CHAPTER - I.

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Manipur is the nineteenth State in the Indian Union. It was constituted into an autonomous State by the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 (81 of 1971); on January 21, 1972 the Manipur State was inaugurated by late Shrimati Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India. The Manipuri people congregated in large number in Imphal to celebrate this historic day with great pomp and grandeur.

It must be mentioned here that the status of statehood was not attained so easily by the Manipuri people who have a chequered history. The beautiful land of Manipur, once described by Lord Irwin as the "Switzerland of India", has been existing from the days of antiquity. Manipur became the melting-pot gate of India where races, languages and cultures Aryan, Mongoloid and Burmese - met through ages, influencing one another in a large measure but ultimately mingling together to produce in the course of history the culture identified as Manipuri culture.

Politically, Manipur came to be ruled by Hindu Kings, although suffering from time to time because of
successive waves of foreign invasions, first by the Burmese, then by the British, and subsequently, by the Japanese during the second world war. Although since 1891 Manipur came under the paramountcy of the British Rulers of India, its internal administration remained in the hands of the native Hindu rulers. But the real political problem was faced by the Manipuri people when, as a consequence of the transfer of power, the Maharaja of Manipur had to accede to the Indian Union in matters of External Affairs, Defence and Communications. In October 1949, on the initiative taken by Government of India and popular support mobilised by the Manipur State Congress, and the Manipur Socialist Party the princely state of Manipur was integrated with the Indian Union and was made a Part C State under the direct control of the Union Government. Ever since the Manipuri people started their political struggle for the transformation of the constitutional status of Manipur within the framework of the Indian Constitution,

The trend of the constitutional evolution of Manipur has been governed by two major political aspirations of its people. The first one relates to their aspiration for democratic government consisting of a Council of Ministers ultimately responsible to the
people but immediately accountable to a directly elected representative Assembly. The second political aspiration was the attainment of autonomous statehood for Manipur, a constitutional status which would be commensurate with Manipur people’s passion for maintaining intact their cultural and regional identity.

The above two political aspirations were considered by the people of Manipur to be just and legitimate, because prior to their integration with the Indian Union the people enjoyed, even though for a shortwhile, popular responsible Government under the native Ruler who very zealously maintained the integrity of the political boundary of Manipur despite sporadic attempts of some sections of the people at disintegration. Therefore after Manipur became an integral part of the Indian Union it was natural on the part of the Manipuri people to expect that the pre-independence autonomous State administered by a popular responsible Government be continued intact in the post-independence phase of Manipur’s history.

But a survey of Manipur’s political history in the post-independence period would show that its major political aspirations were not readily appreciated and recognised, but they have been conceded in phases as a
consequence of Manipur's constitutional evolution which had been slow and gradual.

The constitutional evolution of Manipur in the post-independence period has been the gradual outcome of popular struggle in support of the Manipuris' political demands and gradual response of the Government of India in fulfilment of those demands at different stages.

The strength and force of the demonstration of popular demand has been governed by one important factor, the nature of aspirations of the people of the hill areas of Manipur and the measure of their feeling of solidarity with the people of Manipur valley. The geographical structure of Manipur divides the State into two physical parts, one consisting of the Central valley, and the other, namely, the hill areas, surrounding the valley on all sides. This sort of physical division of Manipur has been an irreversible and an important determinant of the socio-economic problems of the people of Manipur and the nature and character of the pattern of government and administration which the aforesaid problems have called for. For instance, the complimentary character of the economy of the valley as well as that of the hill areas has forced upon the
Meiteis\(^1\) of the valley and the native tribes of the hill areas a bond of inter-dependence for centuries. Socially also, although the customs and religion of Meiteis differ from variegated customs and religion of the native tribes, yet a process of mutual influence of one upon another has brought the two sections of Manipur's population closer.

The above characteristics of the economic and social life have influenced the shaping of the goals and aspirations of the people of the valley as well as of the hill areas. The very situation of Manipur on the far extreme eastern border of India has kept Manipur immune from subjugation to the Emperors of ancient and medieval periods, whether Hindus or Muslims, or Mughals; even Burmese occupations of Manipur were occasional and temporary. Although the British conquered Manipur in 1891, they maintained only suzerainty, leaving the direct rule over the people to the native Rulers. This type of political aloofness and independence of status enjoyed by the people of the valley as well as of the hill areas had created in their mind a sense of autonomous political identity, a political value which the Manipuris were not inclined to sacrifice.

\(^1\) The people inhabiting the valley of Manipur since 33 A.D. are known as Meiteis.
At the same time it must be pointed out that the different hill tribes had been by custom accustomed to some sort of autonomous administration by native Chieftains. They were equally anxious to be protected from exploitation by the people of the valley. Thus in the post-independence period the tribal people of the hill areas shared with the people of the valley the common political aspiration of an autonomous statehood and responsible government while remaining firm about their regional political demands for freedom from exploitation and for a pattern of autonomous local self-government within the broader framework of the general democratic Government of Manipur.

From what has been said above it becomes evident that the evolution of autonomous self-government in administration for the hill areas of Manipur tended to become in the post-independence years co-eval with the political evolution of Manipur towards autonomous statehood and full-fledged democratic responsible government. This evolution was greatly supported by economic interdependence of the people of the valley and the people of the hill areas and their common pride in maintaining the socio-cultural identity of Manipur as distinct from the culture of any other state in the north-eastern region. These inevitable
facts of the socio-economic and cultural life of the Manipuri people and their political aspirations in the post-independence period call for a detailed probe into the factors and forces which have shaped in the post-independence era the pattern of government and administration with particular reference to the administration of its hill areas.

Review of Literature

It is necessary here to dwell on the nature of the literature that is available for a systematic understanding of the problems of the Manipuri people and the manner in which their political life had evolved towards constitutional autonomy and full-fledged responsible government.

After Manipur became a native State under the British rule some serious attempts were made by the British Political Agents and Administrators to give portraits about the history, culture and political system of the Manipuri people. In 1835 an excellent Report on the Eastern-Frontier of British India by Capt. R.B. Pemberton described the Burma war 1824-26 and the way the Manipuris recovered their independence with the help of the British. The next important work
was that of Major William McCulloch's *An Account of the Valley of Munnipore, and of the Hill Tribes* published in 1859. In 1874 Dr. R. Brown, who succeeded McCulloch as Political Agent, wrote the *Statistical Account of Manipur*. In 1886 Capt. E.W. Dun wrote *Gazetteer of Manipur* which contains some useful information about the people of Manipur and their history, their revenue and administration of justice etc. A good account of Manipur and the hill tribes is available from Sir James Johnstone's *Manipur and the Naga Hills* published in 1896. In 1908 an excellent work, entitled *The Meiteis* by T.C. Hodson, Assistant Political Agent in Manipur, provided a good account of the social and political life of the Meiteis of the valley. Hodson's *Naga Tribes of Manipur* published in 1911, was equally informative and useful. Excepting these, there has been hardly any other good work written in the pre-independence period.

In the post-independence period only a few works are available on the recent history of Manipur; reference may be made to *History of Manipur* by Jyotirmoy Roy published in 1958 and *Introduction to Manipur* by L. Ibungohal Singh published in 1963 (second Reprint).

As regards the constitutional evolution of Manipur there is one book written in Manipuri language
by Shyamkanhai; but this gives more or less a general description of the developments.

As far as our knowledge goes only one scholar has made an attempt on the basis of research to write on Government and Politics of Manipur. But as the work has not been published it has not been possible to explore the actual contents of this work.

A critical survey of the foregoing literature would show that the most of the pioneering works done by the British Political Agents are confined to the British period in India and are of historical importance. But there has been no adequate research on the important political and constitutional developments in the post-independence period which has been responsible for the transformation in Manipur's status from one of a princely State to that of a Union Territory, and from a position of Union Territory to the more prestigious status of an autonomous State within the Indian Union. It was this transformation which has been responsible in the evolution of an appropriate machinery that would balance the interests of the hill people with those of the valley keeping in view the problem of development of the general interests of the people of Manipur as a whole. Since study of this process
of political and administrative evolution on the basis of relevant documents and literature was necessary, an humble attempt is made here to fill up this need in the field of research.

Method of Research Work

The work of the author is based on consultation of primary sources as well as secondary sources including personal interviews. For the primary sources the author has consulted, particularly, the Secretariat Library, Manipur which is the custodian of almost all the valuable documents inherited from the British Administration. For the secondary sources materials were collected from the Manipur Legislative Assembly Library, Imphal; National Library, Calcutta; Pan Manipuri Youth League, Imphal; Orissa Legislative Assembly Library, Bhubaneswar and Utkal University Library, Bhubaneswar. Of these the Assembly Library of Manipur located at Imphal, deserves special mention on the count that the said Library provides unpublished minutes and proceedings, particularly, of the Hill Areas Committee of Manipur Legislative Assembly. Besides, the author depends on other materials such as bulletins, pamphlets, memoranda etc. issued by Governments, political parties and individuals. Even in doing so, there were still some aspects which were not covered by them; these deficiencies were made up through personal interviews with the political personalities and other people involved
in the process of the constitutional evolution of Manipur during the period with which the present study is concerned.