indian states. The collected material has been examined critically and chronologically to reconstruct the political and constitutional developments leading to the merger and to examine its administrative, political and socio-demographic consequences.

Result and Discussion

Historical Background of Tripura

The Kingdom of Tripura occupies a distinctive place in the political history of north-eastern India. The continuity of the Manikya dynasty in Tripura provided the kingdom with a long-established political identity extending over several centuries. The Rajmala, the traditional royal chronicle, constitutes an important source for the historical memory of the kingdom, although its accounts require critical comparison with archaeological evidence, inscriptions and later historical scholarship (Gan-Chaudhuri, 1985; Roychoudhury, 1983).

Although the dynasty's lineage is much older, the political prominence of the Manikya rulers increased considerably from the fifteenth century onwards. Under rulers such as Dharma Manikya and Dhanya Manikya, Tripura exercised influence over parts of the eastern Bengal plains and adjoining hill areas. Its geographical position between Bengal and the



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hill regions of north-eastern India gave the kingdom considerable strategic importance and brought it into sustained interaction with neighbouring political powers (Roychoudhury, 1983).

The expansion of Mughal power in eastern India from the sixteenth century onwards gradually altered this territorial position. Tripura lost control over portions of the plains, while the hill areas remained under the authority of the Manikya rulers. This process did not eliminate the kingdom but contributed to the emergence of a smaller political territory whose rulers continued to maintain a degree of autonomy. The capacity of the monarchy to adapt to changing regional circumstances became an important characteristic of Tripura's political history (Gan-Chaudhuri, 1985).

The emergence of British power in eastern India during the second half of the eighteenth century introduced another significant change. The plains territory of Chakla Roshnabad came under British administration, while the Hill Tippera state continued under the Manikya monarchy. Tripura consequently occupied a position distinct from directly administered British territories. The British relationship with the kingdom operated within the framework of paramountcy, under which the ruler retained internal authority while accepting the superior political authority of the British Crown in matters affecting the wider imperial system (Gan-Chaudhuri, 2004; Ramusack, 2004).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, successive Manikya rulers introduced administrative reforms affecting revenue collection, judicial arrangements, education, public works and communications. These developments reached an important stage during the reign of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, who ruled from 1923 until his death in 1947. His reign witnessed substantial initiatives in urban planning, education, infrastructure and administrative organisation. By the eve of independence, therefore, Tripura possessed an established governmental apparatus that provided the institutional foundation inherited by the Regency after his death (Roychoudhury, 1983).

Maharaja Bir Bikram's reign represented a period of significant institutional development in Tripura. His administration promoted education, urban planning, infrastructure development, and administrative reorganisation. The establishment and expansion of modern institutions, including improvements in public administration and communication networks, strengthened the governing capacity of the state. These developments were particularly significant because they provided the administrative foundation that the Regency inherited after the Maharaja's death in 1947 (Gan-Chaudhuri, 2004).

This background is important because the political crisis of 1947 did not emerge in a politically or administratively undeveloped territory. It occurred in a kingdom with a longstanding monarchical identity, an established bureaucracy and an evolving relationship with the wider constitutional changes taking place in British India. The problem confronting Tripura after 1947 was therefore not simply whether the monarchy would survive, but how an established kingdom could respond to a rapidly changing political environment.

Internal Political Situation in Tripura (1947-1949)

The death of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur on 17 May 1947 created a significant political transition in Tripura at a time when the entire subcontinent was experiencing constitutional uncertainty. The Maharaja had been the central figure in the modernisation of the state and had provided strong political leadership during a period of administrative transformation. His death, only a few months before the end of British rule, created a situation in which Tripura had to manage both an internal succession issue and the wider uncertainties associated with the transfer of power (Roychoudhury, 1983; Gan-Chaudhuri, 2004).

Since the successor, Maharaja Kirit Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur, was a minor, the administration of the kingdom was placed under a Regency headed by Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi. The Regency assumed responsibility for maintaining governmental continuity and safeguarding the interests of the kingdom during a period of rapid political change. Unlike a normal transition of royal authority, the Regency had to exercise political judgement on constitutional matters while simultaneously managing administrative responsibilities, financial pressures, and the consequences of Partition (Gan-Chaudhuri, 2004).

The political orientation of Tripura had, however, already begun to develop before Bir Bikram's death. A notification issued by the Tripura State Government on 11 June 1947 recorded that the late Maharaja had decided that Tripura would participate in the existing Constituent Assembly and had nominated G. S. Guha as the state's representative. The decision had been communicated to the Secretary of the Constituent Assembly by telegram on 28 April 1947. A subsequent



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notification of 3 July 1947 was issued under the authority of the Regent concerning representation in the Constituent Assembly. These developments indicate that Tripura's political leadership was already engaging with the constitutional framework that was emerging in British India before the formal end of paramountcy.

The political situation became more complicated following Partition. Tripura's geographical position meant that the creation of East Pakistan had immediate consequences for the kingdom. The territory was surrounded on three sides by East Pakistan, while its principal connection with the rest of India was through Assam. Established commercial and communication links with the Bengal plains were disrupted by the creation of the international boundary. The consequences extended beyond trade to the movement of people, supplies and administrative personnel (Chatterji, 1999).

Refugee movement added another dimension to the pressures confronting the Regency. Displaced persons from East Pakistan began arriving in Tripura during the post-Partition period, placing additional demands on land, food, housing and public administration. Although the demographic transformation intensified in subsequent years, its beginnings were already visible during the period immediately following Partition. For a relatively small state with limited financial resources, the need to respond to these pressures complicated the task of maintaining administrative stability (Bhaumik, 1996).

The internal political environment of Tripura also underwent significant changes during this period. The weakening of traditional princely authority after independence encouraged the growth of organised political activity. The Tripura State Congress demanded constitutional reforms and greater political participation, while the Ganamukti Parishad emerged as an important movement among sections of the tribal population, raising concerns related to land rights, social justice, and administrative reforms. These developments indicated the gradual emergence of organised political activity in Tripura as traditional monarchical authority faced new demands for representation and reform.

The internal political environment was also changing. The Tripura State Congress pressed for political reform and greater public participation, while the Ganamukti Parishad emerged as an important political force among sections of the tribal population, raising questions relating to land, social justice and administrative reform. These developments reflected a broader transition from established monarchical politics towards mass political mobilisation (Bhaumik, 1996).

At the same time, reports of political activity favouring the incorporation of Tripura into Pakistan contributed to a heightened sense of uncertainty. Later accounts, including those cited by Pannalal Roy (2014) and Suchintya Bhattacharjee (2017), identify the Anjuman-e-Islamia and certain individuals associated with it as having supported or facilitated pro-Pakistan activity. These accounts also make allegations concerning the role of Prince Durjoykishore Debvarman and his alleged connections with Muslim League-oriented political circles. Such claims should not be treated as established facts without corroboration. Nevertheless, they form part of the political record of the period and help explain why questions concerning the kingdom's constitutional alignment became closely associated with internal political anxieties.

The contemporary evidence is stronger with regard to the existence of security concerns than it is with regard to the more elaborate allegations concerning individual conspirators. Communications from November 1947 show that the Government of India was concerned about activities associated with Muslim League National Guards in East Bengal. On 4 November, Nehru informed Patel of trouble developing along the borders of Tripura, while a communication to Liaquat Ali Khan referred to propaganda by Muslim League National Guards asserting that Tripura belonged to eastern Pakistan (Nehru, 1947a, 1947b). These records provide contemporary evidence that the situation was viewed in New Delhi as a security concern.

Some later accounts go further and describe the existence of a planned Pakistani attack or invasion of Tripura involving Muslim National Guard elements based in Comilla and individuals within Agartala. Such accounts also describe the organisation of a local resistance and the dispatch of information to the Regent in Shillong (Roy, 2014; Bhattacharjee, 2017). Because the available evidence does not establish all aspects of these allegations with equal certainty, the episode is best understood as a period of serious apprehension concerning possible external interference and political destabilisation rather than as an unequivocally established Pakistani invasion plan.

The political response within Tripura was nevertheless significant. According to later accounts, Prabhat Roy, Joy Singh Debbarma, Prafulla Roy and Kanu Chand travelled to Shillong to inform Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi of the situation.



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The Regent subsequently communicated with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. A State Congress delegation headed by Umesh Singh also travelled to Delhi to meet Patel and other national leaders, while a Prajamandal delegation approached the Government of Assam for assistance (Roy, 2014; Bhattacharjee, 2017). These contacts indicate that the political crisis was increasingly being connected to the wider governmental structures of India.

The Government of India responded to the security situation through the existing administrative and security channels. In his response to Nehru, Patel referred to the improvement of postal and communication links with Tripura and the posting of Assam Rifles in the State, while further administrative arrangements were also being considered (Nehru, 1947c). Later accounts describe additional assistance through Assam. The significance of these measures lies less in proving a particular military plan than in demonstrating that Tripura's security was increasingly understood within the framework of the wider security concerns of the emerging Indian Union.

The Regency itself also underwent institutional change. The Council of Regency was dissolved on 12 January 1948, after which Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi continued as sole Regent (Gan-Chaudhuri, 2004). The change did not immediately end monarchical authority; rather, it concentrated political responsibility for the kingdom's administration in the Regent during the remaining period before merger. Dewans and other officials assisted in the administration, although the precise chronology of individual appointments differs among secondary accounts and therefore does not require detailed treatment here.

The internal political situation between 1947 and 1949 was consequently characterised by a combination of continuity and uncertainty. The monarchy and its administrative institutions continued to function, but the constitutional environment had fundamentally changed. Partition had transformed Tripura's geographical and economic circumstances; refugee movement increased administrative pressures; political organisations demanded greater participation; and reports of pro-Pakistan activity created additional security concerns. These circumstances did not mechanically determine the decision to merge with India, but they narrowed the practical alternatives available to the Regency and strengthened the importance of securing a stable constitutional framework.

Constitutional Developments and Negotiations with India

The constitutional transition of Tripura should be understood as a sequence of related but distinct developments. The first was the kingdom's participation in the emerging constitutional arrangements of 1947. The second was accession to the Dominion of India through the Instrument of Accession. The third, and decisive stage for the termination of separate princely authority, was the Tripura Merger Agreement of 1949. This distinction between participation, accession and merger is important for understanding the constitutional transformation of the state (Menon, 1956).

The decision of Maharaja Bir Bikram to participate in the Constituent Assembly was an early indication of Tripura's engagement with the constitutional transformation taking place in India (Gan-Chaudhuri, 2004). The subsequent Instrument of Accession provided the formal constitutional relationship between Tripura and the Dominion of India. As with the accession arrangements of other princely states, accession concerned specified areas of Dominion authority and did not by itself amount to the immediate extinction of the state's separate internal administration (Menon, 1956; Ramusack, 2004).

The Instrument of Accession therefore needs to be distinguished clearly from the later Merger Agreement. Tripura's accession took place on 13 August 1947, when Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi, acting as Regent for the minor ruler, executed the Instrument of Accession (Gan-Chaudhuri, 2004). The significance of this step was subsequently reaffirmed by the Regent in November 1947, when she stated that the late Maharaja had decided upon accession to the Dominion of India after consideration of the circumstances and consultation with different sections of the population (Roy, 2014).

Accession did not, however, resolve the question of Tripura's ultimate constitutional status. The Regency continued to administer the kingdom while the Government of India dealt with the broader problem of integrating the princely states. As Menon (1956) demonstrates in his account of the integration process, accession and the subsequent consolidation of political authority were related but distinct stages. In Tripura's case, the practical circumstances created by Partition made the question of long-term political and administrative arrangements increasingly important.

The Government of India's approach to princely-state integration was associated particularly with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and V. P. Menon. Menon (1956) describes the policy of the Ministry of States as one that sought settlements with the



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rulers while adapting the arrangements to the circumstances of individual states. Tripura's situation was shaped by its small size, frontier location, administrative limitations and the political uncertainties that had developed after 1947. Its position on the eastern frontier also gave the question of its future status a significance beyond the immediate constitutional relationship established through accession (Gan-Chaudhuri, 2004).

The negotiations eventually culminated in the Tripura Merger Agreement, signed in New Delhi on 9 September 1949 (Government of India, 1949). The agreement was not an Instrument of Accession. Its formal title was the Tripura Merger Agreement, and its purpose was fundamentally different from that of the earlier accession instrument. Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi signed the Agreement as Maharani Regent on behalf of the minor Maharaja Kirit Bikram Kishore Manikya, while V. P. Menon signed on behalf of the Governor-General of India.

Article I of the Agreement provided that the Maharaja ceded to the Dominion Government "full and exclusive authority, jurisdiction and powers" for the governance of Tripura and agreed to transfer the administration of the state to the Dominion Government on 15 October 1949 (Government of India, 1949). The Agreement also provided for a privy purse of Rs. 3,30,000 annually and contained provisions concerning the ruler's private property, personal rights and privileges, succession, and the continuity or compensation of permanent public servants.

These provisions demonstrate the negotiated character of the settlement. The Agreement did not simply record the disappearance of the monarchy; it established the terms under which governing authority would be transferred while making arrangements for the ruling family and the existing administrative establishment. The provisions concerning public servants were particularly significant for maintaining administrative continuity during the transition (Government of India, 1949).

The distinction between 13 August 1947 and 9 September 1949 is therefore fundamental. The former marked Tripura's accession to the Dominion of India, while the latter marked the conclusion of the agreement by which the ruler ceded full authority over the governance of the state. The administrative transfer took effect on 15 October 1949. The Government of India's *White Paper on Indian States* records that the Regent signed the agreement on behalf of the minor ruler and that the administration of Tripura was taken over by the Chief Commissioner for the Government of India on that date (Government of India, 1950).

The merger should consequently be understood as the culmination of a process that had begun before independence and developed through the political and constitutional uncertainties of 1947-49. The Agreement provided the legal framework for the final transfer of authority, but the circumstances that made such a settlement possible had developed gradually through the interaction of constitutional change, regional insecurity, administrative pressure and political negotiation (Menon, 1956).

Administrative and Constitutional Consequences of the Merger

The immediate consequence of the Merger Agreement was the end of the Manikya dynasty's exercise of sovereign political authority over Tripura. On 15 October 1949, the administration of the state was transferred to the Government of India. The *White Paper on Indian States* records this transfer to the Chief Commissioner and places it within the wider process through which the centrally administered merged states were brought under the authority of the Government of India (Government of India, 1950).

The post-merger administrative arrangement should nevertheless be distinguished from the later constitutional designation of Tripura as a Part C State. On 15 October 1949, administration was taken over by the Chief Commissioner on behalf of the Government of India (Government of India, 1950). Tripura was subsequently brought formally within the Chief Commissioners' Provinces framework under the States' Merger (Chief Commissioners' Provinces) Order, 1950. The Order was issued on 22 January 1950 and came into force on 23 January 1950, providing that Tripura, Manipur and Vindhya Pradesh would be administered as Chief Commissioners' Provinces (Government of India, 1950).

With the commencement of the Constitution of India on 26 January 1950, Tripura became a Part C State. The chronology is therefore precise: administrative transfer to the Government of India took place on 15 October 1949; the Chief Commissioner's Province arrangement took effect on 23 January 1950; and Tripura became a Part C State with the commencement of the Constitution on 26 January 1950.



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The merger also altered the position of the ruling family. The Merger Agreement guaranteed a privy purse and recognised specified personal privileges and private property arrangements (Government of India, 1949). It also contained provisions concerning succession and the position of members of the former ruling house. At the same time, provisions relating to permanent state servants sought to protect continuity or provide compensation in accordance with the terms of the Agreement. These arrangements reflected the wider pattern of negotiated settlements through which the Government of India incorporated the former princely states (Menon, 1956).

The administrative consequences extended beyond the formal transfer of sovereignty. Tripura was incorporated into the wider governmental structure of India, bringing the former princely state within institutions and administrative arrangements that had previously operated on a more limited scale. The transition consequently altered not only the locus of political authority but also the relationship between the state administration and the population it governed (Gan-Chaudhuri, 2004).

The social consequences were more complex. Partition-related migration continued to affect Tripura after the merger, contributing to significant demographic and socio-economic changes. The arrival and settlement of displaced persons affected agricultural activity, settlement patterns and urban development, while also intensifying competition over land and resources. For indigenous communities, these demographic changes generated concerns relating to land, political representation and cultural security (Roy, 2014).

The merger also had long-term implications for the relationship between indigenous and migrant populations. The political and demographic changes associated with the post-Partition period did not disappear with the transfer of authority in 1949. Rather, they became part of the social and political context within which subsequent demands for safeguards, representation and recognition developed (Bhaumik, 1996).

From a strategic perspective, integration placed Tripura within the administrative and security framework of India. Its location along the border with East Pakistan, geographical isolation, dependence on Assam for its principal connection with the rest of India, and proximity to the international frontier gave the state continuing strategic importance. The incorporation of Tripura into a centrally administered structure therefore had an administrative as well as a wider strategic dimension (Government of India, 1950; Menon, 1956).

The political meaning of the merger therefore extended beyond the end of monarchical rule. It represented the incorporation of a historically distinct kingdom into the institutional framework of independent India. At the same time, the transition did not erase the particular historical, demographic and political conditions that had shaped Tripura before 1949. The merger marked a decisive constitutional transformation, but many of the political and social questions associated with the transition continued to influence the subsequent history of the state (Gan-Chaudhuri, 2004; Bhaumik, 1996).

Conclusion

The merger of the Kingdom of Tripura with India in 1949 was the culmination of a complex historical process shaped by constitutional change, political transition, administrative challenges, and regional circumstances. The end of British paramountcy, the death of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur, the establishment of the Regency, Partition, demographic pressures, and growing security concerns collectively influenced the constitutional choices available to Tripura. While integration formed part of the broader process of nation-building in independent India, it was also shaped by the kingdom's own internal political, administrative, and strategic realities. The Tripura Merger Agreement of 1949 therefore represented not merely a legal transfer of authority, but a negotiated constitutional settlement that ensured administrative continuity during a period of profound political transformation.

The case of Tripura demonstrates that the integration of princely states was not a uniform process, but one shaped by the historical background and regional conditions of individual states. Tripura's experience illustrates how a centuries-old kingdom underwent a negotiated transition from princely rule towards integration into the constitutional framework of independent India through political accommodation and administrative continuity. Examining this transition from Tripura's perspective contributes to a more balanced understanding of the diverse pathways through which the princely states became part of independent India.



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