CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Manipur was an independent state before 1891. After its defeat in the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891, it was a dependent and subjugated state under the British Government of India. Prior to the outbreak of that war, the British Government and the Government of Manipur had been rendering mutual assistance in the event of a war with a third party.

An Anglo-Manipuri war could have taken place earlier, i.e., in 1834. In that year there was a serious difference of opinion between the Government of India and the Government of Manipur. The point at issue was over the appointment of a Regent to the minor Raja, Chandrakirti Singh, the son of Raja Gambhir Singh of Manipur. The Government of Manipur supported the appointment of Nara Singh as the Regent; while T.C. Robertson, the Agent to the Governor General in Assam, favoured Rani Kumudini, the widow of Raja Gambhir Singh, as the Regent. However, the impending war did not occur in that year owing to the transfer of Mr. T.C. Robertson as a member of the Governor General's Council; and Major Grant, the Commissioner in Manipur, had inclined to respect the local sentiments. Again, the war could have occurred in 1890. In the same year, there had been another serious clash of opinion between the two Governments. Mr. Grimwood, the Political Agent in Manipur, recommended the arrest and banishment of Tikendrajit Singh,
the Senapati (later Yubaraj), the step brother of Maharaja Surchandra Singh and also the most popular hero of the state. Maharaja Surchandra Singh did not hand over the Senapati, Tikendrajit Singh to the British authorities; and also, he did not execute the recommended punishment himself. This time also, the war was averted as the higher British authorities did not accept Mr. Grimwood's proposal. In fact, the Political Agent was warned against use of harsh words while writing to the Maharaja.

In 1890-91, when a division among the Manipuri princes appeared, the British authorities took actions by attempting to arrest and banish Yubaraj Tikendrajit Singh by force of arms. The Manipuris took it as an undue interference by the British authorities in the internal affairs of their country; and it led to the War.

The defeat of the Manipuris in the Anglo-Manipur war of 1891 brought about a sharp turn in the political history of Manipur. The British forces occupied the State. Foreign military rule was established in the state in April 1891. But the military rule was shortlived; the administration was transferred to the British civil authorities headed by a Chief Political Officer in September 1891.

Manipur escaped annexation by the British Government of India owing to a variety of reasons. Primarily, direct British management of the administration of Manipur, with its low income and meagre resources, was considered a liability.
Arrangement had been made in 1891 itself for regrant of Manipur State to a Native Raja. It visualised the declaration of the supremacy of the Government of India over Manipur. It also envisaged a hereditary Rajaship for the State with 11 guns salute subject to his loyalty to the British Government of India. A Sanad was issued incorporating the basic features of the arrangement. In appointing the Raja, the British authorities desired that he should not belong to the former line of the Manipuri kings; that he should be a minor so as to ensure the direct management of the administration of Manipur by a British officer as his Regent; and that the period of regency by the British officer should be as long as possible. Such a desire duly materialised with the appointment of Churachand Singh, a minor of five years of age, rejecting all his elder brothers, as the Raja of Manipur. The arrangement for Manipur promoted the vital British interests in the subsequent years. Raja Churachand Singh rendered all possible assistance to the British during the critical days of the first World War. In recognition of his services, he was honoured with the hereditary title of Maharaja and the British honours of K.C.S.I. and C.B.E.

All the powers of the state administration were centralised in the hands of the British Officer in his three capacities as (a) the Political Agent in Manipur, (b) the Superintendent of State, (c) Regent to the Raja of Manipur. The inhabitants of the valley were administered by the
Superintendent of State, on behalf of the Raja. The Hill Tribes of Manipur and the foreigner British subjects in the state were administered by the British Officer in his capacity of being the Political Agent in Manipur. Such an arrangement for administering the plainsmen and the hillsmen of Manipur by two separate political authorities helped breed a sense of separation between the two groups. Thus, a cleave had been created in the hills and the plains of Manipur leaving a problematic legacy for the future.

The Government of India, and below it, the Government of Assam were controlling authorities as regards all matters of the Manipur administration. The Government of India also took the responsibility for defence and maintenance of internal peace and security in the State.

The period from 1891 to 1906-07 might be called a period of temporary annexation. The Raja was a minor. There was no local advisor to assist the Political Agent and Superintendent of State in carrying out the state administration. The British Officer was the sole authority both for the hills and the valley. The Political Agent and Superintendent of State took full advantage of the situation. The traditional Lalup system was thus abolished. A house tax, at varying rates, higher in the hills, was imposed in the hills and the valley. The total cultivable land in the valley was assessed and a
land tax was imposed on the inhabitants of the valley. Such land tax was not imposed on the inhabitants of the hills because land survey of the hills was difficult; and jhoom and terrace cultivation in the hills had not thriven to yield a good harvest. Because of this exemption from the land tax, apparently, the people of the hills had to pay a higher rate of house tax than the people in the valley. The British currency had been introduced for statewide circulation. Only the British Indian subjects (foreigners) were employed in the State and the Government offices. The Manipuris were not given responsible jobs in the administration for the reason that they did not know the English language. However, in some matters like, the Judiciary, the traditional institutions were retained for the sake of convenience; but, the final judicial authority rested with the British.

During the Regency period more stress was laid on development works like, improvement of communication facilities, opening of schools for the Native subjects, etc. Raja Churachand Singh and his elder brother, Digendra Singh, were sent to Mayo College at Ajmer for receiving English education to enable them to become competent administrators. With the opening of schools and their gradual upgradation, the people of the state could avail themselves of the opportunity of acquiring western education. It was by such education that the local people could take up responsible jobs in the administration of the state in the subsequent years.
In 1907 the Raja attained majority. The administration of the State was entrusted to the Raja assisted by the Manipur State Darbar of which the Raja was made President. A British European officer from amongst the officers of the Assam Provincial Service Cadre was to be appointed Vice-President of the Darbar. A set of rules for administration of Manipur was also framed in 1907. The powers to be exercised by the different administrative agencies in the State were clearly defined.

The Raja and the Manipur State Darbar had been entrusted with the responsibility of administering the inhabitants of the valley. The post of Superintendent of State was abolished. The Raja and the Manipuri members of the Darbar were not given any jurisdiction in the matters of hill administration of the state. However, the Darbar had to discuss and pass the State budget, including the hill budget, subject to the final approval of the Government of India.

The administration of the hill tribes of Manipur was managed by the Vice-President of the Darbar, a British officer. This officer was not responsible to the Raja or the Darbar in matters concerning the hills of Manipur. Thus, the Raja was not even theoretically associated in the hill administration. Subsequently he was associated with the hill affairs nominally through the amendment of the Manipur Administration Rules. Under such amendment, the hill administration was declared
to be under the Vice-President of the Darbar (later President) on behalf of the Raja. But, practically, the Raja was not given any authority over the affairs in the hills. He had, however, the power to review the decision of the Vice-President of the Darbar on the hill matters subject to the approval of the Political Agent.

The British Officer in charge of the hill administration, the Vice-President of the Darbar, was also given the authority to control the administration of the valley as well in his capacity of being the Vice-President of the Darbar. Afterwards, to ensure effective control over the valley administration, the post of President was given to the British Officer and the Raja was kept aloof from the Darbar. The post of Vice-President was abolished.

The Vice-President of the Darbar was made the controller of state finance. He prepared the state budget both for the hills and the valley. He signed all the bills for Government payment. He was also empowered to correspond directly with the Government of India on routine matters of finance without making a reference to the Political Agent.

Under the administration of the Raja and the Darbar, the state works were basically devoted to making of further progress on the different schemes which had been initiated and implemented during the Regency rule. There was opening of a greater number of roads and bridges, and increase in the
number of schools with higher standard of learning. The water­works at Kangchupkhul completed construction and started to supply drinking water to the Imphal town. The construction of the power-house at Leimakhong was also completed and the Imphal town was supplied with electric power. The land tax was slightly increased in 1913 consequent upon the abolition of Pothang system in response to the demand of the people. The Rayatwari and Dariyawari systems of land holding were introduced. The Government of Manipur encouraged the local students by instituting scholarships for higher study outside the state. The students availed themselves of such opportunities in various fields of study like, general lines of study, technical, engineering, medical education, etc.

Side by side with this, there were also improvements in the hills, though in a lesser degree. Mainly there was much improvement in communication and education. The Christian Missionaries played a considerable role in spreading education among the hill tribes of the state.

After the Kuki Rebellion of 1917-19, the practice of administering the hills from a remote centre, Imphal, had to be abandoned. A closer and more direct administration was felt necessary. As a result, the hill areas of Manipur were divided into four hill Sub-Divisions, viz., Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Churachandpur and Sadar Hill Sub-Division. A Sub-Divisional Officer was appointed for each of the Sub-Divisions, excepting for the
Sadar Sub-Division, and troops were posted in these Sub-Divisions. For the Sadar Hills, the President of the Darbar was carrying out the administration. However, such hill Sub-Divisions were abolished, and the troops were withdrawn in 1929-30 for dearth of a British officer to fill the vacant post of Sub-Divisional Officer. Presumably, the Government of India was complacent because of the absence of disturbances in the hill areas of Manipur for about ten years. They completely forgot the situation warranting the opening of the hill Sub-Divisions and posting of troops there. Such a policy proved to be wrong as it paved the way to fresh disturbances in the hills. The Kabui Nagas in the western hills of Manipur had created law and order problem in 1930-31.

By 1930 with the gradual expansion of the educational facilities, a number of state subjects had come out as qualified citizens. A suitable man from among them could have been appointed to the only vacant post of Sub-Divisional Officer instead of adopting the mistaken policy of abolition of the Sub-Divisions and withdrawal of troops from there on the flimsy ground of non-availability of a British officer. Had not such a wrong policy been adopted, the Naga Unrest of 1930-31 could possibly have been averted. However, it might be noted that the Naga Unrest had opened a new chapter in the hill administration of the state by the practice of associating qualified Manipuris in the hill administration on ranks and status equal with the British Officers in Manipur.
With the increase in the number of educated youths in the state, a sense of political consciousness and nationalism was steadily rising. They started to demand their rights and privileges as against the British Indian subjects in various aspects of state administration. The Manipur State Darbar had sought the power to appoint a permanent President of the Darbar instead of the temporary appointment through deputation. They also expressed their preference for a local subject in the matter of appointment to the post of President. They had demanded unification of the hill and the valley administrations under a single political authority, viz., the Maharaja and the Manipur State Darbar. Further, they urged the retrocession of the Kabo Valley to Manipur State.

The year 1934 marked the birth of a nationalist organisation with the establishment of Nikhil Manipuri Hindu Maha-Sabha (later Nikhil Manipur Maha-Sabha, popularly known as Nikhil Manipuri Maha-Sabha). Initially it was concerned with only religious matters. Later on, it was converted into a social and political forum concerning itself with social, political and even constitutional reforms in the state. In 1946 the Nikhil Manipur Maha-Sabha became a branch of the Indian National Congress in Manipur. Before the Maha-Sabha became a political organisation, the Maharaja of Manipur blessed it as its President. But, the Maharaja left the Maha-Sabha when it began to engage in political problems apart from religious
issues. Since 1939-40, other organisations like, the Praja Sangha, Krishak Sabha, etc. were also formed followed by other organisations in the hills.

Since the outbreak of the second Nupi-Lan in 1939, the educated elite of the state challenged the sense of superiority among the British officers. Open criticism was made against the Government policy of employing British officers on deputation while the local talents could carry out the same responsibilities in a more befitting manner. They expressed doubt as regards the sense of dedication and loyalty of the British officers towards the state. It was also declared that such deputations were not desirable from the point of economy of the state.

The attack of the nationalist youths was directed against the authority of the Maharaja as well. They demanded a political system based on democratic decentralisation instead of centralised autocracy. Such a demand necessarily implied constitutional reforms over and above the normal administrative reforms. The Indian National Congress and the All India State Peoples' Conference were giving additional impetus and vigour to the demand of the state subjects. In response to the general trend in the rest of India, the Government of India also pursuaded the Maharaja to introduce certain democratic reforms. Under the circumstances, the Government of Manipur
could not remain indifferent to the people's urge. The Maharaja, under great pressure from the internal and external forces, had ordered the formation of the Constitution Making Committee for Manipur State in 1947. Preparations were duly made for establishing a popular responsible government in Manipur.

A form of miniature responsible government was started on July 1, 1947 by converting the Manipur State Darbar into the Manipur State Council. The Maharaja was known as the Maharaja-in-Council; the President of the Darbar was redesignated Chief Minister. A set of rules called the Manipur State Administration Rules, 1947, was introduced with effect from 1 July 1947. It had also envisaged the unification of the hill and the plain administrations under the Maharaja-in-Council and the Manipur State Council. But, in line with the changing political conditions in India, the position of the Manipur State Council was taken over by a new body called the Interim Council of Manipur since 14 August 1947. Subsequently, the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 was passed; and under the new Constitution of the State a popular Legislative Assembly and a responsible government were established in 1948. The new Constitution lacked in the true spirit of a democratic government because of the fact that under it the post of Chief Minister was reserved for a member of the royal family, and not to be elected by the people.
When the dominions of India and Pakistan were formed in 1947, the Native States were invited to join either of the two. Manipur had joined India in 1947. The Manipur State Council had accepted the Instrument of Accession and the Stand Still Agreement on 11 August 1947 by a resolution. The Maharaja approved of the resolution of the Council on 22 August 1947. The Maharaja also signed the Instrument of Accession on 11 August 1947. Mr. G. S. Guha was appointed representative of Manipur in the Constituent Assembly of India.

In 1948-49 Manipur faced a political crisis. A coalition government was formed by the Praja Shanti Party and the Praja Sangha Party with the support of the hill members of the Manipur Legislative Assembly. The Congress Party in Manipur was in the opposition. Due to conflicts between the Maharaja and the Manipur State Congress, there were allegations against the Maharaja. With the purpose of abolishing the Gaddi, the Manipur State Congress demanded transfer of the State administration to the Government of India. The Dewan of Manipur, a representative of the Government of India in Manipur, also recommended direct assumption of the state administration by the Government of India in view of the political instability and the probability of Communist infiltration into India from Burma through Manipur State. The Government of India, therefore, decided to assume directly the administration of Manipur State. The Governor of Assam was
entrusted with the responsibility of concluding an agreement with the Maharaja of Manipur on the subject. The result was the agreement of 21 September 1949 between India and Manipur. The Agreement was signed by Bodhachandra Singh, Maharaja of Manipur, and Sri Sri Prakash, Governor of Assam, on behalf of the Government of India; and it was to take effect from 15 October 1949. It provided for, among others, transfer of the State administration to the Government of India; and removal of the Maharaja from all political powers and authorities over the administration of the state on payment of a privy purse of three lakhs of rupees per year. The Agreement was called 'Merger Agreement'.

The British administration in Manipur was basically a foreign administration. However, it was during such period that the Manipur administration had been adjusted to the modern trends. Improvement of Communication, spread of education on western model, introduction of monetary economy, establishment of responsible government, etc., were all made possible through the British contact. Acquaintance with the British system of administration had led to the growth of democratic ideas among the people of the state. Present day Manipur learnt to adjust itself to the needs of the situation imbibing lessons from both the virtues and faults of the alien administration.