

Integration Crisis and The Unique Partition Of Sirohi (1947–1956)

Dr. Seema Charan

Assistant Professor, Sanghvi Maatushri Puribai Bhurmal Jain Government College, Shogun, Sirohi
(Raj)

ABSTRACT

The integration of princely states was one of the major political tasks faced by India after independence in 1947. Most princely states were merged into Indian provinces or into newly created unions. The case of Sirohi was different. Sirohi was a small princely state in the south-western part of present-day Rajasthan, located close to the Gujarat region and including the important hill station of Mount Abu. After the end of British paramountcy, the future of Sirohi became a matter of political disagreement. The Government of India first arranged for the administration of Sirohi through the Government of Bombay. At the same time, strong opinion in Rajasthan demanded that Sirohi should be included in Rajasthan. The matter became more difficult because of the location, language, administrative links and importance of Mount Abu.

The final arrangement did not give Sirohi a single and simple merger. In January 1950, the decision was made to divide the former state. The larger part was integrated with Rajasthan, while the Abu Road and associated Abu–Dilwara/Mount Abu area was administered with Bombay. The Constituent Assembly debates of November 1949 show that the proposed division was controversial and that several members objected to the lack of a normal covenant with the minor ruler. The issue was finally settled in a different direction by the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. From 1 November 1956, Abu Road taluka, which had been part of Bombay State, was transferred to Rajasthan and included in Sirohi district. Thus, Sirohi passed through several territorial arrangements between 1947 and 1956.

This paper argues that the Sirohi case is important because it shows that the integration of princely states was not always a straight movement from a princely state to a modern state. In Sirohi, questions of regional identity, administrative convenience, popular opinion, geography and national political decision-making came together. The 1950 division was therefore an unusual form of post-independence territorial adjustment, while the 1956 settlement brought the separated territory back into Rajasthan.

KEYWORDS

Sirohi, Rajasthan, princely states, political integration, Mount Abu, Abu Road, Bombay State, States Reorganisation Act, 1956, territorial reorganisation

INTRODUCTION

When India became independent in August 1947, the political map of the country was not the same as the map of present-day India. Along with the provinces directly administered by the British, there were hundreds of princely states. The end of British paramountcy created an urgent need to decide how these states would be connected with the new Indian Union. The Government of India used political negotiation, Instruments of Accession, merger agreements and administrative arrangements to bring the princely states into the new constitutional system.

Rajasthan was one of the most complicated regions because it contained many princely states of different sizes. Their integration took place in several stages between 1948 and 1950. Sirohi was the last princely state to be integrated into Rajasthan. The Rajasthan Government records describe the final merger of Sirohi as part of the sixth stage of Rajasthan's integration, completed on 26 January 1950. However, the story did not end there because a portion of the old Sirohi territory was then under Bombay. In 1956, that territory was again transferred to Rajasthan.

The Sirohi question was closely connected with Mount Abu. Abu was an important hill station and administrative centre. It also had geographical and historical connections with the surrounding Rajputana region. At the same time, the southern and western parts of Sirohi had strong links with the Gujarat side. Therefore, the question of where Sirohi should be placed was not only a question of political merger. It was also a question of geography, administration, regional identity and the future boundaries of Indian states.

The present paper uses the term 'partition' in an administrative and territorial sense. It does not mean the Partition of India between India and Pakistan in 1947. It refers to the division of the former Sirohi State between Rajasthan and Bombay in the process of post-independence integration.

OBJECTIVES

- To explain the political background of Sirohi at the time of Indian independence.
- To examine the reasons for the integration crisis surrounding Sirohi between 1947 and 1950.
- To study the role of the Government of India, Rajasthan and Bombay in deciding the future of Sirohi.
- To examine the controversy over the division of Sirohi and the position of Mount Abu.
- To trace the territorial changes from the 1950 division to the final settlement in 1956.
- To understand why the Sirohi case was different from the normal pattern of princely-state integration.

METHODOLOGY

This paper follows a historical and descriptive method. It mainly uses primary sources because the subject is a political and constitutional event. Important primary sources include the Government of India's White Paper on Indian States (1950), the Sirohi Merger Agreement, Constituent Assembly debates, the Census of India records and the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. Official Rajasthan Government material has also been used to confirm the stages of Rajasthan's integration.

Secondary works on Indian federalism and state reorganisation are used to place the Sirohi case in a wider context. The paper compares the dates and territorial arrangements mentioned in different official records. Where a primary historical source has no DOI, no DOI has been invented. DOI-bearing scholarly works are listed separately in the references.

Sirohi and the Political Situation after Independence

Sirohi was a princely state situated in the south-western part of the Rajputana region. Its location was important because it lay close to the Gujarat area and contained routes connecting Rajasthan and Gujarat. Mount Abu also gave the state a special geographical and political importance. After the end of British rule, the old relationship between the British Crown and the princely states changed. The Government of India therefore had to create new arrangements for these states.

The Government of India treated integration as an essential part of building a stable Union. In Rajasthan, this process was completed through a series of unions and mergers. Official Rajasthan material identifies seven broad stages, beginning with the Matsya Union in March 1948 and ending with the reorganisation of Rajasthan on 1 November 1956. Sirohi became part of Rajasthan in the sixth stage, but the territory connected with Abu remained a special problem until 1956.

The Sirohi question therefore developed at a time when the Government of India was trying to complete integration quickly while also balancing local demands and administrative needs. This helps explain why the Government used an interim arrangement before taking the final decision.

The Sirohi Merger Agreement and Central Administration

The Sirohi Merger Agreement was made on 8 November 1948 between the Governor-General of India and the Maharao of Sirohi. The agreement provided that full and exclusive authority for the governance of the state would be transferred to the Dominion Government and that the administration would be transferred on 5 January 1949. The agreement also provided personal privileges and a privy purse for the ruler.

The Government of India's White Paper records that the Government of Bombay took over the administration of Sirohi on behalf of the Government of India from 5 January 1949. This was an interim arrangement. The White Paper clearly states that there was disagreement about whether Sirohi should be merged with Bombay or integrated with Rajasthan. Until the future was finally decided, Bombay administered the state on behalf of the Centre.

This arrangement is important because it shows that Sirohi was not immediately treated in the same way as the other states that joined the Rajasthan Union. The Centre kept the matter open while political and administrative arguments were considered.

Table 1. Main Stages in the Sirohi Territorial Question

Date/Period	Development	Importance
1947	Future of Sirohi becomes a matter of discussion after the end of British paramountcy.	The old princely-state system had to be fitted into the new Indian Union.
8 Nov. 1948	Sirohi Merger Agreement signed.	The ruler ceded full authority for governance to the Dominion Government.
5 Jan. 1949	Government of Bombay began administration on behalf of the Government of India.	Interim administration while the future of Sirohi was being decided.
Nov. 1949	Constituent Assembly debated the proposed division.	Members raised constitutional and popular-consent concerns.
Jan. 1950	Decision made to place the main part in Rajasthan and the Abu area with Bombay.	Sirohi was territorially divided.
26 Jan. 1950	Sirohi became part of Rajasthan, while the	The new constitutional order came into force.

	Bombay-held area remained outside it.	
1 Nov. 1956	Abu Road taluka was transferred from Bombay to Rajasthan.	The major territorial problem created in 1950 was reversed.

Table 1. Main stages in the Sirohi territorial question, 1947–1956.

Why Sirohi Became an Integration Crisis

The Sirohi problem had several connected causes. First, the state was geographically close to Gujarat and Rajasthan. Second, Mount Abu had importance beyond its small area because it was a well-known hill station and an administrative centre. Third, there were different political opinions about whether Sirohi should be connected with Rajasthan or Bombay. Fourth, the political position of the ruler was unusual because the ruler was a minor and the administration had already been transferred to the Centre.

The Constituent Assembly debate of 16 November 1949 gives direct evidence of the controversy. Members from Rajasthan objected to the proposed division and argued that Sirohi should not be divided without proper consent. The debate also shows that the Government of India had already decided that either the whole state would go to Bombay or the state would be divided between Bombay and Rajasthan. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel explained that a special inquiry had been made and that the views of people in different parts of Sirohi were not uniform.

The debate also reveals the emotional importance of Mount Abu. Members from Rajasthan described it as an important hill station for the people of Rajasthan. At the same time, Patel argued that geographical beauty alone could not decide the territorial question. His explanation shows that the Government was considering administrative and political factors rather than only cultural sentiment.

The 1950 Division of Sirohi

The final decision before the Constitution came into force divided the former Sirohi State. The Government of India's White Paper states that Abu Road tehsil and a portion of Dilwara tehsil were merged with Bombay, while the remaining portion was integrated with Rajasthan. The States' Merger (Bombay) Order, 1950 provided the legal basis for administering the specified merged area as part of Bombay.

The Census of India gives a similar description in more geographical terms. It records that Abu Road, including Mount Abu and Dilwara, with an approximate area of 323 square miles of Sirohi State, was merged with Bombay, while the rest was included in Rajasthan. Because official records use slightly different administrative descriptions, this paper uses the broader expression 'Abu Road–Mount Abu–Dilwara area' when describing the Bombay-held portion.

The division was therefore not a simple merger. The old state disappeared as a single political unit, but its territory was placed under two different administrative systems. The larger Rajasthan portion became a district of Rajasthan, while the Abu-related territory became part of Bombay's administrative structure.

Figure 1. Timeline of the Sirohi Integration Crisis, 1947–1956

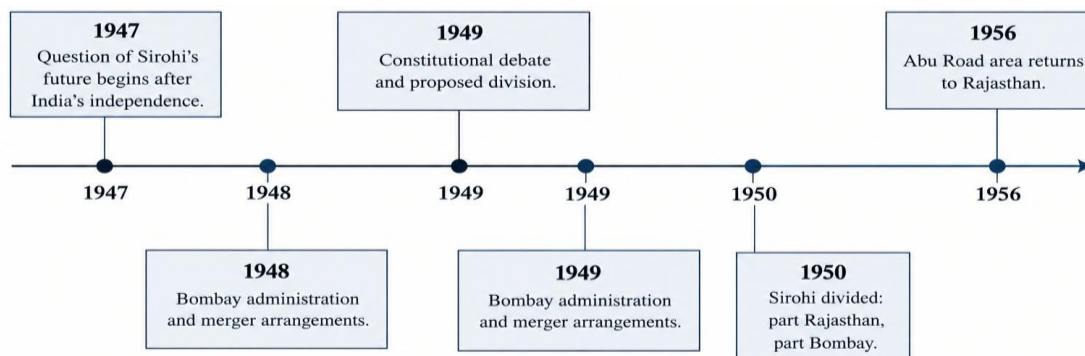


Figure 1. Timeline of the major stages in the Sirohi territorial question.

Constitutional Debate and the Question of Consent

The Sirohi issue was unusual not only because of the territory involved but also because of the constitutional questions raised during the making of the Constitution. In the Constituent Assembly on 16 November 1949, members from Rajasthan questioned how Sirohi could be divided when no normal covenant had been signed by the ruler for such a division. They also raised the issue of popular opinion.

The debate shows that the Government of India considered Sirohi a special case. Sardar Patel explained that the Government had taken steps to find a practical settlement and that a map had been prepared. He stated that the final choice was between transferring the whole state to Bombay or dividing it so that one part went to Rajasthan and another to Bombay. The debate therefore gives evidence of a negotiated political solution rather than a simple automatic merger.

This episode also shows the tension between two ideas. One was the need for quick territorial integration and administrative stability. The other was the principle that the wishes of local people and regional identity should be considered. Sirohi became a small but clear example of this larger problem in post-independence India.

Figure 2. Simplified Flow of the Sirohi Territorial Process

Sirohi princely state before integration				
↓				
Merger	Agreement	(8	November	1948)
Full governance transferred to the Dominion Government				
↓				
Bombay administration on behalf of the Centre (from 5 January 1949)				
↓				
1950	territorial			division
Main portion → Rajasthan Abu-related portion → Bombay				
↓				
States	Reorganisation	Act,	1956	
Abu Road taluka → Rajiasthan (1 November 1956)				

Figure 2. Simplified flow of the Sirohi territorial process.

Sirohi in Rajasthan after 1950

The main portion of Sirohi was integrated with Rajasthan in January 1950. The Census record for Sirohi states that after its merger into Rajasthan, a separate Sirohi district was formed. This was an important administrative change because the former princely state was no longer a sovereign or semi-sovereign political unit. It became part of the constitutional structure of the Indian Union through Rajasthan.

However, the territorial question remained incomplete. The part administered through Bombay continued to separate the Abu-related area from the main Sirohi district. This meant that the political integration of Sirohi and the territorial integration of all its former areas were not the same event. The distinction is important for understanding why the period 1950–1956 should be studied as a separate phase.

The States Reorganisation Commission and the 1956 Settlement

After 1950, the Indian Union continued to reconsider the boundaries of states. The States Reorganisation Commission was appointed in 1953 and submitted its report in 1955. Its work considered several factors, including language, culture, administration, economy and national unity. The reorganisation of 1956 did not simply follow one single principle; it was a wider political and administrative settlement.

The States Reorganisation Act, 1956 created the new State of Rajasthan from 1 November 1956. Section 10 specifically included Abu Road taluka of Banaskantha district in the new Rajasthan. It also stated that this territory would become part of Sirohi district. This was the legal completion of the territorial reunion of the separated Sirohi area with Rajasthan.

The 1961 District Census Handbook for Sirohi confirms the result. It states that Abu Road Taluka along with Delwara and Mount Abu, which had earlier been transferred to Bombay, were re-transferred to Sirohi district as a result of the reorganisation of states in 1956. Thus, the division created in the first phase of integration was substantially reversed six years later.

Table 2. Sirohi Before and After the 1956 Reorganisation

Aspect	Before 1 Nov. 1956	After 1 Nov. 1956
Main Sirohi district	Part of Rajasthan	Part of Rajasthan
Abu Road area	Part of Bombay State	Transferred to Rajasthan
Mount Abu / Delwara area	Connected administratively with Bombay arrangement	Reconnected with Sirohi/Rajasthan under reorganisation
Political meaning	Legacy of the 1950 territorial division	Territorial settlement under the new state map

Table 2. Sirohi before and after the States Reorganisation Act, 1956.

Why the Sirohi Case Was Unique

- Sirohi did not move directly from a princely state into one final state unit. Its administration passed through an interim Central–Bombay arrangement.
- The state was divided between Rajasthan and Bombay during the process of integration.
- The division became a subject of constitutional discussion in the Constituent Assembly before the Constitution came into force.
- Mount Abu gave the issue an importance that was larger than its physical size because of its administrative, geographical and regional value.

- The 1956 reorganisation reversed an important part of the earlier territorial decision by transferring Abu Road taluka from Bombay to Rajasthan.
- The case shows that early Indian state-making was based on a mixture of political negotiation, administrative convenience, regional claims and constitutional change.

A Wider Historical Interpretation

The Sirohi case can be understood as part of the larger process of state-making in post-independence India. Scholars of Indian federalism have shown that state boundaries were shaped by more than one factor. Language became very important during the 1950s, but administrative history, political bargaining, economic considerations and national unity also mattered.

Sirohi is useful because it shows this mixed process in a small geographical setting. In 1950, the government accepted a divided arrangement as a practical solution. In 1956, the larger reorganisation of Indian states created an opportunity to change that arrangement. The result was not simply the victory of one side over another. Instead, the boundaries were adjusted again when the wider constitutional and administrative framework changed.

The case also reminds historians that integration was not completed everywhere at the same moment. A state could be politically integrated while some of its former territory remained under another administrative unit. Sirohi therefore helps us distinguish between political merger, administrative control and final territorial settlement.

RESEARCH GAP

The history of Indian integration has received considerable attention, especially in studies of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, V. P. Menon, Hyderabad, Junagadh, Kashmir and the major Rajasthan unions. However, the Sirohi case is often discussed briefly as one step in the integration of Rajasthan. Its special sequence from 1947 to 1956 deserves a more focused study.

First, more work is needed on the local political voices of Sirohi and the surrounding areas. The Constituent Assembly debates show that people and political representatives did not hold a single view. A closer study of local newspapers, Rajasthan Congress records, petitions and district-level administrative files could give a clearer picture of these opinions.

Second, the role of Mount Abu and the Abu Road area needs more detailed study. The question was not only about language or administrative convenience. Geography, hill-station administration, regional identity and the existing links with Bombay and Rajasthan all influenced the debate.

Third, the 1950 division and the 1956 reunion should be studied together rather than as two unrelated events. Doing so shows that state boundaries in early independent India were flexible and could change as political and constitutional conditions changed.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Sirohi was a difficult and unusual episode in the making of modern Rajasthan. After independence, the Government of India did not immediately place Sirohi inside Rajasthan. The state was administered by Bombay on behalf of the Centre while its final political future was considered. This was followed by a territorial division in 1950, with the main part becoming part of Rajasthan and the Abu-related area being placed with Bombay.

The Constituent Assembly debates demonstrate that the decision was controversial. Rajasthan representatives questioned the division and raised the issue of consent and constitutional procedure.

At the same time, the Government of India treated the question as one requiring a practical political settlement. The result was a temporary territorial arrangement rather than a permanent solution. The States Reorganisation Act, 1956 changed this position. Abu Road taluka was transferred from Bombay to Rajasthan and was included in Sirohi district. The later Census records confirm that the Abu Road, Mount Abu and Delwara area was again connected with Sirohi. In this sense, 1956 completed a process that had remained incomplete since 1950.

The history of Sirohi therefore shows that the integration of princely states was not always a straight or uniform process. It could involve disagreement, temporary administration, territorial division and later territorial reunion. The Sirohi case is important precisely because it reveals these complexities at the local level. It also shows how the political map of India was gradually made through several decisions rather than through one single act of integration.

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