Chapter IX

MANIPUR'S INTEGRATION WITH THE INDIAN UNION: 1949

Prelude

When the British announced their intention to transfer power to the Indians some selfish and ambitious leaders saw an opportunity to reap a rich harvest by creating political upheaval in the State. They made out a case for the immediate installation of a full responsible government and a constituent assembly composed of elected members; subsequently, a satyagraha was launched in the State. An election to the Legislative Assembly thereafter was held in which no single party could secure an absolute majority to form a government. It inevitably led to political instability in the State. In the meanwhile, the question of the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union became the principal political issue and the public opinion was sharply divided over it.

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1. In the election that was held in June 1948, the State Congress Party secured nineteen seats in a House of fifty-three. The ministry was formed by the Praja Santi Party in coalition with other parties. But the fall of the ministry was brought because of the lack of the cohesion among the members.
A section of people preferred rather the creation of a composite North-East India Frontier Province comprised of Cachar, Tripura, Manipur and Lushai hills; the another section desired to merge with Assam. Some leaders advocated the idea an independent Manipur. The Congress group led by Tomal Singh was alone committed to Manipur's integration with the Indian Union; and some of this group even threatened to launch a satyagraha if the integration was not effected forthwith. The Government of India was anxious to complete the merger of the princely states within the Indian Union to bring the political homogeneity and the democracy to all parts of India. When the first phase of the mergers was over only eight states were left unmerged, namely, Kashmir, Hyderabad, Benares, Tripura, Cooch-Behar, Khasi Hills States (including sixteen small units), Mysore and Manipur.


3. Ibid.
Impediments

However, Manipur underwent a great political turmoil before the merger was effected. The Hindustan Standard on May 28, 1947, reported that some leaders from the four adjoining states of Assam — Cooch-Behar, Tripura, Khasi Hills and Manipur — were to meet in a conference to be held in Shillong in June 1947, to discuss the problems arising out of the future constitutional changes. It was also learnt that these states, excluding Cooch-Behar, had nominated some of their delegates to represent their case with the Constituent Assembly. These small states were suspicious of whether their cultural identity would be preserved within the Union.

The position of Manipur was rather delicate. According to an unconfirmed report, the Anti-Fascist People's Federation League, the people of Manipur invited U Aung San, Deputy Chairman of the Burmese Interim Government, to visit their State. It was mentioned in the report that, the Manipuris

4. The Hindustan Standard (Calcutta), May 11, 1947, p. 3.
wished to roll into one with the State of Burma in order to establish a permanent tie with the same. It was also reported that U Aung San was expected to be flown to Manipur in May 1947, to meet with the leaders of Manipur. A news published in Rangoon on May 12, 1947, contained the clarification made by U Ba Choe, Information Minister of Burma, to the Associated Press of America, that '... his country would neither encourage the border State of Manipur to incorporate itself as a part of Burma, nor discourage the State from joining Burma' U Ba Choe added, 'you may be certain the Burma Government will refrain from interfering' with the decisions of the Manipuris. Further he firmly and confidently remarked that U. Aung San, Deputy Chairman of the Governor's Executive Council, would like to visit India for a discussion about the future of Manipur only if he were invited by Jawaharlal Nehru. But he was quite conscious of the desire of the Manipuris to mix with the Burmans; and he wished to go to Manipur for the purpose. At the same time U Ba Choe clarified that

8. Ibid.
'Burma has no wish to encroach upon other's territories. When the Burmese Government has given to States within Burma the right of self determination for deciding whether they should amalgamate with Burma proper or not, it is unlikely that Burma would seek an outside state to merge irrespective of past associations between Burma and the State'.

Whatever the case might be the Burmese would have definitely liked the merger of Manipur with them. In a Rangoon information of May 11, 1947, it was described clearly that Manipur was once a part of Burma some one hundred years ago. Later, it came out of Burma when the Britishers overrun the country. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say, with no partiality, that the Burmese leaders wanted that Manipur should come and join Burma. In support of this view it would be appropriate to quote the words of U Ba Choe, which are as follows, 'The Manipuris being Hindus may not want association with Muslim Bengal, but that is a matter for the Indian Government to decide ...'.
In the meantime, the Communist Party of Manipur was carrying out subversive activities near the Burma-Manipur boundaries. The Communist infiltration in Manipur was repeatedly reported from time to time. It was reported from Shillong that a few Communist insurgents had entered into Ukhru (in the north-east of Manipur) and lifted the rifles from the hill people.\footnote{11} It was also informed that considerable arms and ammunitions including the modern weapons had been smuggled by the underground Indian Communists into Assam through Manipur from the Red-held areas of Upper Chindwin and the Hukang valleys in Burma. The Manipuri Communists were reported to have taken part in this activity. It was the time when the Communists movement in the north-east region of India was rapidly increasing.\footnote{12}

The report that there had been a move for the inclusion of Manipur in the Burmese territory was highly described as fabrication by two Congress leaders-cum members of the executive of the Manipur State Congress Party. The two gentlemen — Krishna

\footnote{11. \textit{The Amrita Bazar Patrika} (Calcutta), March 5, 1949, p. 5.} \footnote{12. \textit{Ibid.}, July 23, 1949, p. 5.}
Mohan Singh and Jogeshwar Singh — clarified their stand in a statement published in a local newspaper, that the 'Manipuris would resent this fantastic report. This is a sinister move engineered by few followers of the C.P.I. in Manipur State. The State Congress and the people could not even dream of it and were deadly against it'. Further, it added, 'Not to speak of incorporation of Manipur into Burma, the State Government and the people now demanded for bringing under the direct control and administration the Kabaw valley, the area between the Anglo hills in Burma and Moreh of Manipur for which the British Government have been passing an annual tribute to the State'. These two leaders assured that Manipur being a Hindu State would not like to join Burma whose religion had been ethnically quite different from the Manipuris. Hence, Manipur would rather prefer to merge with the Indian Union. The two Congress posed that the Congress party of Manipur as 'only a nationalist party' which

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
According to him Manipur being culturally different from other states would prefer to be independent.

As the Government was well informed of the Communist activities in Manipur, several efforts were made to arrest Irabot who had been underground for a long time; but the State Government could never catch hold of him alive. At last he died in Rangoon. The political situation in Manipur favoured the Communists to be dealt with firm hands. Analysing all the facts of the political development in Manipur, the Government of India decided to bring the State under the grip of the Centre. And it was the dream of Patel to see India consolidated. 18

The problem of merger was to be solved urgently as Manipur had the international boundary with Burma. The Indian leaders were aware of the old feud between Burma and Manipur over the issue of the Kabau Valley. The British Raj had ceded the Kabau Valley to Burma under the treaty of Yandaboo signed in 1825. The Indian leaders foresaw that in the future the trouble might ensue on the issue of the Kabau Valley. This would surely disturb the

neighbourly relations of India with the independent Burma. In the meanwhile, the clashes on the Manipur-Burma border had been reported from time to time. 19

Besides, the Naga frontier problem was also there. Athiko Daiho, a Mao Naga leader openly and boldly demanded the separation of the Naga inhabited areas of Manipur and Assam with a view to form a separate Naga State. He wanted that the Nagas of Manipur should join their brotheren Nagas of Assam. He further advocated for the establishment of an Eastern Frontier Hill Federation within or without an independent India so that the existence of their nationalities, rights and privileges would be recognised by India. 20 As to the reaction of the hill people's demand, Khoimacha Singh, a Congress leader, said that '... the Manipur State Congress stand for solidarity of His Highness's territories, the people of Manipur will resist any attempt as dismemberment of the State by any section.' 21 It

19. Ibid., September 12, 1949, p. 3.


21. Ibid.
was reported that Daiho's men were engaged in collecting taxes on potatoes. The cutting of the telephone-lines, the telegraph wires and the interference with the despatch of the mails were also reported. For the security measures, the Assam Rifles were stationed at several disturbed areas. 22 The Mao Nagas demanded the Government for the immediate withdrawal of the imposition of rice duty on them. They thought that it was a repressive measure on the part of the State Council on the Mao Nagas who were fighting and leading the other Naga tribes of the State to amalgamate themselves with the Nagas of the Naga Hills on the basis of their closer affinity with them. 23 Later, the Naga National League was formed in the early part of 1948 under the Presidentship of Pukeni and Athikho Daiho

22. The Hindustan Standard (Calcutta), September 1, 1948, p. 3.

23. The Mao Nagas in Manipur consumed a fair amount of rice from the Manipur valley. No duty was ever known to be imposed on rice movement within Manipur when the white folk (Britishers) were in power. Immediately after the resumption of power by the Manipuris (Meiteis), the imposition of duty on rice commenced at the rate of four annas per maund in December (1947) last. Since then the duty had been enhanced up to two rupees per maund and was actually realised.
as its Secretary. The political aim of the league was to represent the cause of the Nagas. On January 24, 1949, the Mao Nagas submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Prime Minister of India Dominion, demanding the consolidation of the Naga inhabited areas under one administrative unit. They further suggested that a referendum might be called to ascertain the wishes of the Nagas of Manipur.

In the Naga Hills (now Nagaland), Imti Aliba Ao, the first President of the 'Naga National Council', said that he would be giving an ultimatum to the Prime Minister of India and the Assam Governor. He

24. The Naga National League was the only political organization set up in order to work and consolidate the Nagas of Manipur. It pledged itself to stand together with other hill tribes in the state as well as outside it in order to demand self-determination of the hill peoples in general without in any way injuring the general interest of Assam and India.


26. The Naga Hills District Tribal Council which was established under the Chairmanship of Charles Pawsey in 1945 with an object to train the Nagas in the art of self-administration, had changed its name and the whole set-up to the Naga National Council in 1946. It stands in 1946: The solidarity of the Naga tribes, including those in the unadministered areas, which scattered all over the north-east hilly region of India and the north-west frontier of Burma. Its aim was to bring about amity and understanding among the different tribes. It strongly protested against the grouping of Assam with Bengal. It demanded the Naga Hills should be continuously included in an autonomous Assam in a free India, with local autonomy and due safeguards for the interests of the Nagas; and the Nagas should have a separate electorate.
threatened: If the authorities failed to look into the matter, the Naga Hills would automatically discontinue to be a part of the Indian Union from December 6, 1947. A delegation of the Naga leaders had flown to New Delhi to discuss with the appropriate authorities and the leaders what they described as 'their claim for independence' after the British withdrawal from India on August 15, 1947. It was understood that the delegation already met Gandhi and Jinnah and placed before them their view points. It was presumed that the movement was instigated by the Communist elements in Assam.

Angami Zapu Phizo, who became the President of the Naga National Council on December 11, 1950, was the person who dreamt of a larger Nagaland comprising of the whole Naga inhabited areas in the northeast frontier of India and the northwest frontier of Burma.

27. The Hindustan Standard (Calcutta), November 26, 1947, p. 3.
28. Ibid., July 22, p. 2.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., November 26, 1947, p. 3.
But the movement of Naga self-determination was as old as 1929; the issue had well-gripped the Naga minds and public opinion had already been moulded against the continual dominance of the Britishers over the Nagas. It was in the same year the Nagas had requested His Majesty's Government of Great Britain in vain 'to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times'. The Naga problem was discussed in the British parliament; the Government, however, was reluctant to endorse the Nagas' claim to self-determination.

Sir Reginald Coupland, a British constitutional expert, drew up a plan for the creation of a Crown Colony comprising of all the Naga contiguous areas of India and Burma; at the same time, the territorial integrity of it should be guaranteed by the Governments of India and Burma. But the Coupland plan was strongly criticised by Sir Andrew Clow, Governor of Assam, as impracticable, eventhough it received appreciations and supports from several British

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32. R. Reid, Years of Change in Bengal and Assam (London: 1966), p. 110.
politicians and officials. Sir Charles Pawsey, the last British Deputy Commissioner in the Naga Hills, made his own effort to revive the Coupland plan as an alternative to the Naga demand for complete independence, just before the termination of the British rule in India; but the Government of India was openly against his proposal and rejected the Coupland plan. Phizo outrightly branded it as a policy of British imperialism and colonialism.

On February 20, 1947, the Naga National Council submitted a memorandum to His Majesty's Government and the Government of India, demanding the setting up of an interim government of the people with financial provisions for a period of ten years at the end of which the Nagas should be left to choose an appropriate government under which they themselves choose to live. But unfortunately, on the issues of Naga self-determination and interim government, no agreement could be arrived at between the Naga National Council and the Government of India, despite many efforts on both sides.

On June 26, 1947, the then Assam Governor Sir Akbar Hydari held a three-day negotiation with the members of the Naga National Council. Engulfed
in a controversy on the interpretation of Clause 9 of the Hydari Agreement, 1947, the negotiation ended in a fiasco; otherwise Phizo asserted that the agreement envisaged that the Nagas would be independent after the expiry of the ten-year period. 33

A seven-member delegation of the Naga National Council consisting of Phizo, Khrisanisa, Kughato, Kezehol, John Angami, Theyiechuthie Sakhrie and Lhousituo met Gandhi on July 19, 1947, at Bhangi Colony, New Delhi. The delegation told Gandhi that the Nagas were never Indians and the Naga Hills had never been a part of the Indian territory; independence was certainly an inalienable right of the Naga people. Further, the delegates well apprised the Father of Nation that the Nagas would be celebrating August 15 as their Independence Day. They also complained of the intimidation of Hydari to use force if the Nagas declared independence, informing their apprehension to Gandhi. Gandhi replied that if the Nagas were not really willing to join the Indian Union, nobody would force them to do that. He

further rapped out: Hydari was wrong, and I would ask military men to shoot me first before one Naga was shot.  

Discarding the Hydari Agreement on August 14, 1947, the Naga National Council sent a telegram to the Government of India, intimating that the Nagas would be free to decide their own future at the end of the ten-year period. It so happened, Gandhi was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, a religious fanatic, on January 30, 1948, before he could come to Kohima, Nagaland, and settle the Naga case as he had promised. Then, Hydari came to an untimely end, on December 28, 1948, of a heart stroke at Thumbuthong in Manipur, leaving the Nagas in the lurch. After this tragedy, the Nagas thought that the then Chief Minister Gopinath Bordoloi could be something for them; but he had frustrated the Naga delegates whom he met on November 9, 1949, informing that the Government of India had no longer considered the Hydari Agreement to be existing. Destroyed the hopes of further negotiation, the Nagas now decided

to change their future course of politics, as they had developed in their minds some sort of doubts and misgivings on the good faith of the Indian Government.

On July 9, 1948, Phizo was arrested on the ground of possessing certain documents prejudicial to India's security. On the compassionate ground, he was released from the Presidency Jail of Calcutta on parole on December 18, 1948; then the Government of India extended the period of parole for a special medical treatment at the Welsh Mission Hospital, Shillong, as his wife and baby had met a vehicle accident on December 4, 1948 between the village of Khonoma and Jotsoma in Nagaland. Believing that Phizo had given up the anti-Indian political activities, Nari Rustomji, the then Political Advisor to the Assam Government, unconditionally set him free from the jail. But Phizo never changed his old path of the political propagation of the Naga independence and the anti-national activities. Later, the Phizoites resorted

35. Phizo quietly slipped out of India in 1957 and took political asylum in England. The seventy-four year old Phizo has been the President of the Naga National Council in absentia ever since his self-exile in London. He never came back to India. Still he claimed that the Nagas were never Indian citizens and

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to violence as a means of achieving Nagas' freedom; but even today, this had not brought a permanent solution in spite of relentless efforts by the Government to bring peace in Nagaland.

At the same time, the Mizo problem could not be overlooked; in other incident, the Mizo Union demanded Mizos' independence. A conference of the Mizo Union consisting of representatives from Manipur, Lushai Hills and Cachar was held at Lakhipur (in Cachar district), on November 21, 1946, with Bauichhuaka as the President. It resolved that all the Mizo areas in Manipur, Lushai Hills, Cachar district, Chittagong Hills Tract and other adjacent places should be amalgamated into one administrative unit and designated as the Mizoram district because all these people have a common culture, language, religion, geographical

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Nagaland was never an integral part of India. This was proved by his first ever dialogue, that hardly lasted some twenty minutes, with the Prime Minister Morarji Desai in India House, London, on June 14, 1977.

Even today, Phizo has been the source of political inspiration to the Naga people who have been demanding Naga independence for the last thirty-three years. The Nagas firmly believe that their problem cannot be solved without Phizo. The underground movement for a sovereign state of Nagaland is still in continuance.
contiguity and the most important of all is that the area occupies a strategic position from the point of defence. It demanded that the widest autonomy should be given to the Mizo district along with the right of representing in the Constituent Assembly; Not even before completing two months, it wrote to the President of the Constituent Assembly that its representative should be given membership in the Advisory Committee for the Tribal Areas of Assam. If it was excluded from the Constituent Assembly, the Mizo Union threatened that they would form a separate constitution exclusively for the Mizos. Then, they would decide whether they would seek the British protection for the time being, or join the Chin Hills in Burma and form a separate province within Burma, or declare an independent sovereign country.

The intricate politics among the members of the Mizo Union undermined the cause of independence: The Leftists submitted a memorandum to the Bordoloi

Committee when it visited Aijal, present capital of Mizoram, on April 17, 1947, stating that the Mizoland should be a part of India for a period of at least ten years after which they would decide what they would do with themselves. During this period they would govern themselves through a district council. The Rightists stood for complete independence; on the other hand, the two co-opted members of the Bordoloi Committee, Khautinkhuma and Saprawnga, on behalf of the Mizo people agreed to be a part of the Indian Union. Lalmauia, the founder of the United Mizo Freedom Organization, made up his mind to form an independent Chin state; later on, he opted to merge the Mizo Hills with Burma. But his proposal did not get much support from U Nu, Prime Minister of Burma. 37

In late 1948, the civil disobedience started in the Mizo Hills; it took mainly in the form of riotous assaults on the chiefs whom the commoners branded as exploiters. The Unionists reiterated their demand for the abolition of the oppressive systems of the village chiefs and the installation

37. Ibid., p. 515
of the district council. The Government of Assam hesitated to launch upon a drastic legislation as demanded by the Mizo Union. The Unionists, however, were pacified by Nari Rustomji, Political Advisor to the Governor on tribal affairs, when he visited the district in January 1949 with a promise to implement the Sixth Schedule; as a result, prior to the formation of the district council, the Lushai Hills District along got an Advisory Council. But the solution of the Mizo problem remained unfulfilled; in fact, the Mizos resorted to political violence as an immediate means of achieving independence. Nevertheless, the Government of India was not at all prepared to accept an independent Mizo-homeland.


39. Ever since the birth of the Mizo National Front, Laldenga as its President, was preaching openly complete independence. Laldenga who had been living in Delhi since July 1976 as a guest of the Government of India was arrested on July 8, 1979 from his residence on the ground of sedition, conspiracy and waging war against the State. On October 30, 1965, the Mizo National Front submitted a memorandum to the late Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, stating that the Mizos, from the time immemorial, lived in complete independence. The Mizo Hills had never been an integral part of India.

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Flanipur's Accession Achieved

Being aware of the political problems of the north-eastern region the Indian leaders were afraid that Assam might possibly developed fissiparous tendencies. The eastern region important as it was the geographically and strategically needed the fullest integration with the Indian Union to forestall all the possible dangers. The Union Government took the matter very seriously. It was understood that the discussion was started among the high political circles of Assam regarding the merger of the small states like Manipur, Cooch-

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It was thirteen years ago that the Mizo movement suddenly erupted into large-scale violence; the revolt came in the wake of a devastating famine in 1959. By March 1966, the Mizo National Front declared independence. Recently, the outlawed Mizo National Front launched the quit Mizoram movement on the plea that the non-Mizos were agents of the Centre; and in occupation of the Mizoram, they were spoiling Mizo nationalism. They were given ultimatum for leaving Mizoram for all by July 1, 1979. This had created a panic among the non-Mizos. However, the timely action of the police brought the tense situation under control. Subsequently, the Government has suppressed the Mizo insurgency with the help of a strong military operation. But force could not be an only means for the permanent solution of the Mizo problem. The repressive measures would make the local people more hostile to the Government. It would be better if the Centre could understand the real happenings in Mizoram; and this would mean initiating a dialogue with the Mizo leaders on sorting out things and evolving a satisfactory and a lasting solution to the problem plagueing that area.
Behar and Tripura in the Assam Province like that of eight states of Orissa, eight states of Deccan, etc. The matter was put up before Patel when he came to Assam. 40

With due reference to the question of the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union, a team of Sri Prakasa, Governor of Assam, A.B. Chatterjee, Joint Secretary, States Ministry of the Government of India and Rustomji, arrived at Imphal on March 22, 1949. This was followed up after the declaration of the States Ministry of the Government of India to corporate some of the states namely, Benaras, Rampur, Tehri Garwal states, Khasi Hills states, Cooch-Behar, Tripura and Manipur with the Indian Union as these with due regard to their geographical positions and other consideration. 41

The need for an immediate Central take-over of Manipur's administration was emphasized by Gopinath Bordoloi, Premier of Assam, in a letter


which he sent to Patel on May 4, 1949, in which he informed that '... the Central C.I.D. sometimes suspected the Communist leaders, Irabot Singh of Manipur as having received shelter in the place itself. It is now suspected that Irabot Singh is somewhere in Burma, acting in league with the Communists of Manipur. You have already seen what the R.C.P. is doing in Dum Dum. I have not the slightest doubt that the Manipur Government will not be able to do anything substantial to help the Assam Rifles or Our forces, if a serious situation arises'.

Further, he cautioned Patel that it would be '... dangerous to maintain a weak and vacillating State near our borders and also to give them independence to act as they liked'.

Patel himself confirmed that 'From a careful study of international affairs, it appears almost certain that the danger, if it comes to India, is likely to come from this Burma borders'.

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43. Ibid.

44. Ibid, pp. 517-18.
During this time the Manipur State Congress led by Tomal Singh was uproarious in demanding the abolition of the Maharaja's gaddi and the immediate take-over of the Manipur administration by the Centre. They had been agitating for a long time. Such an action of Tomal was never sympathized by the other Congress group led by Elangbam Tompok Singh. They were in the advocacy of the formation of 'Purbachal Pradesh' comprised of Tripura, Cachar, Lushai Hills and Manipur. This demand was even prevalent when the two rival Congresses were one; but the difference of opinion developed after the Congress split.

Criticising the resolution of Tomal's Congress, Laishram Achaw Singh, Secretary of the Manipur Socialist Party and one of the members of the Manipur State Assembly commented, 'The Manipur State Congress in its annual sitting on the 30th April last has committed another great blunder by asking the Government of India to take over the administration of Manipur State as a centrally administered area. The Congress while advocating the necessity of a strong government in this frontier State of Manipur has sought the direct intervention of the centre, in spite of the fact
that a more or less democratic form of Government has been set up in Manipur since the introduction of the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. But the Socialist Party of Manipur rejected the idea of a separate province. And 'It should be the duty of the Indian Government to consult the leaders of public opinion before they take any step on this matter. The Socialist Party of Assam has given the right lead by adopting the principle of a Federated Province of Assam where in the different cultural and linguistic groups in Assam should enjoy full cultural autonomy. The principle has never been questioned for the solution nor has any alternative been suggested for the solution of this complicated problem. The

45. The Hindustan Standard (Calcutta), April 16, 1949, p. 3. He further said: 'Any change of Government can only be brought about by peaceful and democratic means. We wonder how a political party wedded to non-violence and Khadi can adopt extra-constitutional methods for their own political end by calling their rivals bad names'. Moreover, a centrally administered autonomous unit of Manipur would become just a military outpost with little political and civic freedom, for which the Manipur people have fought since 1939. Their decision is premature and inopportune as they lack the necessary backing of the masses of Manipur'. Ibid.
Socialist Party would rather welcome a referendum in deciding the future relation of Manipur State with the Indian Union.46

Not long ago, the Congress led by Tomal decided to launch a satyagraha in the whole State in order to abolish the autocracy of the Maharaja. It was known that a delegation of three men—Krishnamohan Singh, a member of the Congress Working Committee, Shaugaizam Somorendra Singh and Dwijamani Dev Sharma—had left Imphal for Delhi in connection with the recent political development. The programmes of the political mission was to meet some Congress high commands like, Pattabi Sitaramayya, President of the Indian National Congress, Patel, Deputy Prime Minister of India, etc. They discussed the matter of the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union; and they gave word that if the Centre delayed and failed to work out the integration, they would immediately launch a satyagraha movement. It was expected that the three delegates would be laying down their demands before the Congress Working Committee's meeting to be held shortly in New Delhi.

46. Ibid.
The delegation would also put up an issue on the merger of Manipur with the Assam Province as totally unacceptable on the cultural and economic grounds. 46

Not later than a few days ago, Prakasa, Governor of Assam, accompanied by Rustomji, left Gauhati for Benaras en route to Delhi by air on September 4, 1949. The Premier of Assam was already in Delhi in connection with the future administration of Manipur (and other states). 49 In Delhi they had an hours-long discussion with the States Ministry on September 6, 1949. After the talk was over the Governor had left for Bombay. On September 8, 1949 the Governor accompanied by Rustomji met Sardar Patel, who was ailing at that time, at Birla House in Bombay. They apprised him of the political situation in Manipur. Patel reportedly asked him:

47. Ibid., July 10, 1949, p. 3.


49. The Hindustan Standard (Calcutta), September 6, 1949, p. 1.
'... is there no our Indian Brigadier?' It meant that force should be used if Manipur opposed the merger with the Indian Union. Now, the Governor fully understood what to do next; immediately he left Bombay for Shillong.

As soon as Prakasa reached Shillong, he invited Maharaja Bodha Chandra Singh, as advised by the Central leaders, to meet him at Shillong at an early date. It was clearly understood that the Maharaja had to be pressurized to sign the Instrument of Accession. As directed by the Governor of Assam, the Maharaja came to Shillong to discuss the future of his State. The policy and programme of the Government of India was placed before the Maharaja. After going through the typed documents prepared by the Assam Government according to the advice of the Central Government, the Maharaja did not wish to sign them as some of their provisions were unsavoury to him; in the meantime,


the Assam Governor informed Sardar Patel about his reluctance. The telegram of September 18, 1949, reads: 'Begins had discussions with H.H. (High Highness) of Manipur this morning H.H. threatens returning to Manipur without holding any discussion or signing agreement. H.H. must not under any circumstances be allowed to return to Manipur with his advisors and I have accordingly instructed police to be detained here his party if they attempt to return before signing of agreement. Please telegraph immediately repeat immediately authority for detention of H.H. and Advisors under Regulation III or by whatever other means you consider might be appropriate. Have already warned sub-area to be prepared for any eventually in Manipur. Grateful for further instructions. Ends. Will keep you

52. On the other hand, it was learnt that the Maharaja had informed the Chamber of Princes that he wanted Manipur to be grouped with Sikkim and the Khasi states and not with Tripura. Home Department, Political File No. 5(8), 1947, NAI, New Delhi.
closely informed of further development (if) here addressed.  

It was very clear that the Maharaja was not agreeable to certain conditions of the document of the merger agreement. He also knew that force would be used against him if he did not sign the agreement. He was in a confused state of mind. To avoid technical complications, the Maharaja requested the Governor to allow him to go back home as he would not be able to sign the agreement unless he consulted with the State Assembly. But that was a political gimmick only to escape from the critical situation. This intention of the Maharaja was already sensed by the Governor and his Advisor; so they were very eager to finalize the agreement as soon as possible before he left Shillong for Manipur. On the other hand, the Central leaders would have probably been apprehensive of a possible rebellion like that of 1891 to break out if the Maharaja was allowed to return to his State. The security arrangements,

therefore, were tightened along the borders of Manipur. The Maharaja had to be detained in Shillong unless he signed the documents of the agreement. The Governor pressurized the Maharaja at his best to do it; and he tempted the Maharaja that he would get a privy purse of a few lakhs for the whole of his life if he signed the agreement. At this moment, the Maharaja was conveyed a rumour that his younger brother Maharajkumar Priyabrata was to be installed as the Maharaja of Manipur. For him (Maharaja) this was just like a thunder in his brain. At last, the Maharaja afraid of the use of force on the part of the Government, jealous of his younger brother and lusty of the privy purse reconciled with his fate and agreed to sign the agreement. The final arrangements were made for the ceremony in the Government House in Shillong. Maharaj Bodha Chandra Singh executed the documents of the agreement of

54. After the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union, the Maharaja received a payment of Rs300,000/- annually free of all taxes to cover all expenses of the ruler and his family including expenses on account of his personal staff, maintenance of his residence, marriages and other ceremonies. The Amrita Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), December 27, 1949, p. 4.
the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union on September 21, 1949. 55

The culmination of Sardar Patel's 'Bloodless Revolution' was gradually completed. 56 The Union Government took over the administration of Manipur on October 15, 1949, and a Chief Commissioner was appointed. 57 The State Assembly was dissolved. Rawal Amar Singh, the erstwhile Dewan of Manipur, designated as the first Chief Commissioner took charge on the morning of October 15. 58


57. Ibid., October 16, 1949, p. 1.

58. Ibid., October 17, 1949, p. 7.
Chapter X

CONCLUSION

The present study aims at a historical survey of political development in Manipur since the revolt of 1890-91. Nine distinct periods of this process have been singled out for the detailed treatment in the preceding chapters.

The important events of these periods which have had any significant impact on the course of the State's political development have been thoroughly researched. To mention only few of them, in December 1917, the Thado Kukio who had responded poorly to the calls for the Labour Corps sent to France early in the year, broke into open armed rebellion. In 1930-32, Jadonang and Gaidinliu revolted against the British power in Manipur with a view to establishing a 'Naga Raj'. The question of Manipur's accession to the proposed Indian federation was greatly controversial during 1936-38. The Women's Bazar Agitation that took place in 1939 was a product of the economic and the political pressures in the State. From 1946 onwards Manipur saw a movement of political and constitutional reforms. Immediately after the independence a movement was started by the intelligentsia to form a North-East India Frontier Province along with Manipur, Cachar, Tripura and
Lushai Hills. But due to the lack of the popular support the political movement soon fizzled out.

Manipur in its present territorial limits has existed as an independent political unit for about 2,000 years. Ruled by a succession of dynasties, the State has in the past undergone many periods of civil strife, mutual killings, bloodshed and turmoil; the absolute rule of the rajahs came to an end with the dawn of the Indian independence in 1947.

Manipur differs from other states in history and culture due to its peculiar geographic location. It is situated in the most isolated and neglected eastern part of the Indian Union. It was a British protected State, under the superintendence and the control of the Assam administration. Though of small size, Manipur is rich in history. The State which came under the British control as a princely State in 1891, was merged in the Indian Union on October 15, 1949, and made the administrative charge of a Chief Commissioner.

The origins of political development of Manipur may be traced to the period of the Kuki Insurgency (1917-1919) which had a direct bearing on the policy of the British Indian Government towards
this princely State. It was a first major revolt by the tribals after the Manipur uprising of 1891. For a long period, it could not be subdued by the authorities, the normalcy was restored only when the British took a strong military 'punitive measure' against the rebels. Some of the British officers even thought of using hand-grenades and powerful guns and planes to crush the rebellion but that idea was dropped immediately because of the non-availability of ammunition.

The British policy of 'forced recruitment' from the hill tribes, especially the Kukis, for the establishment of a Labour Corps which was supposed to serve in the British Army in Mesopotamia (Iraq) during the World War I, was the immediate cause of the Kuki Rebellion. At the beginning of 1917, the Assam Government was assigned a quota for supply of the labourers for the deployment in Mesopotamia; the matter was referred to the Maharaja of the Manipur State. Immediately, the Maharaja started recruiting labourers or coolies from the hill tribes, two thousands in number. But a further requirement of two thousand labourers, for the establishment of a Second Labour Company, could not be raised up because of the size and frequency of the drafts demanded for the first corps of
the hillmen; therefore, he offered a Second Corps (Labour), to be recruited, when required, from his Valley. Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy and Governor-General in India, wrote to Maharaja informing a further Second Labour Corps was not required for the purpose at present. After some time, the Government of India felt the need of a second Labour Company; the matter was discussed in a political conference held in Shillong. The British Political Agent in Manipur, Higgins, was confident at this time that he would be able to raise up a Second Labour Corps of the hillmen. A dialogue was arranged between the Political Agent and the Kuki village heads. But the Kuki chiefs declined to supply the labourers. The Political Agent, with an escort of fifty rifles, left Imphal with a view to having another conversation; as the Kuki chiefs did not turn up, he burnt the Mombi village which he found deserted. The burning of a Kuki village was a blunderous offence ever committed by a Political Agent which provoked the restless tribals to rioting and violence. The recalcitrant Kuki chiefs (Luchingba) now flatly refused to carry out the orders of the Government of India, and an open armed rebellion broke out.
The rebellion in most of the hill areas of Manipur soon spread to the bordering territory. The Kukis of the unadministered area of Somra Tract and some adjacent area within the neighbouring Burma had been affected seriously. The revolt was politically embarrassing to the governments of Manipur and Burma. To cope with the situation, some seasoned British officers proposed to construct a new road at Mauleik (Burma) running to Manipur State, but dropped the idea due to an inevitable economic pressure on the state exchequer.

An Armistice was signed in May 1919 and many British military officers were rewarded with higher ranks in appreciation of their services during the Kuki outbreak. The military campaign nevertheless ended up with a huge loss of human lives and the destruction of a large number of cattle and several tribal villages. It cost a few laks of rupees. However, the villages affected by the punitive expedition were compensated to some extent for their sufferings.

As the uprising came to a close, a number of riotous and unruly Kuki chiefs were convicted and executed; and the other prisoners were lodged in the Sadiya Jail.
The main causes of the rebellion may be ascribed to the apathy on the part of the State administration and misunderstanding of the critical situation and of the Kuki psychology; but the immediate provocation was provided by the burning of the Mombi village. The role of the corrupt lambus (interpreters) was also responsible for the outbreak. A lack of direct link between the hill tribes and the State Government and want of mutual understanding between them created a cleavage between them. Moreover, the Kukis were afraid of going to a foreign land which was quite unknown to them; adding to this, they were unwilling to leave their villages at a critical juncture, as the rival Nagas might take an advantage of attacking their families. It seemed that both the Political Agent and the Maharaja were oblivious to the traditional feud between the Nagas and the Kukis; above all, it very well be suspected that the information regarding the ill-treatment of the Indians in Mesopotamia had been leaked out to the Kukis; they were, therefore, ready to pay money rather than serve as labourers.

The significance of the Kuki uprising lay in its political repercussions; the political bearing of the rebellion, however, whatever the case might be,
aimed at the overthrow of the British Government and the suppression of the Nagas whom the Kukis had been grudging for the last many years. And the rebels directed it towards the subjugation of the plain subjects, i.e., Meiteis. A no-tax campaign was also launched during the Kuki rebellion. It was the only local armed political uprising against the British India Government and the State administration in Manipur.

When the rebellion subsided, the British Government fully realised the strong feelings of the rebels and thereafter took steps for the reform of the tribal administration and for the mutual understanding and benefit. Finally, the rules for the administration of the Manipur State, originally framed in 1916, were revised keeping in view the need for the better administration among the hill tribes.

The Naga unrest spans the two phases marked by the rise, growth and suppression of the rebellious cults of Jadonang and Gaidinliu respectively.

The political aim of Jadonang's movement was to establish a Kabui Naga Raj by overthrowing the domination of the British, of the Manipuris and of the Kukis.
Jadonang was the chief leader of this unique movement; he who professed to be starting a new cult. He was regarded as God or Messiah of the Kabui Naga group. Originally as a 'Maiba' or Medicine-man he played on the minds of the Kabuis to such an extent that they began to look upon him as a god who would overthrow the existing British administration.

Jadonang sent words to all the Kabuis: 'There is a word (prophacy) that Milong (Nagas) will become great; let us try and kill the Sarkar (British administration-mine)'. He just came to the notice of the British authority in 1927 when he caused unrest amongst the Kabuis. In 1928, he was put into jail telling the people the British Raj was coming to an end and that a Kabui Naga Raj was to be established in its place.

Jadonang told all the Kabui Nagas not to pay any more revenue to the British Government from 1931-32 and that all revenue was to be paid to him. There was suspicion that he had got Congress infection from Lakhipur (Assam).

Jadonang was wanted not only as the leader of the new movement but also as a murderer. After his arrest the criminal investigations were started against him and others of his village for the brutal murder, in 1929, of four unarmed Hindu Manipuris who
were journeying towards Cachar. It appeared likely that the victims were put to death at the instance of Jadonang probably as sacrifices to his gods as well as to show his followers his power and defiance of the existing laws of the state. He was convicted with six other Kabui Nagas of the village of Kambiron and was sentenced to be hanged. The human sacrifice brought him to the gallows in August 1931. The other convicts were sentenced to imprisonment.

Gaidinliu, the torch-bearer of Jadonang, took up the mission of her master after his execution. She preached the same political religion of her leader. In season and out season it was preached that when Gaidinliu's day would come those who had supported her would be blessed in every way, and those who had opposed her would certainly meet with disaster. Jadonang who was believed then to be present in spirit was held to be that 'Naga King', who would reign jointly with Gaidinliu. 'The day of Nagas is coming' was the slogan. This really involved the disappearance of the British rule in India. As long as Gaidinliu was at large her influence would diminish little.

When the civil disobedience movement was in full swing in the plains in 1930, Gaidinliu launched a no-tax campaign in the hills. To get rid of the
British control meant to them the establishment of a 'Naga Raj', evidently because these illiterate highlanders had little knowledge of the world outside their hill abodes in the frontiers of Assam. The British authorities tried to nip the movement in the bud by capturing the Naga leaders though it was not an easy task for them. Even after the execution of Jadonang, Gaidinliu wielded tremendous influence over the hill tribes. Her movement became the cause of the serious alarm to the governments of Assam and Manipur. The local British authorities had to take recourse to repressive measures including the burning of the villages and the mass arrests. The repression was intensified with the failure of the government to trace the whereabouts of Gaidinliu.

With the arrest of Gaidinliu her movement disintegrated gradually. She was sentenced to transportation for life on a charge of murder by the Political Agent in Manipur. She was praised by Jawaharlal Nehru as a powerful freedom fighter. She was released from the jail at his instance when India became free.

The Government of India Act, 1935, posed a serious problem to Manipur with regard to its federal
scheme. The Government of India was anxious to bring in it all the states still in relations with the local governments of India. But in the case of Manipur so many difficult problems were found to stand in the way that it was decided that when the new Act came into force relations with the State should be conducted by the Governor of Assam province in his personal capacity as the Agent of the Crown Representative. He was authorised under Section 287 of the Government of India Act, 1935, to discharge such functions of the Crown in its relations with the Manipur State as had hitherto been performed by the Governor-in-Council in Assam. This in fact led no practical change in the erstwhile political set-up.

One of the principal subjects of the controversy was, of course, the administration of the hill areas. Though they covered some 7,000 square miles out of the State's total area of 8,000 square miles and contained a population of about 150,000, it had never, and with good reason, been adjudged safe to leave their administration in the hands of the ruler. The opinion of the Governor of Assam as regards the administration of the hill portions was that they could not possibly be handed over to the ruler of Manipur; the Government of India accepted the views of the Government of Assam.
Some two years later i.e. in 1938, the Maharaja of Manipur again raised the question of the hills during the course of the discussion on the details of the federation, but he agreed this time to federate on terms which covered the exclusion of the hill areas from his direct control. Previously he was unwilling to join the proposed federation due to his vanity. He wanted a free hand in the administration of the plains and the hills of Manipur without any interference from the British authorities. But the hopes that the federation would be established by 1938, i.e. a year after the inauguration of the provincial autonomy were never fulfilled. Further talks on the question of the federation were brought to an abrupt end by the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. A Government of India letter informed that it was not expected that in view of the war pre-occupation, Her Majesty's Government would be able to give active attention to the federal problem.

This massively organised women's agitation was the first of its kind in Manipur. The agitation took place because of the scarcity of rice; in its later phase, the agitation acquired the political
overtones as well. The slogans like 'Britishers go back' became popular during the movement; however, the agitation never got out of control.

It was from Nepal to Travancore and Cochin: All the states of the British Indian Empire were witnessing the beginnings of the political awakening. Manipur, though far away in the north-eastern corner of India, could not lag behind the others. The women's agitation was a sort of reaction against the administration of the Manipur State where the autocratic powers were exercised by the Durbar members and the Maharaja.

The agitation had its origin in the acute scarcity of rice in Manipur owing to the floods. A ban was imposed on the export of rice. In November, however, when the harvest season was on, the ban was suddenly lifted and the price of rice shot up causing acute hardship to the people of the State.

The sheer economic necessity had disturbed the placid life of the people of Manipur, so to say, the womenfolk had been forced to agitate due to the ruthless economic dispensation under the rule of the Maharaja. This resulted in a political confusion in the State. Having no other alternative, the
Government had to ban the export of rice again and fulfilled some of the demands of the women agitators. Gradually the movement subsided.

The demand for the formation of a new Eastern India Frontier Province came in the wake of the partition of Bengal. The movement was mainly guided by the Bengali elites who needed a safeguard against the majority rule of the Assamese in Assam.

It is worthwhile to ponder why on earth there had been such a sudden demand at all. According to the views of the Bengali elites it had been evident that the Assamese people have been suffering from the narrow 'Valley jealousy'. Even the body politic of Assam was no exception. The inhabitants of Assam thought that since the province bore the name 'Assam' which they interpreted, was a corruption of the term 'Ahom' the whole of the province was their own homeland and all others were but outsiders. The insular parochialism of the Assamese had prompted them to seek an opportunity just to eliminate the non-Assamese, especially the Bengalis who happened to be a part and parcel of the province.

A consequence of a short-sighted policy on the part of the Assamese people was Bengali-baiting
in political, economic, linguistic and cultural spheres. The Bengalis were being manhandled, their hearth and home being burnt down and looted, their means of living being snatched away, even those domiciles who had been living in the province for generations together. Further, the elites complained that the Assamese had been following a ruthless policy of the extermination of the Bengalis.

The Bengalis declared that there could never be a compromise on this score since a change of hearts should precede any compromise, but that was not to be on the other side. Therefore, to rehabilitate the immigrants of Assam and thousands of the unfortunate refugees from Bengal there was no other way out but the immediate formation of the proposed 'Purbachal Province'.

The proposed North-East India Frontier Province might comprise of Manipur, Cachar, Tripura, Lushai Hills, Naga Hills and Khasi and Jaintia Hills; geographically these states represent a compact area. The elites justified the joining of Manipur to the proposed new province for the reason that the Manipuris well understood Bengali and spoke it too; besides, the Hindu Bengalis and the Hindu Manipuris had a common
religious tie, both being the followers of Vaishnavism. Some of the political leaders of Manipur advocated the formation of a new province in the north-east of India. But this idea was not incorporated with that of the Central leaders of India. The Government of India was tooth and nail against the formation of a North-East India Frontier Province. By a resolution, the Congress Working Committee rejected the idea of the formation of a separate North-East India Frontier Province. As the movement was one-sided it could not endure.

The years 1946-49 saw the assimilation of the democratic ideas by the Manipuris; they consequently started agitating for the establishment of a responsible government. A draft constitution was passed by the Manipur State Durbar on July 26, 1941. On September 26, 1947, the Maharaja promised an announcement on the constitution within eight months from that date. In the meantime, to replace the State Durbar presided over by Pearson, an interim state council was set up consisting of two ministers from the Manipur State Congress, two ministers representing the hills and two ministers nominated by the Manipur State Congress from amongst the State officials and the chief minister nominated by the Maharaja. The new cabinet of the
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ministers was thus set up and began to function from August 14, 1947. Some members of the Manipur State Congress disapprove of the method and personnel taken into the newly formed State Council, seceded and formed themselves into a group of Congress. Now two separate Congress parties appeared on the political scene of Manipur both of them demanding the immediate establishment of responsible government.

The splinter Congress group suggested that the Maharaja should establish a popular interim council by dissolving the present interim council. Further, they appealed to the State Government that a new constitution providing full responsible government should be framed through a constituent assembly elected on the adult franchise.

The new Congress started satyagraha and civil resistance on November 6, 1947. Seeing this state of affairs the old Congress adopted a resolution on November 11, 1947, reiterating its demand for a full responsible government in Manipur with a view to removing discontent in the State. The Maharaja introduced in 1948 a responsible government in Manipur. The first Manipur State assembly, elected on the universal adult franchise, was inaugurated by
him on October 18, 1948.

At the end of the World War II, the British were planning to quit India and transfer power to the native hands.

While the whole of India was amidst political excitement, in Manipur too, some leaders started agitation against the Maharaja demanding a responsible government. The Congress agitated and urged the Government of India to merge Manipur with the Indian Union as Manipur in their view could not become a viable State. No doubt, some political leaders who were not in favour of the merger with the Indian Union, had also been agitating throughout the year. Besides, the Communist Party of Manipur did try to sell Manipur to the neighbouring state of Burma; the ill-design, however, was nipped in the bud.

The Maharaja was strongly opposed to the integration with the Indian Union on terms offered by the British. But the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, assured that the State of Manipur would retain its separate identity. Mahatma Gandhi also made it public that no state would be merged without the consent of its people. The Maharaja, however, remained complacent in this regard. But the political parties restlessly
worked and got the sympathy of the Central Congress leaders of India. At last, on September 21, 1949, the Maharaja of Manipur signed the merger agreement in Shillong.

With the integration of Manipur into the Indian Union as the last State, Sardar Patel's dream of unification of India by abolishing the native state was practically realised. The State assembly and the council of Manipur State stood abolished in consequence of the merger agreement and Manipur then became a Chief Commissioner's Province exercising the powers of the Maharaja-in-Council. A new chapter in the political history of Manipur was thus opened ending up the age-long political hierarchy in Manipur. Today Manipur is proud of becoming one of the full-fledged states of the Indian Union, and stands equal in status with the other states.