Chapter VII

Social Changes in Modern Times

A Brief Account of the British Conquest of Manipur:

Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh (1850-1886 A.D.), son of Maharaja Gambhir Singh (1825-1834 A.D.) had ten sons, four by one wife and the rest by different wives. On the death of Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh on the 20th May 1886, his eldest son Surchandra Singh ascended the throne. On assuming the throne, he appointed his half-brothers, viz., Kulachandra Singh as Jubraj and Pheijāosanā as Commander-in-chief. As Pheijāosanā alias Jhalakirti Singh died within a fort-night, Maharaja Surchandra Singh appointed his half-brother Tekendrajit Bir Singh as the Commander-in-chief. He also appointed his uterine brothers, viz., Thambousanā, Pēkāsanā and Gopālsanā as Samu-hanjabā (officer-in-charge of elephants), Sagol-hanjabā (officer-in-charge of horses) and Phungānāi-sanglēkpa respectively.

But a section of the Maharaja's brothers close to him were jealous of the growing popularity and prestige

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of Tekendrajit, the Senapati. Soon there was an open rivalry and rift between Maharaja's uterine brother, Pakāsanā and half-brother Tekendrajit. The Maharaja, however, took side with Pakāsanā and this divided the brothers into two factions — the Maharaja and his uterine brothers in one group and Tekendrajit and his half-brothers in another group.

On the night of 21st September 1890, the Maharaja's half-brothers, viz., Angousana and Jillāngambā revolted and drove the king out of the palace. In the meantime Tekendrajit, the Senapati, appeared at the scene and took command of the situation and proceeded to strengthen the palace defences against any attempt to retake it.²

The Maharaja and his brother Pakāsanā took shelter in the Residency of the Political Agent, Mr. Saint Clair Grimwood. "The Maharaja had never had much reputation for courage, and on this occasion, instead of rousing his men to action and beating off the intruders, he rushed away for safety out at the back of the palace and round to the Residency."³

The next morning the Maharaja's other uterine brothers, Thambousanā alias Keshorjit and Gopālsanā along with Colonel Samu Singh, Major Jambubān Singh, Thāngāl General and other

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² Letter from the Political Agent, Manipur, to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Assam, dated 25th September 1890; Assam Secretariat, Foreign-A, Progs, July 1891, No.9.
³ Grimwood, Mrs., Ethel Clair., My Three Years in Manipur, London, 1891, p. 135.
officers and ministers except the Aya Purel Major came to see the Maharaja at the Residency with about 2000 men, of whom about four hundred to six hundred were properly armed. These men came to help the Maharaja who then sought the assistance of the Political Agent to fight the rebels. But instead of rendering assistance, the Political Agent ordered the seizure of all the arms of the Maharaja's troops and officers. The arms, so seized, were put in the Political Agent's Bungalow. He then ordered the troops to disband and to return to their homes. After the Maharaja's men were dispersed, the Political Agent then offered to return the arms.

Mr. Grimwood, the Political Agent telegraphed to the Chief Commissioner of Assam about the disturbance that had taken place in Manipur. He told the Maharaja that he had no definite orders from the Chief Commissioner. The actions of the Political Agent disheartened and humiliated the Maharaja very much. He, therefore, suspected that Mr. Grimwood, the Political Agent was communicating secretly with Tekendrajit, the leader of the revolt. Believing that the Political Agent was in favour of Tekendrajit and others,

4. Letter from His Highness Surchandra Singh, Maharaja of Manipur, to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 14th November 1890, Simla records-3, Foreign Department, Secret-E, Progs, April 1891, No. 30.
5. Ibid.
Maharaja Surchandra Singh sent a telegram to the Chief Commissioner of Assam on the morning of the 22nd September, requesting for assistance with troops to restore his position. In the afternoon of the same day the Maharaja received a reply from the Chief Commissioner stating that the latter was in communication with the Political Agent. But no help came from the Political Agent. But according to Grimwood it was hopeless to think of trying to retake the palace and the only thing that could be done was to make the Residency as secure as possible.

Frustrated and humiliated, the Maharaja finally sought Political Agent's advice regarding the immediate measures to be taken up. The Political Agent then told the Maharaja to go to Kohima and offered him an escort of 50 sepoys. This was, however, declined by the Maharaja who thought that the journey to Kohima was long and unsafe. The Maharaja then expressed his wish to leave the kingdom and go on a pilgrimage to Vrindavan. He entreated the Political Agent to arrange for his safe departure. The Maharaja also wrote a letter to Tekendrajit on the 23rd September stating that he would not fight and that he should like to have

6. Ibid.
7. Letter from Political Agent, Manipur, to Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Assam, 25th September 1890, Assam secretariat-Foreign-A, Progs. July 1891, No. 9.
their assistance to enable him to proceed to Vrindavan on a pilgrimage and asked him to receive the silver sword of the state and turban. The latter also replied that he would make necessary arrangement to ensure the safe departure of the Maharaja for Vrindavan. The Political Agent gave the Maharaja a pass and an escort of 35 rifles of the 44th Gurkha Light Infantry to accompany the Maharaja and his brothers to Cachar. The Maharaja left Imphal in the evening of 23rd September 1890.

On the very day of the departure of Maharaja Surchandra, Kulachandra Singh, the Jubraj succeeded him and and Tekendrajit and Angousanā became Jubraj and Senapati respectively.

The ex-king Surchandra reached Cachar on the 3rd of October. Maharaja Surchandra who, in fact, had no intention to abdicate the throne wanted to see the Chief Commissioner of Assam there (who was there in connection with the Lushai expedition) to intimate his grievances and to complain against the Political Agent. His proclaimed pilgrimage was nothing but a camouflage to ensure his own personal safety. But when Maharaja Surchandra arrived at Cachar, the Chief Commissioner had already left the place. He also learnt for the first time that the Political Agent's pass clearly stipulated that he had deliberately abdicated

8. Ibid.
the throne. These developments further aggravated his
disappointment. He, therefore, sent a telegram to the Chief
Commissioner of Assam stating that the Political Agent had
misunderstood him and that he had no intention to abdicate
and was fully willing to secure the throne.  

Having failed to see the Chief Commissioner
personally to plead his case, the ex-king then proceeded to
Calcutta and approached the Government of India to help him
in regaining the throne. But the Government of India, though
sympathetic to him, decided to recognise Kulachandra Singh
as the Raja of Manipur, and at the same time to deport
Tekendrajit from Manipur. Thus Mr. J.W. Quinton, the Chief
Commissioner of Assam proceeded to Manipur by orders of Lord
Lansdown, the Viceroy of India, with an escort of 400 Gurkha
rifles to enquire into the matter and to implement the
decision of the Government of India.

The Chief Commissioner arrived at Imphal in the
morning of Saturday, the 22nd March, 1891 and he was
received by Maharaja Kulachandra Singh at the western gate
of the palace. The usual thirteen-gun salute was given to
the Chief Commissioner.  

9. Telegram from Maharaja Surchandra Singh to the Chief
Commissioner of Assam, dated 6th October 1890, Assam
10. Singh, Ibungohal, L., and Singh, Khelchandra, N.,
the Chief Commissioner told the Maharaja that on that very day after breakfast a Durbar would be held in the Residency and that the Governor General had sent certain intimation through him which would be communicated to the Maharaja at the Durbar. Accordingly Maharaja Kulachandra Singh, Tekendrajit (Jubraj), Angouasanā (Senapati), Jilāngambā (Samu-hanjabā) accompanied with ministers — Thāŋgāl General, Colonel Samu (Luwāng Ningthou), Giridhari Singh (Angom Ningthou) and Aya Purel Major went to the Residency for the Durbar. But the Durbar was not held at the appointed time. The Maharaja, his brothers and ministers were kept waiting on the road. There they discovered some unusual activity in the arrangement of the Durbar. They saw a large number of troops around the Durbar. The Manipuri sepoys who entered the Residency ground reported to Tekendrajit Singh all they had seen inside the Residency. Tekendrajit had already a suspicion about the motive of the Chief Commissioner. This was further strengthened by the information. Thus Tekendrajit took the opportunity to return to his house with his brother, the senapati, giving out as an excuse that he felt too ill to remain waiting about in the hot sun. 11 After a long time the Maharaja was asked to enter the Durbar hall when he and the Political Agent had a conversation in which the former stated that if Tekendrajit, the Jubraj did not attend the Durbar, 11. Grimwood, Mrs., op.cit., p.181.
the Chief Commissioner would not see him. So the Maharaja sent Aya Purel Major to bring the Jubraj but he returned saying that the Jubraj was too ill. The Maharaja returned to the palace after waiting in vain from 12 to 3 p.m. 12 The Durbar was postponed till the next morning, March 23, at 8 o'clock and it was impressed upon the Maharaja that his two brothers must attend the Durbar.

On the following day at the appointed time a message came from the Maharaja that Tekendrajit was too ill to leave his house and, therefore, the Maharaja would not come to the Durbar. Later the Chief Commissioner wrote a letter to the Maharaja through the Political Agent in which it was stated that the Government of India recognised him (Maharaja Kulachandra) as the Maharaja of Manipur but at the same time Tekendrajit Singh, the Jubraj must be deported from Manipur. Further the Maharaja was asked to make the Jubraj over to the Political Agent. 13 The Maharaja informed the Political Agent that he would give a reply after consulting his ministers. Immediately a Durbar was held in which all high officials including Tekendrajit Jubraj were present and the decision of the Government of India was

13. Ibid.
discussed in depth. But the ministers did not give their consent in respect of the deportation of the Jubraj whom they considered innocent. Moreover, the Jubraj was then quite sick. Thus the Maharaja wrote a letter to the Chief Commissioner stating that he would send a reply thereafter regarding the matter after the Jubraj recovered his health.\textsuperscript{14} The letter was handed over to the Political Agent. On hearing the decision the Political Agent requested the Maharaja to issue a warrant to arrest Tekendrajit. This was, however, declined. The Political Agent then sought an interview with Tekendrajit which was of course granted. Mr. Grimwood persuaded Tekendrajit to submit to the decision of the Government of India and to give himself up to the Chief Commissioner. But Tekendrajit, on the other hand, questioned the authority of the Government of India to interfere in the internal affairs of Manipur.\textsuperscript{15} Being disappointed, Mr. Grimwood came back to the Residency and reported that his mission had failed.

The political negotiations having failed, the Chief Commissioner then thought of the application of force. So in the early hours of the 24th March, Mr. Quinton sent two British columns under Lieutenant Brackenbury of the 44th Gurkha Rifles and Captain Butcher of the 42nd Gurkha Rifles

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Roy, J., \textit{History of Manipur}, Calcutta, 1958, p. 121.
to arrest the Bubraj in his house within the fort enclosure. Thus when every one was asleep a large number of armed British troops entered the palace and attacked the house of Tekendrajit. Pukhrambā Tangkā Singh who was on guard at the Bubraj's residence resisted the attacking British force bravely. He killed the British officer who entered the place first in a hand to hand combat. He fought bravely for sometime with the outnumbered British troops before he himself got killed. After a sharp struggle the British troops captured the house of the Bubraj by killing 11 keepers of the gate, beheading two boys and shooting three boys dead. They burnt the neighbouring villages. Entering the temple they smashed the idol and all other articles available there. Thus they burnt houses, destroyed idols and killed boys, girls, cows, etc. Having tied up the hair of two girls together they threw them into the fire and roasted them alive. Men, women and children from the enclosure of the Bubraj had run into the citadel for their lives amidst the fire. But the Bubraj was not found in his house and hence they could not arrest him. The capture of the Bubra's residence did not end the fight. The Manipuris

began to retaliate against the British forces who attacked the palace; they attacked the British Residency. Eventually, in the afternoon, the British troops abandoned the house of Tekendrajit and retreated inside the Residency. The Residency was threatened and the safety of the people inside it was in peril. The Chief Commissioner sued for peace with the Manipuris. Accordingly, bugle sounded "Cease Fire" from the British side. The Jubraj then ordered his troops to stop firing.

Having given up the hope of arresting Tekendrajit by force, Mr. Quinton, Chief Commissioner of Assam accompanied by Colonel Skene, Mr. Grimwood, the Political Agent, Lieutenant Simpson, Mr. Cossins and a bugler entered the palace enclosure to start negotiations with the Maharaja. A Durbar was held in front of the Durbar room on the road in which Tekendrajit, Thangal General, Colonel Samu, Giridhari Singh Angom Ningthou were present. There was a great crowd around. Jubraj Tekendrajit strongly protested that he had been wrongly treated in having his house surrounded and his people killed. Then the Jubraj asked them to give up their arms. The Chief Commissioner replied that they could not give their arms as they belonged to the Government. There was much conversation but nothing was written down and no agreement was concluded. The Chief Commissioner said that there would be a Durbar the following morning. When the
British officers got ready to return, the people shouted in anger and sought revenge against the British. The Jubraj and Thāngāl General went towards the Top Garod and Angom Ningthou went to see off the Chief Commissioner and his party who were returning to the Residency. But a door near the statues of the dragons was shut suddenly and the excited and infuriated people whose near and dear ones had been killed by the British sepoys on that day began to hit the British officers with the butt-ends of their rifles and Lieutenant Simpson was severely wounded. The British officers were hustled back into the Darbar room for their own safety. Mr. Grimwood reached the steps of the Durbar house, Nepri Koot gave him a push and Kājāo alias Pukhramba Phingāng speared him fatally. The British officers were then detained in the Darbar house for about two hours and Mr. Quinton, Lieutenant Colonel Skene, Mr. Cossins, Lieutenant Simpson, and the bugler were taken to the green space in front of the dragons where they were beheaded by the public executioner. About this time the attack on the Residency was renewed by the Manipuris and the escort party in the compound of the Residency along with the wife of the Political Agent fled to Cachar and several British sepoys were captured. As soon as the news reached the

British Government three columns of troops were at once sent to Manipur from Kohima, Cachar (Silchar) and Burma.

The Maharaja sent 700 sepoys under Māipāk Sanā, Wāngkheirākpa and Yengkhoibā Major to resist the advance of British column from Burma. Another reinforcement of four hundred sepoys was sent under the command of Pāonā Brajabāsi Major and Chongthā Miyā Major to face the British force from Burma. 800 sepoys were sent under Khwāirākpa, Lāisrabā Jambubān Major, Tamrā Singh Subedar, Heigrujambā Poilā to take position against the British column coming from Kohima and another one thousand soldiers were sent towards the west under the command of Kālā Singh, Sagol-hanjabā, Sanā Ngāngbā, Lourung purel, Yenkhoibā Poilā, Longjambā Poilā to resist the British column from Cachar. 19 The columns from Cachar and Kohima met no serious opposition. But the Burma column was seriously resisted by the Manipuri forces. The fiercest engagement took place in the battle of Khongjom, about 32 kilometres from Imphal, where a determined band of about four hundred Manipuri soldiers under Major Pāonā and Major Miyā fought the British forces valiantly. Though ill-equipped, Pāonā fought with exceptional courage and patriotic zeal till he was killed. According to Cheitharol Kumbaba, Major Pāonā died on 23rd of April 1891. 20 But the

19. Ibid., pp. 488-89.
battle at Khongjom was fought till the 25th April under the command of Major Miya. According to Lieutenant Grant, on that day, almost all the Manipuri soldiers fought till they were killed. Major Miya who commanded the Manipuri forces was badly wounded. Some officers and troops of the British forces were also either wounded or killed. Among those killed mention may be of Jamadar Adjutant Kiree Ram Gurung; of the wounded mention may also be made of Captain Drury, Captain Carnegy, Lieutenant Grant, and Lieutenant Cox. After the fall of Khongjom on the 25th April, the last battle of the Meiteis against the mighty British forces was over. On the morning of the 27th April the Silchar column led by Colonel Rennick occupied the capital. The two other British columns from Kohima and Burma also reached the capital on the same morning.

After the conquest of Manipur by the British, Maharaja Kulachandra, Jubraj Tekendrajit, Prince Angousana and Prince Jillangamba were taken into custody. Besides, Thangal General, Nilamani Singh, Aya Purel Major, Colonel Samu, Niranjan Subedar, an ex-soldier of the 34th Native Infantry, Chongthā Miya Major, commander of the Manipuri

23. Grimwood, Mrs. op. cit., pp. 307-08.
forces at Khongjom, Pukhrambā Phingāng alias Kājāo Singh who speared Mr. Grimwood to death, the public executioner and the soldiers who escorted the British Officers and the native bugler were taken in custody. Tekendrajit, Thāngāl General, Niranjan Subedar and Kājāo Singh were sentenced to death, while the rest including Maharaja Kulachandra Singh were sentenced to transportation for life. The youngest prince, Jillāngambā, being a lad of about 17 years of age, was exiled from Manipur. 24

Thus Manipur fell into the hands of the British on 27th April 1891 and they hoisted their flag (union jack) at Kanglā, the capital of the state. The state was, however, regranted and from the 21st August 1891 Manipur became a suzerain state under the British Government. 25 In September 1891, the British Government made Churchand Singh, son of Chāobiyaimā and a grandson of Narsingh the Raja of Manipur. The administration of the state during the minority of the Raja was entrusted to the Superintendent and Political Agent, who was given full power to introduce any reforms that he considered beneficial but with instructions to pay due regard to the customs and traditions of the Manipuris and to

as little as possible with existing institutions.\textsuperscript{26}

The British conquest of Manipur and their subsequent rule marked the departure of the age-old sovereign rule under its Rajas. Though a Raja was selected to administer the state, the real administration was in the hands of the British Government. Major Maxwell was the first Political Agent after Manipur came under the British administration. He introduced various administrative reforms for the administration of the state which in turn also affected the social life of the people tremendously. Though Manipur was directly under the British rule after the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891, the British influence, however insignificant, started to be felt since the time of Raja Gambhir Singh (1825-1834 A.D.) when he regained the independence of Manipur from Burmese occupation with British assistance. The British Political Agency was established for the first time in Manipur in 1835.

A very important aspect of British influence in Manipur is noticeable in the realm of modern education. The first English school at Imphal was opened in 1837 in the

\textsuperscript{26} Aitchison, C.U., A Collection of Treaties, Engagement and Sanads, Vol. XII, Calcutta, 1931, p. 106.
time of Captain Gordon, the first Political Agent in Manipur (1835-1844). In the beginning there was some progress but soon the school became a victim of public apathy and caste prejudices. In 1877 Sir James Johnstone reports: "Education has certainly retrograded in Manipur instead of advancing, as 40 years ago there was an English school in the state which among its pupils counted two little girls, One scholar survives, a Brahmin, by name Gokul Thakur, who has not forgotten all he learned and still understands English tolerably well." After the failure of the first English school, no attempt had been made in this particular direction. In 1872 a school for boys was established by General Nuthan which was aided by a grant of books from the Bengal Government. The boys were taught Bengali and to translate from Manipuri into Bengali and vice versa. But after some initial success the school too soon suffered the fate of the first English school for the same reason. Sir James Johnstone, the Political Agent of Manipur (1877-1886) who took much interest in the spread of western education among the Manipuris established an English school in 1885 after getting permission from the Maharaja. But unlike the previous ones the school was located in the

Residency grounds and was run under his supervision. Thus the spread of western education was started even before the advent of British rule in Manipur.

But Manipuris being apathetic in the matter of western education, it could not make much headway. The only school established by Johnstone which was named after him was destroyed by the Manipuris in the war of 1891. When the British took over the administration of the state, the school was re-opened on the 1st June 1892. Subsequently, many other schools were established. Since then considerable progress has been made in the field of western education. The school established by Johnstone is still functioning as the Johnstone Higher Secondary School.

Mention has already been made that in the pre-British days the chief mode of imparting education to the people was mainly in the field of traditional martial arts and other forms of military education. No doubt the kings of Manipur used to encourage the native system of literary education. But there were no public educational establishments and non-formal education used to be given at the residence of the teacher. Thus the traditional system of literary education was confined to a selected few. This

was necessitated by the then prevailing social and political conditions of the kingdom where there was no peaceful life and warfare was the order of the day. Moreover, in those days, those who could show prominence in war or in the field of traditional martial arts succeeded in achieving royal recognition and favours. Under the British rule, people led a well-settled and peaceful life; and as such the traditional martial arts have lost their importance and consequently the old way of imparting military education on a mass scale was abandoned. With its disappearance together with the changing social outlook, the people began to take the advantages of the spread of western education.

Another important aspect of British rule in Manipur was the introduction of the modern system of land reforms, revenues, justice and other measures which brought socio-economic changes for the people. Since the death of Garibnawaz till the advent of British rule the repeated Burmese destructive incursions coupled with the internal dissensions and rebellions for the throne had almost uprooted the social and economic life of the people. In the days of the Rajas, all land belonged to the Raja. No one had any permanent or regular holdings and land revenue was used to be realised in kind. Under the British administration land was properly surveyed and to ensure undisturbed possession pattas were properly issued to each holder and
the system of realizing land revenue in cash was introduced. The land revenue to be paid to the government as fixed by Major Maxwell in 1892 was Rs 5/- per pari of land (2\(\frac{1}{2}\) acres)\(^3^1\). Under the new system the Brahmans and Rajkumars who had been enjoying rent free lands during the regime of the Maharajas had to pay new taxes like the commoners.\(^3^2\) In pre-British days, the Rajkumars were a privileged class of people in Manipur. The Brahmans who enjoyed the patronage of the Vaishnava kings of Manipur were another privileged section of the society. The Brahmans were even exempted from capital punishment. They were given various sorts of facilities at the cost of the common people. Under the British administration, no extra facility was accorded to them for their being Rajkumars and Brahmans. In other words, due to the introduction of British rule these erstwhile privileged sections of people were deprived of their former privileges. This was a very significant step towards social justice and equality. But the system of granting rent-free land to state officials in the judicial department continued.

The Manipuris being an agricultural community the introduction of such reforms, in fact, boosted their morale which induced them to concentrate vigorously on their agricultural pursuits. Besides, the British rule enabled the Manipuris to carry on trading operations safely with Burma

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\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 9.

\(^{32}\) Ibungohal and Khelchandra, op. cit., p. 498.
and other neighbouring British provinces. This not only opened the scope for economic prosperity but also provided scope for wider social contacts with outside world.

In the field of culture and religion, the advent of British rule did not bring any direct impact. In the spheres of religion, the Manipuris treated Englishmen almost as untouchables. This was evident from the demolition of temples and sacred structures which they thought to have been defiled by the presence of the mleccha. To cite an instance, the mandap of Sri Govindaji was demolished in 1892 because it was defiled by the presence of British officers who had come to witness a Manipuri song and dance performance in it. But the British did not pursue any policy which might injure the religious sentiments of the people. They also did not make any attempt to spread Christianity among the Manipuris. This might be partly due to the fact that unlike the Moghuls, the British did not pursue the policy of interference against native customs and religion. Even if there were attempts to spread Christianity, they would not have succeeded, for, unlike the hill tribes, the Manipuris had their own advanced culture and religion. Moreover, they never considered the culture and religion of the white man as something superior to those of their own. When Reverend William Pettigrew arrived in Manipur in 1894-1895 the

33. Ibid., p. 501.
British authorities in Manipur refused him permission to carry on missionary work in the valley. Probably the British authorities had already realised that any effort to spread Christianity among the Manipuris would be a futile endeavour. Pettigrew was, therefore, advised to work among the hill tribes. The hill tribes having a relatively primitive culture and religion regarded the Christian culture and religion as the best in the world and started to sing and dance to the tune of the missionaries. Mr. Pettigrew started his missionary work among the Tāngkhuls. Subsequently, the hill tribes became Christians.

While the British influence in Manipur had no direct impact on the culture and religion of the Manipuris it indirectly fostered the further development of their cultural and religious activities. In pre-British days, the Manipuris had little time to spare for their cultural activities as they were mostly engaged in warfare and other state services. The peaceful and secure atmosphere brought about by the British rule enabled them to devote more of their time and energy to the development of their art, culture and religion. For instance, since the Manipuris became Vaishnavas, Sri Govindaji's temple had been a very important centre of their cultural and religious activities.

34. Shakespear, J., op. cit., p. 5.
But the frequent Burmese invasions compelled them to utilise their time and energy in war preparations and in actual combat and when the Burmese made their incursions into the valley, they fled to Cachar and other neighbouring kingdoms along with the sacred image of Govindaji. Thus the newly adopted religion was greatly disturbed by the chaotic political conditions of the country. But under the British rule such a disturbed state no longer prevailed and naturally it provided wider scope for the promotion of their culture and religion.

Another significant impact of British rule in Manipur was the abolition of the age-old institution of slavery. The institution of slavery had been a major social evil which afflicted the pre-British Manipuri social system. The king, the Rajkumars and persons in the higher strata of society who were most benefited by it made no attempt to put an end to this social evil. We have already referred to the various aspects of this institution in Chapter III.

When the British conquered Manipur and took over the reins of administration, Major Maxwell, the Superintendent of State and Political Agent of Manipur proclaimed a decree to put an end of this institution. On the day of the investiture ceremony of Raja Churachand
Singh which was carried out on 29th April 1892, Major Maxwell announced that "all persons at present in slavery to private individuals shall cease to be slaves in five years from the 29th ultimo or at any previous date on repayment of the purchased money, deducting one fifth for each years service commencing from that date." While announcing it, Maxwell further hoped that by offering advances for working on the roads, etc., many of these people would be able to re-purchase their liberty. The abolition of slavery was a very progressive measure. By its abolition, those unfortunate people could gain their redemption from the oppression of their feudal lords.

Another major impact of British rule in Manipur was the abolition of lāllup, another age-old institution which had been the backbone of administration in pre-British Manipur. Lāllup was also the biggest social and economic organisation which played a dominant role in the old Meitei society. Mention has already been made regarding the workings of this traditional institution and its relative merits in Chapter III.

When the British Government took over the administration of the state after the disaster of 1891, Major Maxwell, the Political Agent and Superintendent of

35. Reid, Robert., History of Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam, Shillong, 1942, p. 75.
State announced the abolition of lâllup along with slavery on the occasion of the installation of Raja Churachand Singh which took place on the 29th of April 1892. Though Maxwell found certain defects in the system, he himself was not in favour of its abolition until the roads in the state had been improved. He stated that "the present is an inopportune time to abolish a system which so greatly assists in improving the backward communications in the state." But in compliance with the instructions of the Government of India, Major Maxwell announced the abolition of lâllup on the date mentioned above. Under the regime of the Maharajas all public works were carried out by lâllup. So in order to provide for the necessary expenditure on public works, as a substitute for lâllup, a uniform tax of Rs 2/- per house per annum throughout the valley was levied. This tax was, however, abolished in 1899-1900.37

With the above announcement the state service of lâllup which had played a very pivotal role in the socio-politico and economic life of the people in pre-British Manipur came to an end. When the news of the abolition reached Sir James Johnstone, he strongly criticised the abolition of lâllup by remarking that "we may live to regret it. The unfortunate puppet Rajah

36. Ibid., p. 74.
certainly will, we have still to learn that the native system has much good in it, much to recommend it and that it is in many cases the natural outgrowth of the requirements of the people." A similar organisation which was in existence under the Ahom Government in Assam by the name of khel system, organised by Momai-Tamuli Barbarua in 1609 under the direction of the reigning monarch Swargadeo Pratab Singh was also abolished by the British Authorities in Assam in 1838. The abolition of the system in Assam was also regretted by Sir James Johnstone when he said, "It was a sad mistake giving up the system in Assam without retaining the right of the state to a certain number of days labour on the roads every year." 

Unlike slavery, the abolition of lallup was not a progressive step especially for a state like Manipur. It was the most effective state machinery for economic and other developmental works of the state. It was also the most suitable and beneficial system under the then existing social and economic conditions of the society, though the system may look outdated from the modern point of view. Having very little hard currency, the people

found it unbearable to pay the new tax in lieu of lāllup besides bearing the burden of land revenue and other taxes in cash. On the other hand, once the obligation of the people to work for the state was abolished, it was very difficult to secure paid labourers to work on the public roads. Hence the old system, in some form, was retained. Col. Shakespear records, "Though lalup has been abolished, the duty of maintaining the embankments of the roads and along the river sides still remains with the people of the adjoining villages." This was indeed a very repressive measure—exact ing the lāllup tax and at the same time compelling the people to work for the state free of cost.

The abolition of lāllup gave birth to a very obnoxious institution called potthāng by which the people were forcibly employed as porters of the touring officials much to the suffering and humiliation of the people. Whenever the officials, from peons and amins to the highest state officials, were on tour, the people were forced to carry the pieces of luggage and other possessions of the officials from village to village. No remuneration was paid for the service they rendered. The people were also

41. Shakespear, op. cit., p. 6.
42. In Assam early in the British period, there was the begār dharā system which is comparable to the potthāng system.
compelled to keep vigil on the personal possessions of the officials, especially the revenue officials. The system of compelling the people to maintain the roads and schools free of cost was also a part of the potthāṅg system. It was, therefore, the duty of the inhabitants of each village to carry the goods of the touring officials and also to construct and repair roads and schools within the jurisdiction of the village without receiving any remuneration. The system, being very irksome to the people there was widespread agitation throughout the valley for its abolition. Finally in 1913, the potthāṅg system was abolished and in lieu of it fresh taxes were imposed for the upkeep of the roads and schools and the provision of a sufficient travelling allowance to the various state servants who previously enjoyed the benefits of potthāṅg. The new taxes, levied in order to defray the extra cost, were in the form of an increase in land revenue at the rate of annas three per rupee, the sale of thatching grass mahals and minor fisheries which were formerly free, the imposition of survey, partition and process fees and an increase of court fees and the introduction of school fees. The imposition of potthāṅg tax was seriously opposed by the people but all opposition was ruthlessly suppressed.

Thus, in spite of certain beneficial reforms the irrational exactions and other repressive measures caused a lot of hardship to the common people. Nevertheless, the British conquest of Manipur had buried once for all the age-old world of Manipur and planted the seed of modernism. It also laid the foundation for the ultimate integration of Manipur with the union of India which took place in October 1949.

The Political Merger of Manipur with the Union of India:

It has already been described that after the British conquest of 1891, Manipur became a native state under the rule of the Maharaja who was controlled by the British. During the first few decades of the British rule in Manipur, the currents of the political movements and labour strikes in British India did not directly affect the native state of Manipur. But the movements had their repercussions in Manipur. In 1939, there was a great agitation caused by the abnormal rise in the price of rice which was due to hoarding by the monopolists and exporting the same to British India. The agitation was launched by women and was aimed at the stoppage of export and milling of rice. The agitation, however, soon took a violent turn and caused a breakdown of the state administration. In the history of Manipur this disturbance was known as nupi lān (women's
A similar disturbance also occurred previously in 1904 though for a different reason. But the women's agitation was gradually converted into a political movement demanding among others the establishment of legislative assembly elected by and responsible to the people. The political movement was engineered by a local body called Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha with Congress affiliations. But the demand for the legislative assembly was not fulfilled. However, the movement achieved some important results like the establishment of a Chief Court, independent of the executive.

After the end of World War II, the political movements in Manipur took a new turn especially due to the impending departure of the British from India. The agitation for a responsible government and other democratic reforms were intensified. Consequently Maharaja Budhachandra Singh agreed to the setting up of a constitution-drafting committee composed of officials and non-officials to a constitution for the state. The draft constitution was passed by the committee on 8th May 1947. This was called the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. The salient

44. Administration Report of the Manipur State for the Year 1940-41, p. 3.
feature of the constitution was the establishment of a legislative assembly having 53 members with the king as the constitutional head of the state. The Chief Minister was to be responsible to the king. The legislative assembly was not responsible to the legislature.

When India became free on the 15th August 1947, the paramountcy of the British Crown over the native state of Manipur also came to an end. The Interim Government was formed with Maharaja Kumar Priyobrat Singh, younger brother of the Maharaja as the Chief Minister of Manipur. The Interim Government adopted the Manipur State Constitution Act and accordingly the various political parties of Manipur contested the election held in 1948. The Manipur State Congress Party which was in the opposition organised a strong movement for the complete integration of Manipur with the Dominion of India and the abolition of monarchy. Some local parties like the Praja Santi moved against the merger of Manipur with India. In the meantime Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the then Deputy Prime Minister of India was working for the integration of the princely states with the Union of India. Under the coercive pressure of the Union Government, Maharaja Budhachandra Singh having no way out finally agreed to integrate Manipur with the Union of India. The Merger

Agreement was signed on the 21st September 1949 and was effective from the 15th October of the same year. Since then Manipur became an integral part of India.

The Social Life of the Meiteis in the Mainstream of Indian Culture:

Though the political integration of Manipur with India is a recent event, her cultural integration with the latter which has started comparatively early is not yet complete and still continues. Owing to her geographical position and course of history Manipur has had very little contact with the rest of India till the beginning of the 18th century. Before that her political and cultural contacts were mainly with those of her eastern neighbours. Mention has already been made that the Meiteis or Manipuris are distinctly Mongoloid in their physical characteristics and their traditional culture and behaviour pattern are akin to those of the South-East-Asian culture. One can still discern the existence of this aspect in the valley of Manipur.

The beginning of Manipur's cultural contact with the people of the rest of India started intensively from the time of Garibnewāz (1709-1748 A.D.) when he brought a religious change in the country by introducing Hinduism
as the state religion of Manipur. This does not, however, mean that the people of Manipur had no contact with the people of the rest of India before his time. We have already referred in the preceding chapter to the arrival of Hindu missionaries and other immigrants from other parts of India who spread Hindu religion and culture in Manipur from time to time. However, those were confined to individual cases which hardly had any impact on the social life of the community as a whole. But during the time of Garibnewāz in spite of heavy opposition from the traditionalists there were large scale conversions into the new faith and since then Hinduism became the state religion of Manipur. Consequent upon the introduction of

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47. Pandit-raja Atombapu Sharma of Manipur, who has been described by Dr S.K. Chatterji as a Modern Rishi of the Hindudom of India and also the Agasthya for Eastern India, made a very stupendous attempt for the cultural integration of Manipur with the wider world of the composite Hindu culture of India. According to him Manipuris were Hindus in pre-historic times and the present Manipur was the pratnaukas or the "Ancient Home-land" of the Aryan people in the area of North-Eastern India. He also re-affirmed the identification of Manipur with the Manipur of Mahabharata by citing various geographical and astronomical evidences. He harmonised Meitei gods and goddesses and myths and legends with Vedic deities and Puranic myths. He also thought that Sanāmahi (sun-God) who occupies perhaps the most important place in the traditional Meitei pantheon derives its name from the Semmhya of the Vedas. His attempt at harmonising the world of Meitei religion and culture with Brahmanical Hinduism may not stand the tests of scientific investigation but what is significant is his outlook and attempts at integration of India's Great Tradition and the Little Traditions.
Hinduism many other Hindu customs and usages came to be introduced which have been playing a dominant role in the socio-religious life of the people. At the same time, being Hindus, the people began to visit sacred religious places of India to perform the last rites of their near and dear ones and also to fulfill their religious aspirations. Thus by effecting a religious revolution within the country, Garibnewāz paved the way for rapid cultural integration of Manipur with the rest of India.

Apart from these religious factors frequent contacts promoted by political considerations also accelerated the cultural and emotional integration of Manipur with the rest of India. After the death of Garibnewāz, in order to avenge the devastations caused by him, the Burmese made frequent depredations against Manipur which compelled the people to take refuge in other parts of India. Large numbers of Manipuri settlements which are still found in Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) Tripura, Cachar and other regions of India are living traces of political revenge. This brought about a change in the social and political outlook of the people. For the first time the Manipuris began to look towards other regions of India for political help and alliance against their traditional enemy, the Burmese. This state of affairs continued till the Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826, after which the Burmese were no longer a threat to Manipur.
But the frequent contacts and intercourses with the Hindu world naturally had their own impacts on the cultural and emotional life of the people.

The contact between the people of Manipur with the rest of India became closer and more frequent since the time of King Jai Singh. Jai Singh was a great devotee of Lord Krishna and a patron of Hindu culture. By introducing various religious innovations, he firmly consolidated the hold of Hinduism on the social and religious life of the people. Consequently Meitei Hindus became an inseparable part of the great Hindu family even though the form of Hinduism professed by them differs significantly in many respects from that of classical Hinduism. Mention has already been made of this distinctive form of Hinduism. In spite of the prevalence of traditional cultural complex, the social and religious life of the Meiteis are to a very great extent linked with the mainstream of Indian culture.

A sketch of the background of the cultural integration of the people of Manipur with the rest of India has just been given. We shall now present certain aspects of the social and cultural life of the Meiteis vis-a-vis the mainstream of Indian thought and culture. These aspects are mainly the outcome of the introduction of Hindu religion in Manipur and the consequent adoption of Hindu religious
observances. Apart from religion, the Meitei or Manipuri culture has very little in common with the Hindu culture of the Dravidian or the Aryan communities.

As elsewhere in Hindu India, the Meiteis always consider the observance of festivals and ceremonies that fall within the year and the various rituals concerning the major crisis of life as sacred, significant and indispensable. These cycles are rigidly observed as their observance constitutes the appropriate way of life and leads to the prosperity and well-being of the community and the family; and, more significantly to ensure a desirable future for the soul of the individual after death.

The festivals and ceremonies observed by the Hindu Meiteis of today are innumerable. This is because of the fact that the Meiteis besides observing Hindu festivals and ceremonies also observe a number of their pre-Hindu festivals and ceremonies. We have already given in the preceding chapters accounts regarding these two kinds of festivals and ceremonies. To the Meiteis, in spite of their being Hindus, the observance of pre-Hindu festivals and ceremonies have a deeper social and religious significance. This is because of the fact that in their hours of extreme hardships and sufferings, the Meiteis would turn to their traditional gods rather than Hindu ones for succour and
protection. However, those pre-Hindu festivals and ceremonies are observed more or less under the Vaishnava spirit and prescriptions. Some of these aspects has already been referred to in the preceding chapter. As regards the rituals connected with the major crisis of life such as birth, ear-piercing (karnabedha), initiation, marriage, death, etc., the Meitei Hindus observe them according to the basic Hindu pattern. The observance of these rituals remains the sole prerogative of the Brahmans. But one can still see many non-Hindu elements in the observance of these rituals. In spite of the presence of traditional elements, one can hardly deny that these rituals are basically a part of the Indian culture.

The Manipuri Ras-lilā, one of the masterpieces of Asian art, occupies a pride of place in the world of dance and music. It is a product of the cross-fertilisation of two distinct cultures, Hindu and Manipuri. Though it has been evolved on the indigenous Lāi-harāobā dance, the theme is based on the Bhagabata and other purana traditions. The style of singing is definitely indigenous but the language is mainly in Sanskrit, Bengali and Brajabali. This dance is now one of the four schools of classical Indian dance the other three being Bharat Natyam, Kathakali and Kathak. Closely related to the Rās-dance is the Manipuri Nata-saṁkirtana. The style of the Nata-saṁkirtana is typically
Manipuri and like the Rās-dance it is a product of native genius but the theme is unmistakably Hindu. While other aspects of the samkirtana such as the cholog, etc., are developed on the indigenous dance forms, the music aspect is based on the various episodes of the divine love between Sri Krishna and Srimati Radha and also of the glory of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The samkirtana is still an integral aspect in the socio-religious life of the Meiteis. To the Meiteis the Rās-lilā and samkirtana are not simply entertainments but are the means through which their religious sentiments and aspirations find fulfilment. Thus through these Vaishnava dance and music, the socio-religious life of the Meiteis is linked up with the mainstream of Indian culture and religion. In certain other aspects also the socio-religious life of the Meiteis is linked up with the mainstream of Indian life. Horoscope-writing and predictions based on horoscopes, etc., still play a very important role in the social life of the Meiteis. In spite of the presence of certain traditional elements such as the inclusion of the name of cheithābā (the person after whom the year is named) in the writing of horoscopes, in other respects the Meiteis adopt the Hindu mode of writing horoscopes. Likewise story-telling and Lairik thibā-hāibā from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and other sacred scriptures form a very important aspect in the religious life of the Meiteis.
Similarly the Hindu concept of Bhakti and Ahimsa occupy an important place in the socio-religious life of the Meiteis.

Although the Manipuri culture of today forms an inseparable part of the great Indian culture, yet in certain respects it is still outside the cultural superstructure of the country. The caste system continues to play a very dominant role in the socio-religious life of the Hindus in the rest of India. With the introduction of Hinduism in Manipur, the system in a mild form had crept into the Meitei society, as we have already noted in the preceding chapter. Today the caste system and untouchability find no room in the Meitei society just as the system did not exist in their pre-Hindu days. But in the matter of religious rites outsiders are still treated like untouchables even if they be Brahmans and other high caste Hindus. Their social intercourse with the outsiders hardly goes beyond the commercial sphere. In so far as caste-structure is concerned the Meiteis are far away from the mainstream of Indian life. Similarly the dowry system which is still a burning issue in the rest of India has never been a problem in the Meitei social fabric. Further, the Meiteis do not adopt the Hindu custom of child marriage and the theory and practice of widowhood.
In dress men use the Indian-style dhoti and kurta on all ceremonial occasions. But on other occasions the western-style dress is very common, the Indian-style dress is mainly confined to the older people and the traditional khudei (loin cloth) is normally used for domestic purpose. But women do not go for sari. The traditional fanek is the main garment of women. In spite of being Indians, there are many people who today feel greatly annoyed when they see a Meitei woman or girl in sari. In their social customs, manners, etiquettes of which frequent references have been made earlier, the Meiteis are distinctly outside the mainstream of Indian life.

It is mainly the religious ties that draw the Meiteis towards the cultural mainstream of India. But a new wave of disintegrating force has now surfaced. Since the introduction of Hinduism in the valley the Meiteis took much pride in their culture and religion based on Brahmanical traditions. Hindu rituals and festivals have so long exercised a strong hold among the masses. But the trend is now changing and the hold of Hinduism on the people is slackening. This is partly due to the modern attitude to religion in general and also due to the present trend of revivalism launched by certain groups of Meiteis in particular. It is a universal phenomenon that with the spread of science and education religious rituals and
practices have lost much of their sanctity and influence. For most people religion has become a habit rather than an article of faith. This universal trend is true of the modern generation of Meiteis too. But besides this general trend, a new current is sweeping the valley for the revival of the ancient Meitei religion. The movement is spearheaded by certain groups of Meiteis to revive the Sanāmahi cult, the pre-Hindu Meitei religion and to root out any traces of Hindu religion from the valley. They strongly feel that only by doing so they can preserve the Meitei culture and identity from being swallowed by the mighty Hindu culture of India. The followers of this cult who style themselves as the worshippers of Sanāmahi, Pākhangbā and other Meitei gods and goddesses refuse to call themselves Hindus. They now perform the rituals and ceremonies according to the traditional customs and usages. But how far those rituals performed by this section of people in the genuine traditional way is a question which needs serious consideration. One can still notice many Hindu elements in their so-called traditional rituals and practices. It is because in actual practice

48. Sanāmahi occupies perhaps the most prominent position in the pre-Hindu Meitei pantheon. He is not only worshipped by the propagators of the cult but also by all the Hindu Meiteis as well as Manipuri Brahmans. Other pre-Hindu gods and goddesses are also equally worshipped by both Hindu Meiteis and non-Hindu Meiteis. But the latter refrain from worshipping and observing Hindu deities and their rituals.
they themselves are half-hearted in reverting totally to their pre-Hindu customs and traditions. But the echo of anti-Hindu and anti-Brahman propaganda is capturing the fancy of the younger generations. In order to sever their ties with Hindu culture and in their yearning for identity some sections of the Meiteis particularly the younger generation are dropping Hindu surnames like Singh, Devi, etc., from their names and these are being replaced by their clan names such as Ningthouja, Khuman, Luwang, etc. The words Manipur and Manipuri are being replaced by Meitrabak or Kangleipak and Meitei respectively. What is rather disturbing is that these so-called non-Hindu Meiteis find fault with anything of Hindu origin. They spare no pains in condemning the Manipuri Brahmans who have become practically Meiteis. This is perhaps because the Brahmans are still the custodians of Hindu culture and religion and their forefathers were responsible for the spread of Hinduism in Manipur. They even resort to the burning of some Hindu sacred books in a form of retaliation for the burning of the old Meitei books and scriptures by Shānti-Dās Goshāi in the eighteenth century. This revivalism with vengeance is a dangerous trend which might be a breeding ground for the division and disintegration even among the valley people themselves.