Chapter 2

Political Structure of Manipur

2.1 Introduction

The introduction of democratic institutions and principles in Manipur is a new phenomenon. It is coincided with the emergence of educated elite groups in the 1930s when the state was under the British rule. It was this educated elite who organized people against the practices of feudalism and colonialism along with the demand for the establishment of a responsible government in Manipur. The enactment of Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 was the solid foundation for the establishment of a government based on democracy. The political elites as representatives of the people in a democratic setup emerged in the state when it was merged into the Indian union in 1949. It is, therefore, pertinent to study the political history of Manipur, starting from 33 AD, to understand the socio-religious and political background through which the first batch of political elites as representatives of the people emerged in the state.

Manipur has its own long history. Evidences of Old Age; New Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age cultures are available in Manipur.\(^1\) Pre-historic men were said to be settled in a number of caves and rocks in the hills of Manipur. It has been stated that Imphal may be an important zone of Copper-Bronze Age culture. Manipur appear to have received Bronze Age culture traits from Thailand and Upper Burma (now Myanmar).\(^2\) In pre-historic times, the ancestors of Manipur must have settled in kin groups or scattered villages. Rigid clan customs and communal land tenures governed them. They had leaders who assumed importance as Chieftains under more settled conditions of life.

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Before 33 A.D., there were seven clans inhabiting different parts of Manipur. Each clan had a head of its own, a territory as its area and a population of its own. The area of each clan was not demarcated but was changing often with the prowess of different Chieftains. The game of politics was confined to a few ambitious men only, who, as commanders of small armies aspired after local ruleship. No recognized government was there and each clan received tribute and taxes in kind from the land under jurisdiction and maintained there some sort of law and order. Each clan tried to dominate the other and there were frequent wars between the seven clans for the possession of lands or for the capture of human beings. It was only in 33 A.D. that the seven clans came under one suzerain power of king Pakhangba. Feeble attempts were made to consolidate the seven clans in 33 A.D. But it was in 1709 that all the seven clans were merged into one and a single state was brought into existence.

2.2 Rulers of Manipur – A Historical Sequence

Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33 A.D. – 154 A.D.) was an extraordinarily gifted ruler who introduced many reforms during his reign which laid the foundation of social and political structure as well as cultural and religious pattern of the Meiteis. Since his accession in 33 A.D. the term Meitei had been applied to all persons belonging to the seven clans and the new comers were assigned to one of these in later period. The king or ruler of Manipur was descendant of king Pakhangba in his male line. However, he was not the master of the whole of Manipur as the Angom, the Khuman and the Moirang revolted frequently and become independent.

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3 The Ningthouja (Mangang), Luwang, Angom, Khuman, Moirang, Kha-Nganba and Sarang Leisangthem were the clans inhabiting Manipur.
During the reign of Pakhngba, there were two kinds of court — the ‘Kucha’ and the ‘Pacha’. The Kucha was the highest court and the king presided over its meeting. This court which consists of the king and his nobles tried both civil and criminal cases. The Pacha was a court of females and it tried all cases connected with females. It consisted of Pakhangba’s wife, Laisna, as president and other ten members. There was the possibility of making appeal against the decision of this court to the Kucha. Women criminals were neither imprisoned nor put to death. The highest punishment was ‘Khongoinaba’. But male criminals were put to death for offences like treasons and murder by a device called ‘Wayen Michap’. For the administrative purpose king Pakhangba divided the land into four ‘panas’ (divisions) — the ‘Ahallup’ pana, the ‘Naharup’ pana, the ‘Laipham’ pana and the ‘Khabam’ pana. He introduced the play of ‘Kangjei’ (hockey) and the system of giving rewards and distinction. The institution of ‘Lallup’ (forced and unpaid labour) was also introduced by him.

Khuyai Tompok (154-264 A.D.) succeeded Pakhangba. During his reign there was installation of 64 ‘phamdons’ (nobility) and introduction of two ‘Shanglens’ (institutions) namely — Nongdamba Shaglen and Ngamdai Shanglen. Both these institutions were advisory in character and were under the control of Phathi (learned men). There were Keirungba, Sharungba and Ngarungba who were in charge of the royal godown, procuring and maintaining animal and fish respectively. There was also a ‘Ningollakpa’ who was in charge of Ningol or maidens. Bronze making, weaving, printing of design and dying, silk rearing, boat making and exploration were said to be developed during his reign.

7 It was a kind of punishment awarded to women criminals in which the head of the culprit was shaved, her bare breast and head were painted red with a mixture of lime and turmeric and she was exposed to the market in an almost naked conditions.
8 ‘Wayen Michap’ was composed of two stones in the middle of which the convict had to enter. These stones crushed the culprit to death.
9 According to the institution of Lallup, every adult male had to attend to royal functions for ten days out of every forty.
10 The main function of Ningollakpa was to educate girls in social customs and habits.
Taothingmang became the next king of Manipur and had a successful reign. He was described as one of the makers of Manipur. His wisdom, action, adventure and skill greatly benefited the country. He was well known for his work of draining the marshes of Manipur valley and dredging its rivers and streams. Manipur valley had such topography that rains would cause flood as the marshes could not be drained away by the narrow rivers and streams and this affected the agricultural production. The innumerable lakes and marshes, when properly drained, provided agricultural lands and cultivation. The dredging involved human labour which was possible only with the mass participation of the people of the kingdom. Taothingmang had powerful loyalty of his subjects. It is believed that he conquered Lokha-Haokha, a place inhabited by hill men. This conquest was regarded as the ‘first contact’ between the Ningthouja and hill men recorded in ‘Cheitharol Kumbaba’.\(^{11}\)

After the death of Taothingmang, his son Khui Ningomba ascended the throne and he continued his father’s works of dredging the rivers and strengthening the embankments of the rivers and stream of the kingdom. He introduced the worship of Lal Leima (goddess of war) in the Manipuri month of Mera (October) to strengthen the military power of the kingdom. He had a reign of 15 years. His successors, Pengsiba followed by Kaokhagba, had unsuccessful reign.\(^{12}\)

Naokhomba (411-428 A.D.) introduced the title ‘Ningthou’ (meaning king) in place of the old title ‘Piba’. His reign was characterized by expansion of the kingdom which was felt by other tribes.\(^{13}\) Naophangba (428-518A.D.), son of Naokhamba, was the next king. He was credited with the construction of a seven storied kangla palace building. During his reign the rules for the construction of the king’s palace and temples in kangla were written into a treatise called *kangla Haouba* or *Kanglalon* (construction of kangla) by a scholar named Ashangbam Laiba.\(^{14}\) Naophangba, under the influence of a religious

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\(^{11}\) R.K. Jhalajit Singh, *A Short History of Manipur*, Imphal, 1964, p.43. Cheitharol Kumbaba is the Royal Chronicle and it is considered to be the most authentic source of history of Manipur from 33 A.D.

\(^{12}\) Gangmumei Kabui, op.cit. p.100.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.

leader called Pangan Guru who most probably came from Bengal, stop the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Meiteis and took a new religion, perhaps, a form of popular Hinduism. He stopped the practice of burial of dead and introduced cremation. Meat was declared as a tabooed food and meat eating was banned. This was the first instance of Hindu missionary attempt to convert the Meitei king.\textsuperscript{15} The religious Guru as well as the new religion was, however, evidently rejected by the king and the people. Naophangba was a good administrator, a deeply religious man and a good hunter.

Sameirang succeeded his father Naophangba. During his reign (518-568 A.D.), there was consolidation and extension of the Ningthouja political power at the cost of other clan principalities. He along with his half brother Thamanglang carried out the administration of the country. The territory of his kingdom was extended and reached the Maring hills in the east. Ura Konthouba (568-658) was the next ruler. He had extended the Ningthoja kingdom through matrimonial alliance and military aggrandizement. During his reign there was the use of copper and tin sheets in the construction of bridge over Naga stream, the use of cavalry with all the military accoutrements. He also issued bell metal coin in his name and this indicates the beginning of monetization of the barter economy of the country.\textsuperscript{16}

Naethingkhong (633-763 A.D.) was the next successor. The Royal Chronicle assigned the reign of 100 years to him. Between the death of Ura Konthouba and succession of Naethingkhong, there was an interval of five years when there was no king. He was at that time in Luwang principality. He was called by his mother to accept the throne of Kangla under Ningthouja dynasty. He was a man of high military skill, courage and bravery. Naethingkhong was succeeded by Khongtekcha whose administration made Manipur a stable and prosperous country. His reign of ten years was very brief. He was a very skillful hunter and devoted to the meditation on God and soul. Kairencha (784-99 A.D.) succeeded Khongtekcha. He was succeeded by Yaraba (799-821 A.D.). But no significant event was recorded in Royal Chronicles during their reign.

\textsuperscript{15} Gangumei Kabui, \textit{op.cit}, p.103
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid}, 106.
During the reign of the next ruler, Ayangba (821-910 A.D), there was the beginning of conflicts between the Ningthuoa and the Khumans. He constructed a road in the eastern side of the capital which is even today known as Ayangpalli. Ayangba was succeeded by Ningthoucheng, Chenglei Ipam Langthaba, Yorou Keiphaba and Irengba respectively. Ningthoucheng (910-49 A.D) was not an able ruler but his reign was peaceful. Chenglei Ipam Langthaba (949-69 A.D) who succeeded Ningthoucheng defeated the Luwangs on the Luwangyi stream in the west of Imphal. Since this attack the Luwangs were brought under subjugation of Ningthoujas. Chenglei Ipam Lanthaba was succeeded by his son, Keiphaba, who had a short reign of 15 years (969-84 A.D.). Keiphaba was succeeded by his eldest son Irengba, who, during his reign (984-1074 A.D.), invaded and defeated the Moirangs. He was meticulous about royal garments and costumes.17

Loiyamba (1074-1121 A.D.), the next ruler, in his reign, was engaged in a number of expeditions and consequently, there was consolidation of kingdom by defeating and conquering various hill tribes. He introduced administrative reforms by creating six Lups (divisions) – Angom Lup, Nongmai Lup, Akong Lup, Khurai Lup, Chingja Lup and Khaija Lup.18 During his reign, there was the development of Lallup System and this development was the manifestation of the emergence of feudalism in the social, administrative and political structure of the Meitei kingdom. Loiyamba also introduced some sort of functional specialization. The ‘Thangjam’ (surname of a clan) had the specific function of making swords, spears, axes and spade etc. while the ‘Lourungbam’ was concerned with cultivation and the ‘Usham’ was concerned with carpentry and allied industries. Any person who encroached upon the function of another was known as ‘Yumdangba’ (parasites). Loitongba (1112-50 A.D.), son of Loiyamba, was the next king and his reign was marked by the development of peaceful cultural activities. He was succeeded by his eldest son named, Atom Yoiremba who reigned for 13 years (1150-63 A.D). Atom Yoiremba was driven out by his brother, Hemton Iwanthaba, who engineered a conspiracy with the help of some nobles of the court. Hemton Iwanthaba reigned for 32 years (1163-95 A.D.)

17 Gangumei Kabui, op.cit, p.123.
18 N. Ibobi Singh, op.cit. p.27.
The reign of the next king, Thawanthaba (1195-1231 A.D.), was a landmark. He had defeated the Khumans and the Heirem Khunjaus, an ethnic group in south-west of Manipur. He was able to penetrate the hill areas inhabited by various tribal groups surrounding the valley of Manipur. He kept his kingdom more unified. Chingthanlanthaba (1231-43 A.D.) succeeded his father, Thawanthaba and defeated the Khumans and the Kabaw, a Shan group from the Chindwin River basin at a hill village known as Mapithen in eastern hills. His reign was not that eventful. He was succeeded by his son, Thingbaishilungba, who had a short reign of five years (1242-47 A.D.). Puranthaba (1247-63 A.D.) ascended the throne of the Ningthouja kingdom in 1247 A.D. The Khumans were totally absorbed into the kingdom of Manipur during his reign. He suppressed the Chakpas of Moiching village and other villages along the Thoubal River.\(^\text{19}\)

Khumomba’s reign (1263-78 A.D.) marked the beginning of further extension of the Ningthouja kingdom to the east and was into immediate hostile contact with Shan dwellers of Kabaw valley in Chindwin basin of Upper Burma. The Khumans were defeated by the Shans and the Khuman sent for military help from the Meitei king. The Meitei forces defeated the Shans. Khumomba also raided the Thangal and Maram villages to the north and west of Manipur valley. Khumomba was succeeded by his son, Moiramba in 1278 A.D. whose reign was characterized by fights with Khumans and Moirangs. He defeated a tribal village called Aibitok in the Maku River basin. He died in 1302 A.D and was succeeded by his son, Thangbi Lanthaba who had reigned up to 1324 A.D. He defeated the Moirangs and invaded the Maring Khunbi village and Sekkuching village in the Koubru hills. Kongyamba (1324-1335 A.D.) succeeded Thangbi Lanthaba and defeated the tribals of Kongyang village in the western hills. He also raided Tendongyan, Ingenching (Hinglan Ching) to the west of the kingdom. His reign was marked by the invasion of his kingdom by a group of people from the west. The invaders were defeated in the battle fought at Ingenching (Hinglen Ching) and were captured as

\(^{19}\) Gangumei Kabui, *op.cit.* p.135.
prisoners. These prisoners appear to be group of Bengal refugees who were driven out of Bengal by the Muslims and who came to Manipur through the hill routes for shelter.\textsuperscript{20}

Khongyamba was succeeded by his son, Telheiba (1135-55 A.D.) who was succeeded by his younger brother Tonaba who had a short reign of five years (1355-59 A.D.). He was succeeded by Tabungba (1359-94 A.D.). Tabungba invaded Chingsong village but was killed by the Ching Chief, Khamlanba. He was succeeded by his son Lairenba (1394-98 A.D.) who died without any issue. His death was followed by an interregnum of five years. Punshiba who became the next king was the younger brother of Lairemba. His reign (1404-32 A.D.) was extended to a large number of tribal villages in the surrounding hills, Moirang and Thanga Kambong in the western part of the Imphal valley. The kingdom of Ningthoujas had become greatly strengthened by the military exploits of the king.

The next king Ningthou Khomba (1432-67 A.D.), son of Punshiba, was an aggressive ruler that he was described as ‘a worthy son of a worthy father’.\textsuperscript{21} He was determined to expand the territory boundary of the kingdom by following the policy of aggression and conquer of the neighboring areas. As his father had already expanded the kingdom by covering most part of Manipur valley, north-western, north and north-eastern hills, he had to expand the kingdom by coming into conflict with the principality of southern Manipur valley, the Moirang country or the Shan principalities or villages in the east and in the western part of the Chindwin basin of Upper Burma. His soldiers raided the Shan villages, entered every house and killed the queen of the Shan Chief of Tamu. He also defeated the Moirangs. The Meitei king’s writ was fully established in the whole of Manipur valley. The feudal structure of the land was fully developed during his reign.\textsuperscript{22}

Thangwai Ningthouba (1467-1508 A.D.), also known as Kyamba, ascended the throne at the age of 24 years. The area between Tripura on the south, Cachar Mulugrun on the west and Assam on the north was under his influence. Being allied with Kikhomba, the Pong king, Thangwai Ningthouba conquered kyang or Kyang Khambat, a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{20} Gangumei Kabui, \textit{op.cit}, p.137
\bibitem{21} R.K. Jhalajit Singh, \textit{op.cit}, p.70
\bibitem{22} Gangumei Kabui, \textit{op.cit}, p.140.
\end{thebibliography}
Shan kingdom in the kabaw valley. The territory of Manipur was extended widely by this time. The kingdom of Manipur was a full-fledged sovereign country with internal and external independence. All the booties of war were kept in the royal barns. For the better collection of revenue, two revenue circles, *Ahallup* and *Nahalup*, each under a supervisor, were created. An image of Durga was worshipped in a specially built temple dedicated to her. The image of Lord Bishnu presented to him by Kikhomba, king of Pong, was worshipped in a temple at Bishenpur. But no records are available to show that he was formally initiated to Vaishnavism.²³

During his reign there was migration of Brahmins to Manipur. They were employed to look after the Hindu temples and to act as astrologers. There were other non-Brahmin migrants, Leirikyengbams, who were employed as royal scribes. The Shans or Pongs or Kabaws also came to Manipur and became the subjects of the ruler of Manipur in Kabaw valley. The rulers who succeeded Thangwai Ningthouba/Kyamba were weak and their reigns were characterized by internal instability and stagnancy. There were six rulers between 1508 A.D. and 1562 A.D.²⁴

Mungyamba (1562-1597), the 45th king of Manipur, was an efficient ruler. He defeated the Mungyang, a principality near the Kabaw valley. He attacked Samsok twice in 1571 and 1591 and returned with war booties. It was during his reign that the Meitei kingdom had fully established suzerainty over Manipur valley and the surrounding hill region, the Tangkhul hills and Kabaw valley. Wax-coated shirts to avoid rain were introduced and silver crowns were also adopted during his reign. The king established ‘*Ametpa Loishang*’ - the department of medicine men. It was a sort of medical department and its head was the queen.

Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.) ascended the throne at the age of twenty four and was fully equipped to preside over the affairs of the state and guide the duties of his people and the empire. During his reign, he tried to consolidate his rule in Kabaw valley, check the Muslim invasion from the west and establish his hold over the whole hill area. According to Chronicles, the Meitei king attacked the principal Chinese village or town

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²³ N. Ibobi Singh, *op.cit*, p. 29.

²⁴ The six rulers who ruled Manipur between 1508 A.D. and 1562 A.D. were Koiremba (1508-12), Lam kyamba (1512-24), Nonginphaba (1524), Kabomba (1524-42), Thangjanba (1542-45) and Chalamba (1545-62).
along with many brave Meitei warriors and defeated the Chief Choupha Hongdei.\textsuperscript{25} The propitiation of animistic deities and the custom of smoking tobacco pipe began in Manipur during his time. The Manipuri script was improved in 1616 and taught to his royal sons. He patronized many Pandits headed by Lourembam Khongnangthaba.\textsuperscript{26} The feudal system was perfected during his reign. He introduced very elaborate social etiquettes and rules for performance of duties by different officials at the court. The nobility who formed the backbone of the state system was further strengthened with the idea that unity and harmony among the nobles would strengthen the kingdom and enhance the prestige and power of the king. He also gave encouragement and respect to the Chiefs of the hill tribes. \textit{Lallup} system continued to be the steel frame of the state system. But he modified the land tenure and land revenue system within the \textit{Lallup}. The land owners were to pay paddy as tax of rent to the state. Practice of payment in little cash (\textit{\textquoteleft sel\textquoteright}) was introduced and the administration of revenue circles known as \textit{\textquoteleft Panas\textquoteright} were strengthened.

Khunjaoba (1652-66), son and successor of Khagemba, ascended the throne in 1652 after the death of his father. He improved the town of Imphal. He dug a moat round the palace and made it impregnable. He carried out military expeditions both in Kabaw valley and some hill areas within the kingdom. There was more contact between Manipur and Assam as well as Tripura. Paikhomba (1666-97), son of Khunjaoba’s brother Tonaba, succeeded the throne in 1666. He killed many tigers while reclaiming jungles necessitated by the increase in population.\textsuperscript{27} Manipur had trade relations with Burma, Cacher, and Tripura and the objects of trade were mostly elephants and horses. Many immigrants including Brahmin settlers from Gujarat, Vanarasi, Bridavan and Prayang came to Manipur during his reign. There was improvement of roads and communications in the valley. Salt wells were improved in 1693.\textsuperscript{28} During his time, the tribute from the Kabaw valley consisted of silver, armour, caps and canopies were obtained. He raided successfully Shamjok and Tripura. Theft was of a very rare occurrence.

\textsuperscript{25} Cheitharol Kumbaba, p.21
\textsuperscript{26} N. Ibobi Singh, \textit{op.cit}, p.31
\textsuperscript{27} R.K. Jhalajit Singh, \textit{op.cit}, p.10
\textsuperscript{28} N. Ibobi Singh, \textit{op.cit}, p.32.
During the period 1697 to 1826, Manipur experienced social, cultural and religious transformation the impact of which changed the whole social and cultural scenario of Manipur. The period was a revolutionary era in which Manipur was converted into Hinduism. The political zenith during this period was associated with a powerful process of sanskritization of society, culture and history and even the identity of Manipur. In this process of change, three kings, - father, son and a great grandson – Charairongba, Garibaniwaza and Bhagyachandra played very important roles.

After the death of Paikhomba, his nephew Charairongba ascended the throne in 1697. During his reign (1697-1709), a large number of Brahmins entered Manipur. He was formally initiated to Vaishanavism and built a brick temple of Lord Krishna at Bramhapur Guru Aribam Leikai which still exists. He was in close contact with the Burmese. He invited the hill Chiefs of the east and made personal friends with them. As Imphal valley was thickly populated with tigers, leopards, wolves and monkey, the tiger menace was really great. Protection from the menace was the responsibility of the state, especially the monarch.\textsuperscript{29} He enforced strict punishments for crimes. Even thieves were condemned to death.

Garibaniwaza (1709-1748), the next ruler, was a great king of Manipur of whom any country or nation could be really proud of. The fame of him rests on his military conquests which were classified into three fronts – the first was military expedition towards the hill tribes for internal consolidation, the second was the war against Burma and the third was the war against Tripura. He was the greatest conqueror and military leader Manipur ever produced.\textsuperscript{30} A number of reasons were responsible for the success of Manipur in the wars against Burma and Tripura. Garibaniwaza and his predecessors had built up a strong state system based on sound economy with enough natural resources in Manipur and kabaw valley. The hill tribes gave a strong support to the king and the most important factor was the well organized military force. Manipur’s infantry were well known for skill in swordsmanship, use of spear and personal bravery. Every Manipuri soldier was a foot soldier, a horse soldier, a boatman and a sailor soldier. The cavalry

\textsuperscript{29} Gangumei Kabui, \textit{op.cit}, p.235
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid}, p. 240.
equipped with the deadly ‘arambai’\textsuperscript{31} was the most effective wing of State force and it became a terror to all her neighbours.

Garibaniwaza was also a great religious reformer and played the pivotal role in the introduction of Hinduism in Manipur. His court was greatly influenced by the Brahmin priests, specially the royal preceptor, Shanta Das, who was involved in all spheres of Manipur’s life. However, despite the adoption of Hindu titles, the structure of the monarchy and other government apparatus remained the same. He introduced the Hindu system of ministers known as Mantris. The office of the mantri or minister was an additional post created by him over and above the traditional Meitei court known as ‘Ningthou Pongbas’ which were interpreted as something like ministers. The form of punishment continued to be severe, like the cutting of limbs and exile to penal settlements.\textsuperscript{32} His reign was characterized by burning of ‘Meitei Puyas’ (ancient scripture of Manipur), destruction of the abodes of traditional deities, intensification of Sanskritization and identification of Meitei festivals with Hindu festivals. But the efforts of the king and his preceptor to destroy the ancient Meitei religion failed due to opposition by the traditional followers of the ancient religion. Therefore, the king and Shanta Das agreed to the acceptance of ‘Sanamahi’ (indigenous religion of Meeteis) as distinct and important God and practice of the old religious ceremony and beliefs though outwardly, the Hindu forms were enforced and accepted.\textsuperscript{33}

After killing his father, Garibaniwaza, Chit Shai (1748-52) ruled for four years. Though he was a very unpopular ruler, he tried to revive the traditional Meitei religion by persecuting the converts. Chit Shai’s brother, Bharat Shai drove out the patricide king from the throne instead of killing him to avoid further bloodshed among royal brothers and exiled him to Cachar.\textsuperscript{34} Bharat Shai was again driven out of Manipur and exiled to the Shan principality in Upper Burma. After expulsing Bharat Shai, Maramba or Goursham (1753-58) ascended the throne of Manipur. He was assisted by his younger brother Bhagyachandra who was made the crown prince and his uncle Ananta Shai was

\textsuperscript{31} It is a little heavier and bigger arrow with string and feather of the cocks, carried in numbers on both sides of the saddle on the horse, on the neck side of the horse, was used for attack and defence against enemy army.
\textsuperscript{32} Gangumei Kabui, \textit{op.cit}, p.260
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid}, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{34} Chetharol kumbaba, p.108.
appointed senapati. In 1758, there was Burmese invasion and this led the king and people fled to the hills and after the departure of the Burmese returned to the capital. In 1759, Gourashyam abdicated the throne in favour of his younger brother Bhagyachandra. But in 1762 Bhagyachandra stepped down from the throne as atonement for killing a Brahmin Brahmacharya by his servants and Gourashyam became king again. In 1762 Gourashyam died and Bhagyachandra became the king once again.

In 1764, Bhagyachandra, also known as Jai Singh, had to flee to Cachar due to Burmese invasion. He affected a friendship with the Ahom ruler who agreed to send an expedition to Manipur to drive away the Burmese. In 1767, Bhagyachandra with the help of the Ahoms regained the throne of Manipur by killing the titular ruler, khellemba. In 1769, the Burmese again invaded Manipur and defeated Bhagyachandra. In 1770, Kukila was made the titular ruler of Manipur. However, Bhagyachandra drove away the Burmese and regained the throne. The Burmese under Hsinyu shin continued to harass Manipur by minor skirmishes till 1782. But by 1782, Manipur became completely independent again. Bhagyachandra moved from heaven to earth for forty years to defend against invasion and liberate from foreign rule. He was a good administrator that even during the repeated Burmese occupation of the kingdom; he was able to run the administration very efficiently. He had support from every circle. His reign was also marked by propagation of Vaishnavism, installation of the wooden statue of Sri Govindajee, beginning of Ras Leela and Bengali cultural influence.

After the death of Bhagyachandra in 1799, Manipur experienced political instability due to fratricidal conflicts among the sons of Bhagyachandra. This led to foreign intervention and ultimately, the Burmese conquest of Manipur. The political instability weakened the state structure and the monarchy on which the fortune of the kingdom depended much. There were intrigues and conspiracies among the ambitious princes whose love for power had no limits even at the cost of the country. Manipur also was affected by the Burmese imperialism in the east and the British expansionism in the west.
Labanyachandra (1798-1801), the eldest son of Bhagyachanda, ascended the throne at the age of 44. He tried to restore and revive the important religious places in the ancient Kangla, the capital of the kingdom. He also constructed a royal residential building at the Kangla. In 1799, he was successful driving away the Burmese who invaded the Kabaw valley and burnt down the town of Tamu which was within the territorial boundary of Manipur. He was assassinated by Angom Chandramani. Modhuchandra (1801-1804), the third son of Bhagyachanda, ascended the throne when he heard of the assassination of the king. In order to please his royal brothers who could create trouble he appointed Chourajit, his half brother as Yubaraj and Marjit Singh as Senapati. In 1802, Yubaraj Chourajit revolted against the king but was defeated. He fled to Cachar.

Chourajit Singh (1804-1813) again invaded Manipur and ascended the throne in February, 1804 by defeating Modhuchandra and made him fled to Cachar. He made Marjit Singh, who was an exceedingly ambitious young prince the Yubaraj of the kingdom. Marjit Singh conspired to capture power but failed in his conspiracy and escaped to Burma. In 1813, a Burmese military expedition accompanied by Marjit Singh defeated Manipur and this led king Chourajit and Prince Gambhir Singh fled to Cachar to take refuse. Marjit Singh was installed as the king of Manipur in 1813 by the Burmese who accepted latter’s suzerainty and ceded Kabaw valley to Burma. He bargained his independence and Kabaw valley for the kingship of Manipur. Marjit Singh gradually asserted himself as an independent ruler making his vassalage under the Burmese a mere promise. In 1818, he constructed a gilded royal residence with seven rooms and this very act was considered an offence by the Brumese ruler. Burma was at the zenith of power and the new king Bagyidaw (1819-37) summoned the Manipur king to be present at his coronation ceremony at Ava and pay homage to him which was customary for any vassal ruler of Burma. Marjit Singh did not comply the royal summon and refused to attend the ceremony on the plea that he apprehended troubles from his brothers Chourajit singh and Gambhir Singh. The Burmese invaded and conquered Manipur 1819 and they rule Manipur through puppet rulers for seven years. This period from 1819 to 1826 is still remembered in Manipur as ‘Chahi Taret Khuntakpa’ (Seven Years Devastation). It was during this period that the Burmese domination over Manipur reached its extreme height
with a devastating impact that the country was left practically with no ruler. The male population was reduced to a very low level as majority of them were forcibly taken to Burma.

2.3 Power and Functions of the Raja

During the period 33 AD to 1709, the Raja did not exercise autocratic power. He was bound by customs and conventions. Any violation of them had resulted in house imprisonment. He was also not permitted to attend to his royal functions. Even his private life was regulated by laws and customs. The nobility exercised tremendous influence over the Raja before 1709. However, since 1709 the influence of the nobility began to decline. The Raja remained the final appellate judge. He could interfere at any time in any case in which he was interested.

During the period 1709 to 1907 the Raja was more concerned with the maintenance of security of his kingdom. He had to meet external aggression on several occasions. Consequently, the administration was more concerned with war preparation than with the administration of local and development was, thus, completely neglected. The law of primogeniture often broke down and any powerful man within the Ningthouja clan could be the Raja. Only males should succeed the throne. Further, the principle of adoption was sometimes resorted to. The Raja was the fountain of honour and the commander in chief. All the honours emanated from him. All officers of the army, cavalry and navy were appointed by, and responsible to, the Raja. However, the Raja did not command armies in civil wars. The Raja was also the Chief-Priest of the country. But his appearance in priestly capacity was infrequent and strongly limited to great calamities.

The Raja was assisted by a council of ministers and the relation between them was cordial. Before 1709, both the Raja and his council of ministers were co-ordinate

authorities. However, after 1709, the powers of the ministers gradually declined and those of the king steadily increased. Most of the ministers were men of capacity, integrity and experience and they rendered sound service to the king. They were selected by the king from among the 32 leaders of the 32 divisions of Manipur. Ministership was not hereditary. Formerly selection was based on merit. But later on, the sons of the Raja became ministers. Security reasons might have been the cause of this arrangement. Ministers were collectively responsible for efficient administration of the state. Individually, they were responsible for the administration of different departments such as revenue, food and jail departments.\footnote{N. Ibobi Singh, \textit{op. cit}, p.240} Therefore, the ministers were executive officers. There was no separation of powers. One and the same minister exercised all the powers – legislative, executive and judiciary. The arrangement was not only responsible for the prompt execution of cases but also for the loss of liberties of the people. Ministers were collectors of revenue from their respective circles. New lands would be reclaimed and in this connection the minister was also a record keeper.

All the ministers were expected to command an army in the battlefield. They often led expeditions. The Raja often consulted them in military matters. Each of them exercised almost the same powers in his jurisdiction. Since these high officials exercised tremendous powers there was much room for corruption, favouratism and nepotism. Some of them appropriated a portion of the fines inflicted on convicts and those criminals who could not pay fines were reduced to slavery. The headquarters of administration was in the valley. The hill was divided into five sub-divisions. Due consideration was given for the administration of Imphal. The town was divided into four ‘Leikais’ (localities) – Khwai, Yaiskul, Khurai and Wangkhei. The head of each \textit{leikai} (locality) was a minister.

\subsection*{2.4 British officials in the administration of Manipur}

From 1819 till the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo 1826, Manipur was under the Burmese occupation for seven years which was/is known as ‘\textit{Chahi Taret Khuntakpa}’
(Seven Years Devastation) in the history of Manipur. The kings who rule Manipur under the suzerainty of the Burmese include – Yumjaoba (1820), Gambhir Singh (1821), Jadu Singh (1822), Raghu Singh (1823) and Bhadra Singh (1824-25). By the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, Manipur was liberated from the clutches of the Burmese occupation and Gambhir Singh was recognized as the Raja of Manipur. The treaty however paved the way for British interference in the administration of Manipur. In 1835 Captain Gordon was appointed the political agent of Manipur to advice and regulates the conduct of administration of the Raja. The presence of a political agent was considered necessary to check the frequent and devastative expeditions of the Burmese and to safeguard the country from civil wars.

The posting of a political agent had a far-reaching effect. Before 1835, civil wars, murder, devastation and misery were the order of the day. After 1835 law and order were maintained. It appeared as if that without the political agent at Imphal, there would have been anarchy in Manipur. When there was a temporary vacancy in the office of the political agent after the retirement of McCulloch (1844-62 and 1863-67), Raja Chandrakriti requested the government of India for the immediate appointment of the successor.\(^39\)

In 1851, the government of India declared their determination to uphold the cause of the then Raja and to resist and to punish any party attempting thereafter to dispossess him of his power. This declaration had resulted in the increase of the powers and functions of the political agent. As the price of protection afforded to him, the Raja had to submit to the increasing control of the British. The responsibility of the political agent was therefore two fold – first, to protect the Raja against internal rebellion and external aggression and second, to protect the subjects against the oppressive rule of the Raja. Beside these, he had to insist upon the Raja for the fulfillment of treaties negotiated between Manipur and the British government. Some of the political agents involved themselves in some social activities. For instance, Captain Gordon introduced English vegetables and fruits. McCulloch prevented the slavery trade of the Kukis and James

\(^39\) N. Ibobi Singh, *op.cit*, p.239.
Johnstone was responsible for spreading English education in Manipur. Of course, these functions were optional but they conferred permanent benefit on the people of the state.

Manipur lost her sovereignty in her last war of independence against the British (Anglo-Manipur war) in 1891 and up to 1907, the state was administered by the British officials on behalf of the minor king (only six years old) Churachand Singh. Afterwards, Maharaja Churachand ruled the state and was responsible for the administration of the state as a whole. The king was assisted by a Darbar (an advisory council) consisting of one Indian civil service (ICS) officer and six Manipuri members in the daily administration of the state.

2.5 Turning point

The period from 1938 - 48 marked a turning point in the political history of Manipur. It was during this period that the first batch of educated elites emerged in Manipur. Prominent among them was Hijam Irawat Singh. The socio-political system in Manipur at that time was monarchical under the British colonial rule and people were subjugated to both native monarchy and the foreign imperialism. There were only a few people who stood and fought against the king and who refused to toe line with the establishment. Irawat was the pioneer of such group of people.\textsuperscript{40} He was constantly disturbed about the deteriorating condition of the people under the British imperialism and constantly thought of ways to drive out the imperialists from Manipur and Indian soil.\textsuperscript{41} Irawat along with his friends Bankabihari Sharma, Lalit Madhob Sharma, Kanhai, Bijoy, Megha etc started a great revolution against the practice of ‘amang-aseng’ (pollution-purity) prevalent in Manipur. Irawat was deeply influenced by the writings of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Tilak, Bhagat Singh, Khudiram, Subash Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi and Gorky etc that he was determined to root out all kinds of exploitation and establish a new classless socialist society. The new educated elite groups were against the traditional social system upheld by the traditional elites. They began to question the rights and privileges of the traditional

\textsuperscript{40} For details, see Kshetri Rajendra, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 47-59

\textsuperscript{41} S. Chhatradhari, “\textit{Manipurgi Itihasta Irawat}”, Imphal, Manipur State krishak Sabha, 1972, quoted in Kshetri Rajendra, \textit{ibid.}, p. 48.
elites. There was the demand for the establishment of a responsible government in Manipur and this demand was closely related with the birth of a political party in Manipur. The people of Manipur came to know about the working system of a political organization for the first time in the year 1938. Before this, there was no political party in Manipur.\textsuperscript{42} The establishment of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha in 1934 changed the entire scenario. Some of the leading members of this organization, mostly educated elite, had strongly felt the immediate need for a political organization in Manipur and work for introducing a new political and administrative system based on the principle of democracy. Initially, the Mahasabha was established as a social and religious organization with Maharaja Churachand as its president. However, the driving force behind the Mahasabha was Hijam Irawat Singh, the vice-president, who actually wanted a platform for mobilizing the people. Under Irawat’s leadership, the Mahasabha at its Chinga session in 1938 demanded, among other things, the introduction of fully responsible government in the state. After this session the Maharaja of Manipur declared the Mahasabha as a political party and no government servant was allowed to be member of this party. The Mahasabha became a political party and its original name “Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha” was subsequently changed into the Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{43}

In 1939, a new political party called Praja Sanmelani was formed with Hijam Irawat as the leader. The main objectives of the party were abolition of colonial and feudal rules and establishment of a responsible government in Manipur and the party started a peaceful and non-violent political agitation against the practices of feudalism and colonialism. Again, in 1945 a new party – Praja Sangha party – was established whose main aim and objectives include working for the achievement of independence of Manipur, abolition of feudal rule, establishment of a responsible government and introduction of adult universal franchise in the country. This party also strongly stressed the need for having a classless society in the country. During this time, Krishi Sanmelani – a peasant society – was fighting for the redress of the grievances of the peasants. In the


\textsuperscript{43} For details, see Kshetri Rajendra, \textit{op.cit.} pp. 47-59.
year 1946, it was converted into a political organization with a new name – the Manipur Krishak Sabha. It strongly emphasized the establishment of a responsible government in Manipur, introduction of adult universal franchise, the integration of the people of the hills and plains. Another important demand of this party was that all the cultivable land in Manipur should be transferred to the tillers. This party was indeed the only peasant based organization in Manipur.

2.6 Establishment of Congress Party

The Manipur Congress party was established in 4th October, 1946 at the initiative of some individuals, mostly educated people. Later on, this party became a unit of the All India Congress Committee. Like other parties, this party also emphasized strongly for the establishment of a responsible government on the basis of the principle of democracy, abolition of social injustice of the feudal rule. The birth of these political parties increased to a large extent the spirit of political consciousness among the people of Manipur and brought a sweeping change in the political system of Manipur.

The Maharaja of Manipur after sensing the increasing political development in India and the mood of the time issued a formal order to constitute a ‘constitution making committee’ to prepare a new constitution for the governance of the state on 12 December 1946. The said committee submitted the draft constitution to the Maharaja on 27th July, 1947. In fact, the enactment of Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 was the solid foundation for the establishment of a government based on democracy. After the lapse of the British paramouncy in August, 1947, Maharaja Bodhachandra (1941-55), the eldest son of Maharaja Churachand Singh, entered Kangla at Imphal and hoisted the National flag of Manipur bearing the Dragon God ‘Pakhangba’.

2.7 Merger to India

Under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947, assembly elections were held in 1948 on the basis of adult franchise and Manipur incidentally became the first to exercise
adult franchise in free India.\textsuperscript{44} A representative government was formed under the Chief-Ministership of Maharajkumar Priyobrata Singh, the younger brother of Maharaja Bodhachandra. However, the newly independent India and its government in New Delhi pressured the king to sign a merger agreement with India. Maharaja Bodhachandra signed the merger agreement under duress on 21\textsuperscript{st} September, 1949 AD at Shillong.\textsuperscript{45} Following the Merger Agreement Manipur was made a Part-C state. The President of India carried on the administration of the state through a Chief-Commissioner appointed by him. The Lok-Sabha and the Rajya-Sabha reserved the right of making laws of the Part-C state. Manipur from a Part-C state became a Union Territory in 1956.

\subsection*{2.8 General Election/Formation of First Government}

The first general elections after the merger were held in January, 1952. Manipur went to the polls to elect two members of Lok-Sabha and 30 members of the Electoral College (20 in the valley and 10 in the hills, constituted for electing a member of the Rajya-Sabha). The congress emerged as the single largest party with 10 members followed by Prajashanti with 3 members.\textsuperscript{46} The Electoral College recommended the names of 5 Advisors who eventually formed the Advisory Council of the Chief-Commissioner. The Advisors held different charges but were not responsible. Except recommending measures they did not enjoy any power.\textsuperscript{47} The will of the people was not reflected in the administration. The people, who had once experienced the rule of responsible government, even though for a brief period, cannot be expected to remain satisfied with the rule of bureaucracy.

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\textsuperscript{44} Kshetri Rajendra, \textit{op.cit.} p.46.
\textsuperscript{45} For a detailed account of how the Maharaja was made to sign the agreement, see, Kshetri Rajendra, \textit{ibid.} pp. 34-36.
\textsuperscript{46} Kshetri Rajendra, \textit{op.cit.} p. 39.
\end{flushright}
2.9 Up gradation to Legislature Assembly

Under the 7th Amendment Act (1956) of the constitution of India, a Territorial Council (TC) of 30 elected members was made. In 1957, Manipur went to polls to elect 2 members of the Lok-Sabha and 30 members of the TC in which the congress party emerged as the single largest party with 12 elected members followed respectively by the socialist party with 7 members, communist party with 4 members and 7 independents. The introduction of the TC was an important step towards the formation of a responsible government. But it aroused no or little enthusiasm among the people as the state for all practical purposes was governed by the centre through Chief-Commissioner. Under the Union Territories Act 1963, the TC was upgraded into a legislative Assembly with 30 elected members. M. Koireng Singh, leader of the Manipur congress legislative party who had the largest number of followers in the Assembly formed the government on 1st July, 1963. However, the state continued to be administered by the President through the Chief-Commissioner. The elected representatives of the people had to act under limitations and restraints. The government did not have the right to formulate policies, control finance and lead the executive and most importantly the elected members were denied their rights to take part in the election of the President who was directly responsible for the administration of the territory.48

The fourth general elections along with the Lok-Sabha election were held in 1967. The congress under the leadership of M. Koireng Singh formed the government. Almost all the independent members joined the ruling party. Manipur witnessed the politics of horse trading among the MLAs in a large scale after the 1967 election. A large number of the congress MLAs defected from the party and toppled the Koireng ministry. The defected members formed a new political party – Manipur People’s Party (MPP) under the leadership of Salam Tombi Singh, the then Speaker of the Assembly. A new Ministry was formed under the Chief- Ministership of L. Thambou Singh which was very short-lived and in fact lasted less than a fortnight again due to defections. Thambou himself redefected to congress which again came to power. There was thus great ministerial

48 Kshetri Rajendra, op.cit, p.40.
instability in the state due to defection and factionalism after the 1967 elections. Indeed, the 1967 election marked the beginning of a new trend, the politics of defection and redefection, which was to become a constant aspect of Manipur politics in later years. After the fourth general election, the congress began to decline and within a short period the congress ministry fell twice. The other political parties could not provide stable ministry either. The ministerial instability ultimately led to the imposition of President’s Rule and dissolution of the Assembly in 1969. And then, Manipur witnessed an all party demand for statehood. Manipur had come a long way from Advisory Council to Territorial Council and from Territorial Council to Territorial Assembly to finally emerge as a full-fledged state headed by a governor in 1972.

The first ‘state’ assembly elections were held in March 1972. It was fought mainly on local issues like economic development, unemployment, the need for transport facilities and the role played by the political parties in the statehood agitation. The 1972 election saw the end of congress dominance in the state politics and marked the emergence of a regional party as an alternative to the former. Though the congress remained the single largest party by securing 17 seats out of 60, it could not form the government. The MPP which captured 15 seats formed the United Legislative Party (ULP) with the help of Independents and other non-CPI parties. The ULP under the leadership of Md. Alimuddin, a leading Muslim politician, formed the government and a five member cabinet was inducted into office on 20th March 1972. The Alimuddin led ULP ministry, however, did not last long. It was toppled in March 1973 by massive defection. Indeed, the electoral politics in the state is marked by the politics of defection, redefection, coalition and counter coalition causing great political instability. From 1972 to 2001, three had not been any government which completed the tenure of five years. But the ministry or government formed under the leadership of Shri Okram Ibobi Singh on 7th March, 2002 completed its five years term. The ministry under his leadership has completed its second term in February, 2012. The ministry under his leadership was formed again on 14 March, 2012 for a third consecutive term.

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