CHAPTER-V

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Background

The Anglo-Manipur relation since the treaty of Yandabo 1826 to 1830 indicates that the British intention towards Manipur was to use this hilly kingdom inhabited by a martial race as a foothold in their colonial rivalries of the British imperialism. It is a fact that the British attitude was friendly, but this friendship was used for the expansion and consolidation of their footing over eastern India and Burma. Though the first Anglo-Manipur treaty was concluded in 1762, the relation between the two countries in the nineteenth century was regulated by the treaty of 1833. Chandrakriti Singh, the Maharaja who was awarded K.C.S.I. by the British Indian Government died in 1886 and Sir. Johnstone had retired and the Manipur Political Agency which was ‘Cinderella among political agencies’.
Palace Revolution of 1890

Surchandra Singh, the eldest son of Maharaj Chandrakriti Singh ascended the throne of Manipur in 1886. Since his accession, Manipur had become a divided house with the ten sons of the late Maharaja by his six queens were divided into two groups. One led by Surchandra Singh and the other by Tikendrajit Singh, the most popular prince who was the idol of the masses. Surchandra Singh had to face a number of rebellions in his short reign of four years. The dissensions, quarrels and the mutual mistrusts and rivalry among the princes culminated in the Palace Revolution 1890. Zilangamba and his brother Angousana made an attack on the palace in the night of 22nd September, 1890. The weak-willed king was fled to the British residency without putting up any effective resistance to the rebels. Surchandra Singh, his brothers including Pakasana were given shelter by Grimwood, the Political Agent, at the residency. About 400 soldiers accompanied with the king. Without making any attempt to regain the throne, he expressed his desire to abdicate the throne of Manipur and retire Brindavan in Utter Pradesh 2. On the 23rd, September Maharaja Surchandra Singh left Manipur.
Kulachandra Dhaja, the Jubraj, who was then at Nambol, nine miles from the capital, was sent for by Tekendrajit Senapati for succeeded to the throne. Tekendrajit and Angousans became Jubraj and Senapati respectively. Within a few days Kulachandra Maharaja appointed Jilangamba, the youngest prince to the post of Samu Hanjaba.

On reaching Calcutta from Silchar, Maharaja Surchandra applied to the Government of India to regain his throne. In spite of his demand the Governor General Lord Landsdown orders that the Chief Commissioner of Assam was sent with an escort of 400 rifles to enquire into the matter of Manipur. And, further it has announced an order to recognise Kulachandra Dhaja as the king and at the same time deporting Tekendrajit Bir Singh, the Jubraj who had been the moving spirit in the palace revolution. The escort consisted of 200 men of the 44th Gurkhas under Captain Boileau and Lieutenant Brackenbury, 200 men of the 42nd Gurkhas under Colonel Skene, Lieutenants Luggard and Chatterton and Surgeon Calvert. Lieutenant Simpson and 100 men of 43rd Gurkhas Light Infantry were already at Imphal.
On Sunday, the 8th March, 1891 the Maharaja sent Kangaba Chidananda (Thangal General), one of the highest officials in the State at the head of seven hundred sepoys to Mao Thana, a Manipuri out post at a distance of eight days march from Manipur to receive the Chief Commissioner, and to make arrangements for the large number of escort. Thus at Mao outpost Kangaba Chidananda received the Chief Commissioner. The 20th March prince Angousana, the Senapati and Colonel Samu at the head of fifty soldiers were sent by the Maharaja to Sekmai, 12 miles from Imphal to receive the Chief Commissioner. Mr. Grimwood, the Political Agent in Manipur also joined the party of the Chief Commissioner at Sekmai. Immediately after his arrival he had a long private interview with the Chief Commissioner. In that consultation, it was decided that Jubraj Tikendrajit Singh should be arrested in Durbar in the next day. When the Chief Commissioner reached near the capital, Maharaja Kulachandra Dhaja accompanied by his younger brother Zilla Ngamba received and welcomed him at the western main gate of the palace. After shaking hands with the Maharaja the Chief Commissioner told him that the intimation of Governor General
would be communicated at the Durbar and should attend it at 12 a.m. with his brothers.

Rassiklal Kundu, the head clerk of the Manipur Political Agency was ordered to translate into Manipuri a proclamation of the Viceroy to be announced at the Durbar. The Political Agent warned the head clerk not to divulge the contents of the document which they had been translating into Manipuri. This document mentioned that the Maharaja Kulachandra Dhaja should be confirmed on the Gaddi and the Jubraj Tekendrajit deported from Manipur. But the head clerk could not get it ready by 12 O’clock. It was ready at about 12.30 a.m. In the meantime, the Maharaja had to wait for an hour below the Residency Bunglow. The Maharaja wanted to sit in the Durbar house but he was treated very impolitely and dishonored by the British officers and even refused admittance pending the Chief Commissioner’s permission.

The political negotiations having thus failed the Chief Commissioner of Assam consulted Mr. Grimwood the Political Agent and Colonel Skene and then determined to arrest the Jubraj forcibly.
The Maharaja was informed that the Chief Commissioner would leave Imphal the next day and that he wanted to witness Manipuri Ras Dance that night. Accordingly 400 coolies were arranged and a Manipuri Ras Dance was also organised in the Residency on the night of 23rd March.

At late night of the very day when everyone was asleep without declaring war, a large number of armed British troops entered the palace and attacked the house of Tekendrajit Bir Singh the Jubraj. But the Jubraj was not found. The British army committed atrocities on men, women and children and even they destroyed idols in the temple. Pukhramba Tanka Singh resisted bravely. He killed the British officer who entered there first. After fighting for sometime they occupied the house of the Jubraj by killing 11 keepers of the gate, mercilessly cut off the head of two boys and killed three boys by shooting. They set fire to the houses of the neighboring villages. Entering into the temple, they smashed the idol and all other articles along with it. Thus they burnt houses, destroyed idols and killed boys, girls, cows so and so forth. Having tied up the hair of two girls together they threw them into the fire and had them burnt.
Nevertheless, the Jubraj was not found in his house. Men, women and children from the enclosure of the Jubraj had run into the citadel for their lives.

PALACE OF THE MAHARAJA

The Manipur Capital of Kangla was surrounded on all sides by deep moats. Five walls surrounded the Maharaja enclosure. The outer of these was much broken, and of no great height, but the inner ones were very strong, built of brick and supplied with bastions, and they surrounded the inner palace on all four sides. One three sides of the outer wall was a canal/moat (Thangapat) with very deep and wide. It was here that the great boat races took place every year, and the water was always kept weeded and clean for those events. The whole citadel was built with a view to resisting attack in the time before Burma was annexed, when armies of raiders used to come down upon Manipur with hostile intent; and it was a place which could easily be held against an attacking foe, provided big guns were not brought to bear upon it. The Manipuries were well armed and supplied with ammunition and four mountain guns.
The Chief Commissioner without declaring the war had ordered the British troops to attack the place in the morning of 24th March 1891. At the same time, Maharaja Kulachandra Dhaja declared war against the British. Orders were issued to all outposts informing that war was declared between the British Government and the Manipuris and that the outposts were to be watch and cut the Telegraph line. Heavy guns were fired from the citadel. Severe fighting continued for the whole day. Khumbong Subedar, Leisang Jamadar, Athokpa Dewan, Chongtha Mia, Paona Subedar (later he became a Major), Niranjan Subedar fought bravely to resist the British troops but Khumbong Subedar, Leisang Jamadar, Athokpa Dewan died in the fighting 10.

In a sudden attack the British occupied the western main gate. Wangkheirakpa, prince Angousana Senapati were in command of the western inner gate and a gun was in position there and Angousana, the Senapati now and then fired at the British troops at the outer west gate. Colonel Samu defended the south gate and Yengkhoiba Rudra Singh Major defended the eastern gate of the palace. By order of the Maharaja, taking some soldiers with Yaiskul Lakpa and
Wangkheirakpa left the citadel by the south gate and attacked the British Residency from the west or behind the compound of the Residency. These confrontations resulted in complete failure on the side of the British. Lieutenant Brackenbury, 44th Gurkha Rifles, Subedar Hemchand 44th Gurkha Rifles, one Havildar and some other sepoys were killed. One British officer Lieutenant Lugard and 14 other ranks were severely wounded. The Chief Commissioner wanted to make peace with the Manipuries. At about 8 O'clock the bugle sounded 'Cease Fire' from the British side. The Jubraj then gave orders and stopped the firing on the side of Manipur.

DURBAR

At the end of the fighting with British and Manipur, a Durbar was held in front of the Durbar room of the Kangla palace. On the Manipuri side, Tekendrajit Jubraj, Thangal General, Colonel Samu, Giridhari Singh, Angom Ningthou, Haobam Dewan, Chongtha Mia
and many others were assemble. There was a great crowd (Namupongpei Tinle) around the Durbar. The Jubraj statement given that he had been badly treated by the British troops in which having his house surrounded and his people killed and he protested strongly against it. The Jubraj and Thangal General asked them to give up their arms. The Chief Commissioner replied that they could not give up their arms as they belong to the Government. The Durbar lasted about an hour. Then, the British officers were hemmed in by the excited and infuriated people whose near and dear ones had been killed by the British troops at the early hour of that day. The crowd began to hustle and hit them and Lieutenant Simpson was severely wounded.

Colonel Samu called out to the people to desist. The British officers being hustled came running back to the Durbar room. The officers thus found themselves in the gravest danger. Mr. Grimwood, the Political Agent, as he reached the steps of the Durbar house, Nepra Koot gave him a push and Kajao alias Pukhramba Phingang speared him fatally. The British officers were then detained in the Durbar house for about two hours and order of Thangal General and the Jubraj, Mr. Quinton, the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Skene, Mr.
Cossins, Lieutenant Simpson, and the bugler were taken to the green space in front of the Kangla Shas (Dragons) and the public executioner beheaded there.

DESPATCH OF TROOPS

Lord Lansdown, the Viceroy and the Governor General of British India was at Nainital on the night of Sunday, the 29th March 1891, when His Excellency heard for the first time that Tekendrajit Singh, the Jubraj of Manipur could not be arrested and that the British officers including Mr. J.W.Quinton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam were in the hands of the Manipuries as war prisoners. When the news of the British 'debacle' reached Calcutta, the British government ordered a three-pronged invasion of Manipur. The war had already existed between the two countries since the attack of Manipur palace by the British. It appears that Manipur was not psychologically prepared for a big war against the British; but the war was forced on her and she had to fight it out. By the first week of April, 1891, the three columns of the British troops were ordered to invade Manipur (it had happened the real nature of War Declaration
between two countries) from three directions i.e., Kohima, Silcher, Tammu. They were laid as follows:

I. KOHIMA COLUMN

No. 8 (Bengal) Mountain Battery (two guns);

13th Regiment of Bengal Infantry;

36th (Sikh) Regiment of Bengal Infantry;

II. SILCHAR COLUMN

No. 8 (Bengal) Mountain Battery (two guns);

The Calcutta Volunteer Rifles Crops (Pioneer Company)

3rd Regiment of Bengal Infantry;

19th Regiment of Bengal Infantry (Six Companies);

1st Battalion, 2nd Gurkha Regiment
III. TAMMU COLUMN

No. 2 Mountain Battery, Royal Artillery (four guns);

2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, Oxfordshire Light Infantry (200 men);

2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, 4\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Regiment;

12\textsuperscript{th} Regiment (2\textsuperscript{nd} Burma Battalion) of Madras Infantry 14.

Brigadier General Collet, C.B. was appointed to command the Kohima Column, and to take over the command of united column, when they met. Lieutenant Colonel Rennick of the 18\textsuperscript{th} Bengal Infantry commanded the Silchar Column, and Brigadier General Graham, C.B. the Tammu Column. The first Government instruction to the Officer Commanding was issued on April 6\textsuperscript{th}, when it was hoped that the Chief Commissioner and his party were only prisoners. He was authorised, in case the Durbar tried to make conditions about the release of the prisoners, to promise immunity from punishment with death or transportation from punishment with death or transportation to any person he thought fit, provided they were not guilty of actual murder. If he was not in telegraphic communication with India, he was to use his discretion regarding the best means of
insuring the release of prisoners, his object was to re-assert the political supremacy of the British Government, and enforce the unconditional submission of the Durbar. After the issue of these orders the troops assembled. But it was not until the 20th of April that the various columns were ready to start for the actual march to Manipur.

On hearing the news of the advances of the British troops from three directions – North, West and East the Maharaja sent 800 sepoys under Khwairakpa, Laishraba Jambhuban Major, Heigrujamba Poila and Maibya Tamra Singh Subedar towards the North to defend against the British column coming from Kohima. Another one thousand soldiers were sent towards the West under the command of Rajkumar Kala Sana (Sagol Hanjaba), Sana Ngrangba (Lourung Purel), Yengkhoiba (Poila), Longjamba (Poila) to oppose the British column from Cachar (Silchar) and seven hundred sepoys were sent under Maipak Sana alias Lokendra Birjit Singh (Wangkheirakpa) and Rudra Singh Yengkhoiba (Major) to resist the advance of British column from Tammu (Burma).
At this critical time the Maharaja appointed Subedar Paona Brajabasi and Chongtha Mia Singh to the posts of Majors and four hundred sepoys under two Majors were reinforced to oppose the British force from Burma (Tammu Column). The Manipuri force under Wangkheirakpa and Yengkhoiba Major made a strong stockade at Thoubal. Orders were issued to Wangkhei Meiraba (Poila) to lead a party of Manipuri sepoys also to proceed via Kakching and to Majors Paona Brajabasi and Chongtha Mia Singh to proceed towards Palel by the Burma road. From Palel on the morning of 23rd April Major Leslie took out with him a party of 150 Gurkhas, the mounted infantry of the 12th Burma, and arrived at Kakching at day light. When the Manipuri force under Wangkhei Meiraba Poila arrived at Kakching they were taken by surprise by the British troops under Major Leslie. A hand to hand fighting took palace there. In this encounter 20 Manipuris including Wangkhei Meiraba Poila died after fighting bravely against out numbered British army on 23rd April 1891.

In the meantime, the British troops (Tammu Column) occupied Palel, Kakching and Langathel successively. As the reconnoitering party of the British force from Palel (their H.Q.) was seen moving, the
Manipuri troops under the two Majors could not proceed further. So, the Manipuri encamped on the bank of the Khongjom Turel (river).

The Manipuri fort, which was almost oval in shape about 50 yards long and 40 yards broad was built in an open plain about 200 yards to the west of the main road (Indo-Burma Road) by way of a morcha or mud-work at Khongjom, 32 k.m. from Imphal. The mud-work was almost four feet high in all directions with a view to obstructing the immediate advance of the enemy, a deep nullah (drain) about 12 feet deep and 12 to 15 feet wide containing three or four feet of water in it surrounded the east, south and west sides morcha (mud fort). This nullah was entirely concealed by tall grasses, and it could not be seen till one almost tumbled into it.

Inside this wall there was a deep trench in which the Manipuri soldiers took position. The whole of the centre of the fort was filled up with temporary shelters of bamboo and grass. The object of the advance body of the British troops was to reconnoiter, and during this process they were able to elicit information from the side of the Manipuris. Whenever the British troops approached near the
Manipur camp, they were fired upon by the Manipuris. On the morning of 24th April 1891 Lieutenant Cox, with 24 Mounted Infantry of 12 (Burma) Madras Infantry was sent out from Palel along the road towards the north to reconnoiter. At Khongjom Lieutenant Cox dismounted some of his men and ascended a neighboring knoll from which he spied out the disposition of the Manipuri troops. The Manipuris opened fire on that reconnoitering party of the enemy. 

Having realised the possible gravity of the situation, the Majors at Khongjom – Paona and Chongtha Mia requested the Commander-in-Charge of Manipuri force at Thoubal for immediate supply of pounders of high calibre. Non-Compliance of three consecutive requests made the Majors at Khongjom to fight against the British troops without adequate weapons when compared with the guns of the British.

It had been learnt that the nature of the position, on 24th April Sir Charles Laslie, officer commanding of the advance body of the British troops at Palel applied to the General Officer Commanding for permission to attack the Manipuri position at once; but he was
instructed to postpone the attack till the arrival of the 60th Kings Royal Rifles, who were expected in Palel on the morning of the 25th April, with the General. However, a party was directed to be sent out to make a careful reconnaissance of the Manipuri position early on the morning of the 25th April, and to select the best position for the guns.

On the fatal morning of 25th April was to witness how valiantly the Manipuri forces which was bereft of high calibre pounders, was to fight against the outnumbered British forces which was equipped with adequate guns etc. On that day, at day break, a party consisting of 50 rifles of 24th Gurkhas under Captain Drury and 50 rifles of the 12th (Burma) Madras Infantry under Lieutenant Grant and 35 Mounted Infantry of the 12th (Burma) Madras Infantry under Lieutenant Cox, marched up the Thoubal Road. The Mounted Infantry made a detour off the road and got to the left or west of the Manipuri position while the Infantry got round the hills to the right or east of the Manipuri position.
Captain Drury who commanded the reconnaissance party reported to the Officer Commanding at Palel that he had surrounded the Manipuri force and asked for more troops and guns along with the permission to attack the Manipuri position. The General with his staff had in the meantime arrived at Palel. Thinking that the force under Captain Drury was not strong enough for the purpose, General Graham ordered out another 200 rifles of 2-4th Gurkhas with Captain Rundall and Lieutenant Persse to reinforce Captain Drury’s party and attack the Manipuri fort. The whole British force at Khongjom was under the command of Captain Rundall of 2-4th Gurkha Regiment. Captain Rundall directed Lieutenant Cox, 12th (Burma) Madras Infantry, Commanding the Mounted Infantry, to proceed to the southwest of the Manipuri entrenchment so as to prevent any escape in that direction. Then in order to get a view of the ground before attacking and to obtain a commanding position of his guns, he proceeded with Lieutenant Persse, Royal Artillery, and the two guns and 50 rifles to a hill, 1000 yards east of the mud work of the Manipuris, leaving Captain Carnegie, 2-4th Gurkha Regiment, south of the position.
On arriving at a ‘Meck’ Captain Rundall and his party saw a small body of the Manipuries sitting on a hill 600 yards from them towards the right flank of his guns. He drove them off with a couple of volleys. Then the guns were taken to the top of the hill, which was about 400 feet above the plain, and they opened fire on the earth work of the Manipuris at 1,000 yards range. In the meantime, Captain Drury with his detachment of 2-4th Gurkha Regiment and Lieutenant Grant with the 12th (Burma) Madras Infantry approached the entrenchment from the north, while Captain Carnegy with his detachment of 2-4th Gurkhas approached it from the south. But the Manipuri’s firmly held their ground and opened fire on the British troops with small arms.

As soon as the British Infantry made their advance close up to the fort, the Manipuri position was attacked by the Mounted Infantry and the Infantry from three directions into a V - Shaped Formation. While the attacking British troops soon jumbled into the nullah and were scrambling up opposite side, the Manipuris were keeping up a hot fire all the time. However, the overwhelming attackers entered the fort after facing the primary difficulty in the nullah and then a severe
hand to hand fighting ensued, the British troops with bayonets and the Manipuris with shields and swords 18.

Of the Manipuris 76 dead bodies were counted inside the earth work and 2 wounded, and just outside the work 52 dead bodies were counted; those killed in the nullah were not counted as they lay in heaps in the water, and those killed by the guns and Mounted Infantry were not also counted.

The loss on both the parties of British troops and Manipuris soldiers (particularly Meiteis who were the most advance & thoughtful races of the regions) were very heavy. On the side of the British Captain Drury, Captain Carnegy, Lieutenant Grant and Lieutenant Cox were wounded. To name a few mention may be made of Jamadar Adjutant Kiree, Ram Gurung among the killed. On the side of Manipur, Major Paona Brajabasi, Khumbong Major, Chinglen Sana, Loitongba Jamadar, Keisa Jamadar, Heirang Khongja etc. were died. Of the wounded mention may be made of Chongtha Mia Major, the Commander of the Manipuri force at Khongjom.
Chongtha Mia Major who commanded the Manipuri troops at Khongjom to resist the advance of Tammu column was badly wounded in the battle. Even though of his wounds he retreated towards the Manipuri stockade at Thoubal. But before he reached Thoubal camp the Manipuri troops at Thoubal retreated to Imphal, the capital on that very night. The following day on 26th April Mia Major fell into the hands of the enemy at Thoubal. The Manipuri forces who went to resist the advance of the three British columns from Tammu, Kohima and Silchar retreated and reached the capital on Saturday the 25th April, 1891.

The fall of Khongjom is the turning point in the history of Manipur. The defeat of the Manipuris is the loss of their independence and sovereignty. It marks the integration of Manipur with the British Empire of India.

Lastly, Colonel Rennick's force (Silchar Column) occupied Kangla, the capital of Manipur at the morning of 27th April on Monday at 7 a.m. The Kohima Column under General Collet had not been within the walls of the Palace enclosure before the Mounted
Infantry of the Tammu Column appeared at the south gate. Whereas, all the three British Columns had united at 10 a.m. Thus the Manipur fell into the hands of the British in the morning of 27th April 1891 and the ancient capital Kangla was kept under their control.

After a few days, Maharaja Kulachandra, Jubraj Tekendrajit, Thangal General and other leading officials were captured. Tekendrajit Jubraj and Thangal General were convicted of waging war against the Queen Empress and sentenced to death and hanged at Pheidapung on 13th August 1891. Many others were transported for life out of the country. Maharaja Kulachandra convicted of waging war was sentenced to exile for life with 13 other personalities. Then, the British destroyed the fabulous statue of the Kangla Sha and other important buildings inside the palace as punitive action against the Manipuris. The British Government selected Churachand Singh, a minor son of Raj Kumar Chaobiyaima as the Raja of Manipur. A new palace was also constructed at another place and the ancient Capital of Kangla was kept under their occupation.
Foot notes:

1. Professor Gangmumei Kabui

2. Professor Gangmumei Kabui

3. At that time of Monarchical rule in Manipur the name of administrative posts were known as : Jubraj-Heir Apparent; Senapati-Commander-in-Chief; & Samu Hanjaba - Chief Officer-in-Charge of the elephant.

4. Manipur Compiled from the columns of the pioneer.

5. L.M. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh
   : Cheitharol Kumbaba (1957), p.482.

6. Ethel St. Clair Grimwood
   : My Three Years in Manipur and escape from the recent meeting, London, p.p. 178,179.

7. Assam Secretariat, Foreign
   : A progs, September 1891 No.203 dated 4th April 1891 from Babu Rasik Lal Kundu, head clack, Political Agency Manipur to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam and No.213 dated 25th March 1891 from Kulachandra Dhaja Singh, Maharaja of Manipur to His Excellency the most Honourable Henry Charles Keith, Marquis of Lansdowne, Viceroy and Governor General of India.

8. Assam Secretariat, Foreign
   : A progs, September 1891, No.213. Disturbances at Manipur March 1891.

9. Mrs. Grimwood
   : My Three Years in Manipur (London 1891), p.199.

10. L.M. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh
18. Manipur Compiled from the Columns of the Pioneer, Allahabad, 1891.