ABSTRACT

This work is aimed at a study of the administrative and constitutional development of Manipur State during 1891 - 1947, the period of British domination over the state. Manipur was an independent state before 1891. After her defeat in the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891, the British Government of India assumed the political power of the state since April 1891.

The British Government of India did not annex the state mainly for the reason that owing to the scanty resources of Manipur, the British authorities considered the taking over of the state administration to be a liability; not an asset. Therefore, arrangements were made to regrant the state to a Native Raja under a Sanad. However, while selecting the new Raja, special care was taken to serve British interests. The old line of the kings of Manipur was precluded from occupying the throne as a mark of punishment for their part in the so called revolt of 1891. Churachand Singh, a minor of only six years of age from a collateral branch, was selected Raja of Manipur with the Political Agent as the Regent. The Political Agent was redesignated as Political Agent and Superintendent of State; and was made responsible for the administration of the entire state.

There occurred a number of changes in the administration. The traditional Lalup system (practice of contributing labour for the state works) was abolished. A house tax was imposed.
on both the hills and the valley. The valley areas were subdivided into Panas (sub-divisions) for administrative convenience. The land in the plains was surveyed and a land tax was also imposed. There were developments in communication facilities; schools were established to impart formal education to the Native children. The Panchayat Courts were established for dispensing of Justice in the plains. However, in the hills, the indigenous system was least disturbed, excepting that the Political Agent was kept at the top of the state authority in matters of hill administration.

In 1907 the Raja attained majority; and the state administration, insofar as the valley was concerned, was handed over to the Raja assisted by a Darbar of which the Raja was made President; and a British European Officer was appointed Vice-President. Administration rules were framed for hills and the valley. The Raja and the Darbar had no jurisdiction in the hill affairs. The Vice-President of the Darbar carried out the hill administration under the supervision of the Political Agent in Manipur.

The administrative departments of the state were put under the charge of a member of the Darbar, each being responsible for a single department or more. Under the administration of the Raja and the Darbar the state achieved further progress in the fields of education, medical, communication, finance, etc., both vertically and horizontally. Similar progress was made in the hills as well, though in a lesser degree.
By an amendment of the Administration Rules in 1916 the Raja ceased to be the President of the Darbar. The President's post was given to the former Vice-President of the Darbar; and the post of Vice-President was abolished. The President of the Darbar, under the amended rules, was to administer the hills on behalf of the Raja. Thus, the Raja was formally associated with the hill administration while the Darbar, as usual, had no jurisdiction in the subject except that it had to pass the state budget, inclusive of the expenditures in the hills.

Owing to the Kuki Rebellion of 1917, protesting against the recruitment of labour during the first World War, the hill administration underwent some changes. The hill areas were divided into four sub-divisions with Head-Quarters at Imphal, Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Churachandpur. Armed troops were also posted at the hill head-quarters. Three British European Officers from the Assam Provincial Service Cadre were appointed Sub-Divisional Officers on deputation while the President of the Darbar was in charge of the Sadar hill sub-division, over and above his normal duties. However, as there occurred no disturbance to peace in the hills for about 14 years, the hill sub-divisions were abolished in 1929; and the armed troops were also withdrawn. Such a step resulted in fresh unrest in the hills; and the former administrative measures were restored. There ensued no further unrest in the hills after the Naga Unrest of 1930-31 was settled.
During the period of the study, there were a number of peaceful agitations and armed rebellions; representing the popular movements in the valley and the hills respectively. Among the movements in the valley mention may be made of:

- the Movement for Abolition of Pothang system (a practice of giving food, lodging, protection, etc., free of cost by the villagers to the Raja and the state servants on tour), in 1917;
- the Bazar Boycott of 1920 (a sort of 'Foreigner-Issue');
- the first Nupi-Lan of 1904 (a women's war) and the second Nupi-Lan of 1939. Such movements produced a healthy change in the administration. The Pothang system was abolished. The practices of Wakheisel (paying of money to the judges of a Court by the winner in a case), Chandan-Selkhai (a sort of tax on Manipuri Hindus for using Tilak), etc., were done away with. The questions of Mangba-Sengba (untouchables) were also made triable by a Court of Law.

Among the disturbances in the hills, the most important was the Kuki Rebellion of 1917; followed by the Naga Unrest of 1930. The rebellion was quelled and the unrest settled. These movements in the hills did not directly bring about any constructive change in the hill administration, except those meant for direct control of the hill tribes. But, indirectly, it had brought the administrators nearer the tribes; and it ensured a direct touch between the administrator and the administered. Since then, the hills were given a special care.
The sense of nationalism in Manipur was aroused since the formation of the Nikhil Manipuri Hindu Maha-Sabha in 1934 which transformed into the Manipur State Congress in 1946; and it was followed by other organisations in the hills and the valley. Since the second Nupi-Lan (women's war) in 1939 the people of Manipur demanded a peoples' responsible government. But, it could not take a shape due to the Japanese bombardment of the state in 1942 during the second World War. After the war, the demand was revived in 1946. As the Maharaja was hard pressed by the Governor of Assam, the State Peoples' Conference and the Indian National Congress, the Maharaja ordered the formation of the Constitution Making Committee in 1947. But, it took time to frame the new constitution.

In order to introduce some sort of responsible government a new rule for the administration of the valley was framed and introduced since 1 July 1947. A separate regulation for the hills was also made and introduced from 10 August 1947. A State Council was formed; and the Maharaja was known as the Maharaja in Council. After a short rule of the Interim Government, the first responsible government was established in the state in 1948 under the new constitution. However, the Chief Minister was not elected, but nominated by the Maharaja from amongst the members of the royal family. The new democratic government was shortlived due to the internal disorder. With the signing of the Merger Agreement in 1949, Manipur administration was taken over by the Government of India; Manipur became a Chief Commissioner's province.
The present work is based on official documents and Government files consulted at the National Archives of India, New Delhi, the National Library, Calcutta, the Assam Secretariat Record Room, Shillong, Manipur Secretariat Library, Imphal, etc. A reference to the published books and journals has also been made to supplement the records. A list of the records and books referred to in this work is supplied at the end of this work as Bibliography. A work of this kind has not been done so far by other scholars; and the findings are original.