

MODERN ODISHA

Merger of the Princely States of Odisha

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • April 5, 2018 • Updated February 29, 2024 • 11 min read



Merger of the Princely States of Odisha: Elections for the Odisha Provincial Legislative Assembly were held in the post-war scenario, with the Congress winning a majority. Harekrushna Mahatab was appointed Prime Minister on April 3rd, 1946. That same year, Mahatab met with the Cabinet Mission, assuring them he would address the merger of the 'garajat' states into the new Odisha province.

Following India's independence, Nilgiri became the first Garajat state in Odisha to experience revolts, forcing authorities to merge it with Odisha. Subsequently, the 'Iron Man' Sardar Patel and Harekrushna Mahatab worked together to end the autonomy of the indigenous princely states, eventually absorbing them into Odisha.

Table of Contents

01 Commencement of the merger	4
02 Conference on Prajamandal in Cuttack	4
03 Merger of Nilgiri	5
04 Political Development	6
05 Conference in Cuttack	7
06 Merger of the Garajat States	7
07 Sareikela Kharasuan Rebellion	8
08 Results of Garajat merger	9
09 Conclusion	10

Table of Contents9 sections

1. [Commencement of the merger](#)
2. [Conference on Prajamandal in Cuttack](#)
3. [Merger of Nilgiri](#)
4. [Political Development](#)
5. [Conference in Cuttack](#)
6. [Merger of the Garajat States](#)
7. [Sareikela Kharasuan Rebellion](#)
8. [Results of Garajat merger](#)
9. [Conclusion](#)

Commencement of the merger

In an effort to integrate all the indigenous states into the Odisha administration, Harekrushna Mahatab took significant steps by raising this demand with the Cabinet Mission. On 16 October 1947, he called for a meeting in Sambalpur with the kings of all the princely states. His aim was to convince them of the necessity of merging these states with Odisha for the sake of peace, discipline, law, and order.

However, the outcome of this meeting was not as positive as hoped. The kings of the indigenous provinces argued that complying with Mahatab's demand would mean giving up privileges they had enjoyed for generations. They seemed to overlook the significance of the recent Prajamandal movements and downplayed the potential impact on the future. This response left Mahatab feeling disheartened at the time.

Conference on Prajamandal in Cuttack

On the eve of independence, on 10 August 1947, the Prajamandal organized a crucial conference. This gathering included people from Chhattisgarh and other Odia native states. The conference marked a significant moment in India's struggle for independence as the

attendees unequivocally expressed their desire to join Odisha. This proposal was formally accepted during the conference.

However, the decisions made by the people at this conference seemed to have little effect on the concerned kings of the indigenous states. Despite the clear wishes of the populace, the kings were initially reluctant to merge their states with Odisha. One such example was Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo, the king of Patna, who actively worked against Mahatab's efforts to integrate the native states with Odisha.

R.N. Singh Deo played a pivotal role in establishing the Eastern Zone Native States Association, which included the Garajat regions of Chhattisgarh and Odisha. This association, formed on 1 August 1947, had its own police force. In case of any signs of unrest in the indigenous states, this police force was ready to quell it swiftly. This development made the prospect of the Garajat states merging with Odisha seem distant and challenging at that time, serving as a setback for Mahatab's plans.

Merger of Nilgiri

Following India's independence, the situation in Nilgiri became extremely tense as the king attempted to solidify his position. To strengthen his hold, he sought to win the favor of the tribal people. In a drastic move, he ordered the adivasis to engage in violent acts against non-adivasis using traditional weapons like bows, arrows, and spears, along with burning and destroying their homes. The king believed that by instigating such violence, he could instill fear in the populace, forcing them to seek his protection and submit to his authority.

However, events unfolded in a manner contrary to the king's expectations. The people of Nilgiri quickly saw through the king's deception and organized themselves to revolt against his oppressive rule. Sensing an opportunity to bring Nilgiri under Odisha's administration, Harekrushna Mahatab, the then-Prime Minister of Odisha, acted swiftly. He flew to Delhi and personally petitioned Home Minister Sardar Patel for permission to merge Nilgiri with Odisha. Patel immediately granted his approval.

On 14 November, upon his return from Delhi, Mahatab wasted no time. He dispatched the Magistrate of Balasore and Odisha's Revenue Minister, Naba Krushna Chowdhury, along with an armed police force, to assume control of the Nilgiri state. Faced with the overwhelming force and the growing discontent among the populace, the king of Nilgiri had no choice but to surrender his state to the Province of Odisha.

In this manner, Harekrushna Mahatab demonstrated swift and decisive action in facilitating the merger of Nilgiri with Odisha, taking advantage of the prevailing discontent and the king's oppressive tactics. This event marked a significant step in the consolidation of Odisha's territories post-independence.

Political Development

After the successful merger of Nilgiri with Odisha, a crucial meeting took place in the chambers of Harekrushna Mahatab, along with C. C. Desai and B.D.S. Bedi, on 20 November 1947. In this meeting, all three unanimously supported the idea of merging the Garajat states with Odisha. It was agreed upon that the kings of the Garajat states would be called upon to convene in the near future to discuss and advise on the merger of their respective states with Odisha.

Simultaneously, in Delhi, Home Minister Sardar Patel proposed the disbandment of the Eastern Region Native States Association (Purbanchal Desiya Rajya Sangha). This move was seen as a significant development and a boost for Harekrushna Mahatab's efforts. Upon his return from Delhi, Mahatab was deeply involved in shaping the discussions and plans for the merger of the Garajat states with Odisha.

These developments marked a crucial turning point in the integration of the Garajat states with Odisha, as key leaders and officials worked towards formalizing the process of consolidation and unification under the administration of Odisha. The coordinated efforts of leaders like Mahatab and the support from Sardar Patel's proposal signaled the beginning of a new era for Odisha's territorial consolidation and governance.

Conference in Cuttack

On 24 December 1947, Harekrushna Mahatab convened a crucial meeting in Cuttack to facilitate the merger of the Garajat States with Odisha. He personally met with the kings of the Gadajat States categorized as A, B, and C. The discussions were initiated with the B and C category states, and later, the kings of the 'A' category states were invited to participate.

During these discussions, Mahatab subtly conveyed a message to the kings that in an independent India, there would be no place for indigenous princely states. He emphasized that the union of their states with Odisha was not only necessary but also inevitable in the new political landscape. The kings of the 'A' category states initially opposed Sardar Patel's proposals.

Sardar Patel, being astute and skilled in diplomacy, advised the kings once again before they departed for Bhubaneswar, that signing the agreement for the merger of their respective states would demonstrate their maturity and foresight in the changing political scenario of India.

In the meantime, V. P. Menon had returned from collecting all the kings' signatures. Sardar Patel waited patiently for an hour at the Cuttack railway station, indicating the significance and urgency of the matter. Eventually, the majority of the kings, recognizing the inevitable course of events, signed the agreement for the merger of their states with Odisha.

However, the king of Mayurbhanj contended that he had established a constitutional government, which was later absorbed by Odisha. Despite this contention, the process of merging the Garajat states with Odisha reached its conclusion, marking a significant milestone in the consolidation and integration of the princely states into the state of Odisha within the newly independent India.

Merger of the Garajat States

Indeed, the efforts of Sardar Patel, Harekrushna Mahatab, and V. P. Menon were instrumental in facilitating the merger of the Garajat states with Odisha. The formal transfer of the Garajat states to the Government of Odisha was enacted under the 'Extra Provincial

Jurisdiction Act' on 23 December 1947, with the implementation beginning on 1 January 1948.

During the Garajat states merger conference convened in Cuttack, the leaders of the Prajamandal movement were notably not invited. Mahatab purposefully excluded them from the conference, foreseeing potential trouble and confusion that their presence might have caused.

Following the successful merger of the Garajat states with Odisha, Harekrushna Mahatab appointed Kapileswar Nanda of Bolangir, Kailash Chandra Mohanty of Nilgiri, and Pabitra Mohan Pradhan of Talcher as 'advisors' with the rank of Ministers. This was a significant step towards integrating the newly merged territories into the administration of Odisha.

As a result of these efforts, Odisha successfully absorbed 24 Garajat states, classified as A, B, and C, largely due to Harekrushna Mahatab's perseverance and strategic planning. Mayurbhanj, initially joining India on 16 October 1948, was later transferred to Odisha by the central government in 1949.

However, it is regrettable that Sareikela and Kharasuna remained permanently separated from Odisha despite the integration of the majority of the Garajat states into the state. These territories, nevertheless, stand as reminders of the complex history of territorial reorganization during India's independence and the post-independence period.

Sareikela Kharasuan Rebellion

The absorption of Mayurbhanj into Odisha was indeed a significant development, marking the integration of a major Garajat state into the state of Odisha. However, the fate of Sareikela and Kharasuan, which became part of Bihar, led to unrest and rebellion among the populace who desired to join Odisha.

The people of Sareikela and Kharasuan had expressed their strong desire to merge with Odisha, aligning with the sentiments of the Prajamandal movement and the broader aspirations for regional integration. However, due to the policies of Sardar Patel, which

emphasized maintaining the territorial integrity of existing states, especially Bihar in this case, the people's wishes were not fulfilled.

The policy of 'blood and iron,' as it is often referred to, involved the use of force to suppress any rebellions or movements that aimed to challenge the territorial boundaries set by the newly independent Indian government. In the case of Sareikela and Kharasuan, the rebellion against being separated from Odisha was met with severe repression and force.

As a result, despite the desires of the people and the efforts of leaders like Harekrushna Mahatab, Sareikela and Kharasuan remained permanently separated from Odisha. The aspirations of the populace to join Odisha remained unfulfilled, and these twin Garajat states had to endure their new status within Bihar, a situation that persisted into the post-independence era.

Results of Garajat merger

The merger of the Garajat states into Odisha indeed brought about several significant consequences:

1. **Taste of Independence:** The merger allowed the Garajat kings and the populace to experience a sense of independence within the framework of a larger democratic setup. They were now part of a democratic state, Odisha, which allowed for greater participation in governance and decision-making.
2. **Transition to Democracy:** This move also facilitated the transition of the indigenous states into a democratic system. Both the people and the erstwhile rulers had to adapt to the workings of democratic governance, understanding concepts such as elections, representation, and civic participation.
3. **Resolution of Grievances:** The merger helped in addressing the long-standing grievances and accumulated resentment among the people of these regions. Issues such as exploitation, unjust taxation, and repressive measures were now expected to be resolved through democratic processes and government representation.

4. **Utilization of Resources:** One of the significant advantages for Odisha was the access to the vast mineral resources in the Garajat region. This included minerals such as coal, iron ore, manganese, and others. The integration allowed the Odisha government to harness these resources for the development of the state's economy and industrial growth.

Overall, the merger of the Garajat states with Odisha marked a significant shift in the political landscape of the region. It paved the way for democratic governance, addressed historical grievances, and opened avenues for economic development through the utilization of natural resources.

Conclusion

Indeed, the merger of the indigenous princely states with Odisha marked a pivotal moment in the history of the region. Here are some key points about this significant event:

1. **End of Monarchical Tyranny:** The merger signified the end of generations of oppression and tyranny under monarchical rule. The people, or 'Prajās,' finally achieved a sense of happiness and independence as they became part of a larger democratic state.
2. **Breaking Barriers:** The merger shattered the age-old barrier between rulers and the ruled. The traditional hierarchy of the princely states, where the king's word was law, was replaced by democratic governance, where the voices and rights of the people were recognized and respected.
3. **Sincere Efforts of Mahatab:** Harekrushna Mahatab's sincere and dedicated efforts played a crucial role in making the merger a reality. His vision for a united and prosperous Odisha, free from the shackles of princely rule, guided the process of integration.
4. **Central Government's Support:** The support and assistance of key figures like Sardar Patel and V.P. Menon from the Central Government of India were instrumental in facilitating the merger. Their vision of a unified India and their strategic planning helped overcome challenges and resistance to the merger.

5. **New Chapter for Modern Odisha:** With the merger, a new chapter began in the history of modern Odisha. The state now had a larger territory, a diverse population, and access to the resources of the merged princely states. This laid the foundation for the socio-economic development and political evolution of Odisha.

Overall, the merger of the princely states with Odisha symbolized the triumph of democracy, the empowerment of the people, and the beginning of a new era of progress and prosperity for the region. It remains a significant milestone in the history of Odisha's quest for self-determination and governance.

Category: Modern Odisha

Tag: Princely States and their Merger with Odisha State

Source: <https://historyofodisha.in/merger-of-the-princely-states-of-odisha/>

© History of Odisha · Generated on October 11, 2026