CHAPTER VI

BRITISH PARAMOUNTCY IN MANIPUR

The last attempt to dispossess Chandrakirti Singh from the throne was made by one Irengba Thundangba, on 23 June, 1881. The latter announced himself to be the Raja of Manipur, vested his followers with highest ranks. He collected a party of men in the neighbourhood of the salt wells at Nigel, Chandrakhong and Andro, in the eastern part of the valley of Manipur, and marched towards the Capital. The detachment that was sent under command of Balaram Singh and Samoo Singh succeeded in suppressing the rebels. The ringleader, including his followers, making a total of one hundred and seventy nine men, were taken captives; of these, eighteen were executed, ten imprisoned, nine sent to work in the salt springs and the rest were whipped and let off.

After a long reign, thirty five years Chandrakirti Singh expired on 20 May, 1886. He was a strong and capable ruler. He was of an inquisitive mind and had a great taste for mechanical arts of all kinds. In spite of all the difficulties he had confronted, he had consolidated his kingdom and brought about a series of reforming measures for the welfare of his subjects. However, his commitments to the British Government were not befitting to an independent ruler. From the very beginning he was entirely depended on them for what-

2. F.Poltl.A.Progs., September 1881, No.12, Secretary, C.C., Assam to Secretary, Government of India, 8 August 1881.
3. Ibid., August 1886, No.79, Secretary, C.C., Assam to Secretary, Government of India, 23 June 1886.
ever he did. His acceptance of presents and titles from the Government clearly indicates that his status was not different from other subordinate States under British Government. Johnstone writes: " ............... at the entrance of the Capital I was met by the Maharaja himself, surrounded by all his sons. A carpet was spread with chairs for him and myself. After a day's rest I paid a visit to the Maharaja, having first stipulated as to my proper reception. I was received by the Jubaraja (heir apparent) at the entrance to the private part of the Palace and by the Maharaja a few paces from the entrance to the Darbar room (Hall of reception) ....... I read the Viceroy's letter, informing the Maharaja of my appointment ........... I took my leave and was escorted back to the place where I was met on my arrival.6. Whereas in the Court of Ava, the British Resident, when attending Court had to remove his shoes and kneel before the King7.

Chandrakirti Singh had ten sons from his six queens. In accordance with his wishes, his four sons namely, Surachandra Singh, Kulachandra Singh, Rikeshrajit Singh alias Koireng and Jhalakirti Singh, born of the first four queens in order of seniority, became the Maharaja, Jubaraja, Senanayak (Commander) and Senapati (Commander in-Chief) respectively.

4. A robe of honour, a sword and a belt as Mutiny rewards; a gold signet ring, a many-bladed knife, a silver medallion and a portrait of His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales (afterwards King Edward VII; Annual Administrative Report of Manipur Political Agency, 1875-76, p.9).
5. Knight Commander of the Star of India on 20 February, 1880; James, My Experiences in Manipur and Naga Hills, p.179.
Of the three utarina brothers of Surachandra Singh, Bhairabjit Singh alias Paka Sana held the office of Segolhanjaba (Commander of the Horse), Keshorjit Singh Shamahanjaba (in-charge of elephants) and Padosamochan Singh Dolairoiljanjaba (in-charge of doolies). Prince Angou Sana, son of fifth queen, was officer in-charge of roads and Zillangamba Singh was the A.D.C. to the Raja. From official records, it is not known whether Prince Gandhar Singh, son of the second queen and uterine brother of Kulachandra Singh, held any office. In all probability, he might have been a minor which debarred him from such an assignment. Jhalakirti Singh died within a few months and Tikendrajit Singh succeeded to his office of the Senapati.

Surachandra Singh was a weak ruler. He was more dependent upon the British Government than his father. He firmly believed that he could not rule even for a day without the latter's support. In his character and views he was entirely different from those of Tikendrajit Singh who had already distinguished himself by his own valour and military skill, and this made him the most powerful and prominent member of the Court. His ability and popularity drew the wrath of the British Political Agents, particularly Johnstone, who in 1888 prepared a list of his crimes, some of which were committed as far back as 1877 and 1881. The latter believed that the

presence of such a bold, resourceful and domineering prince would certainly be detrimental to the interest of British in Manipur.

Tikendrajit Singh was hostile to the British influence and he tried to convince the Raja that Manipur could exist independently without any support from an alien government. Tikendrajit Singh, however, realised that no useful purpose would be served by adopting a hostile attitude towards the British Government. He, therefore, remained friendly with the British authorities at Manipur.

The very day on which Chandrakirti Singh died, a prince commonly known as Barachauba with fifteen titular princes revolted at Buri Bazar, a place about seven miles from the Capital. When the news reached Surachandra Singh, he sent a party of two hundred sepoys under the command of Shamu Singh to disperse them. Barachauba, by that time, had collected about six hundred men from the neighbouring villages. An encounter took place between the two parties in which the rebels fell back to Heibi Makhong between Buri Bazar and Manipur. The Raja sent reinforcement of one thousand and five hundred sepoys under the command of Tikendrajit Singh and General Thangal. The rebels were attacked and dispersed by...
Shortly afterwards he made another attempt to seize the throne but was arrested and sent to Hazaribagh as a Political prisoner.

Hardly had one year passed when Wangkheirakpa who was in-charge of the Tangkhul Nagas, unfurled the standard of revolt on 12 September, 1887. Surachandra Singh sent a large force under his brother Tikendrajit Singh to suppress the revolt. By that time the latter also collected a group of his followers and under cover of darkness he and his followers attacked the palace at about ten o'clock the same night and forced their way in. While attempting to make a rush at the gate of the Raja's private residence, Wangkheirakpa was killed in action along with his son and brother, and his revolt came to an end.

PALACE REVOLT OF 1890:

The death of Chandrakirti Singh was a signal for scramble for power amongst his sons who were divided into two groups - headed by Surachandra Singh and Kulachandra Singh. The enmity between the two was high-lighted by open rivalry between Tikendrajit Singh and Bhairabjit Singh, commonly known as Paka Sana. Bhairabjit Singh was an able and educated

12. Ibid.
14. Ibid., Confidential, 19 September 1887.
man. But according to the contemporary evidence he was mean and jealous of others, and as such, was never liked by his followers. He was the sworn enemy of Tikendrajit Singh since the day when the latter as Senapati became his superior officer. Mrs. Grimwood observed the relation between Paha Sana and Tikendrajit Singh as 'jealousies that the weak will ever have for the strong in whatever country or community it may be'. The ill feeling between the two rose to its height when both asked for the hands of a girl, supposed to be the prettiest maid in Manipur. The Raja at first remained neutral and held the balance between the two but was gradually won over by Paka Sana. Besides, Surachandra Singh created a new judicial post and appointed Paka Sana as its head though the whole department of administration of justice was hitherto in-charge of the Jubaraja. This made the relation between the Raja and Kulachandra Singh far from cordial. By that time, Paka Sana also quarrelled with Angou Sana Singh and Zillangamba Singh over several issues, and at length Paka Sana got the Raja to forbid Zillangamba and Angou Sana Singh to sit in the Durbar. The two princes also lost some of their offices, rights and privileges, and had good reason to fear that they would either be banished or punished. The young princes lost no time in consulting their powerful brother and ally Tikendrajit Singh. The result was that at the midnight of September 21, 1890, Angou Sana Singh and Zillangamba Singh accompanied

15. Mrs. Grimwood, My Three Years in Manipur, p. 130.
by a number of attendants scaled the walls of the *zanana Mahal* with the help of a ladder and proceeded towards the bed chamber of the Raja and began firing the rifles into the windows. The Maharaja had never much reputation for courage, and on this occasion instead of rousing his men to action and beating off the intruders he rushed out for safety at the back of the palace and fled to the Residency. Tikendra-jit Singh was not present at the time of this occurrence, but joined his two step brothers shortly afterwards; and the palace was occupied without any bloodshed. For reasons not definitely known Kulachandra Singh had left the palace on that very night, but returned in the morning and was proclaimed Raja. However, the movement of the *jubaraja* suggested that he was aware of the coming revolution and decided to sit on the fence without compromising himself in any way so that if the revolution failed he could claim no part in the whole affair.

In the meantime, Surachandra Singh had found shelter in the Residency along with his brothers, ministers and a number of armed retainers. The ex-Raja expected that Mr. Grimwood, the Political Agent, would help him to reclaim his position but to no purpose. From this moment, the relation between Surachandra Singh and the Political Agent has been a matter of keen controversy. It is not easy to disentangle the truth from the conflicting versions of what actually took

place on that eventful day. Surachandra Singh reported that he had asked for the Political Agent's assistance and sanction to fight rebels. But Grimwood denied and held the view that the former never asked him for sanction to fight. By that time, the Chief Commissioner of Assam instructed the Political Agent to try to mediate between the parties. But before any decision could be taken, Surachandra Singh expressed his desire to leave Manipur and to go on a pilgrimage and settle at Brindaban, in the United Provinces. Mrs. Grimwood writes: "My husband brought every argument to bear upon the Raja to induce him to brave the matters out and allow some efforts to be made to regain his throne; but he would not listen to any reason, and after some hours spent in fear and terror ........... signified his attention to my husband of making a formal abdication of the throne." After a careful study of the official records the Government of India expressed its view: "We consider that in his conduct of this affair the Political Agent showed some want of judgement. He should have exerted his influence more strongly to uphold the authority of the Maharaja and he should not have accepted the Maharaja's abdication, and allowed him to leave the State, without reference to the Government of India by whom Surachandra had been recognised as Chief of Manipur. A Political officer has no power to accept the abdication of a Native Chief. Mr. Grimwood's action greatly prejudiced the case and

was the cause of much subsequent trouble."\(^{19}\) In the whole, it was added, "it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Grimwood for some reason or other was sympathetic to the new regime and unwilling to see Surachandra Singh restored to the throne. The latter seems to insinuate that this was due to Grimwood's friendship for Tikendrajit Singh.\(^{20}\)

Surachandra Singh, finally, made up his mind to go to Brindaban. He wrote a letter to this effect to Tikendrajit Singh informing him that he had no desire to contest the throne. He had also returned the royal dress and sword and other paraphernalia requesting him that preparation be made for his journey.\(^{21}\) On completion of necessary arrangements by Surachandra Singh left for Brindaban. The ministers who had accompanied him to the Residency returned to the Palace where they were all received by Kulachandra, who had meanwhile come back to Manipur and proclaimed himself Maharaja. The new Raja made Tikendrajit Singh his Juhara, Angou Sana Singh, the Senapati and Zillangamba Singh the Sagolhanjaba (Commander of the Horse) respectively. On 29 September, 1890 Kulachandra despatched letter to the Government of India announcing that he had ascended the throne in consequence of his elder brother's abdication.\(^{22}\) The departure of the ex-Raja from Manipur for Brindaban made the Palace Revolution completely successful without any bloodshed.

\(^{19}\) F.Sec.Extl.F., October 1891, No.800, No.186 of 1891.
\(^{20}\) Misc.papers, F.Sec.F.Progs. April 1891, Nos.3-55, No.8-11.
\(^{21}\) Mamudar,R.C., op.cit., p.714.
\(^{22}\) F.Sec.Extl.F., October 1891, No.300, No.186 of 1891.
It is evident from the above that the real cause of the Palace Revolt of 1890 was mutual jealousy amongst the brothers of Surachandra Singh. Kulachandra Singh who occupied the throne valued his newly acquired office more than anything else. He agreed to keep three hundred British soldiers in the Residency and to administer Manipur according to the dictates of the British Political Agent. It seems that he was even prepared to give his consent to the extermination of Tikendrajit Singh if the Political Agent so desired. Evidently, no anti-British feeling could be traced to this revolt. Everything went on smoothly, and freed from internecine strife, the new administration brought peace and prosperity which the country had never seen during the time of Surachandra Singh. Roads had been repaired, bridges were constructed and the people seemed to be happier and more contented. Grimwood himself did not take the Palace revolution of 1890 seriously. He observed: "Manipur has witnessed many Palace revolutions - that of 1890 is merely a repetition."

DECISION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA:

Though the people of Manipur accepted the new regime without demure, Surachandra Singh never gave up hope of recovering his kingdom.

23. Mrs. Grimwood, My Three Years in Manipur, pp. 149-150.
At the time of the ex-Raja's departure from Manipur Grimwood gave him a permit in which it was stated that the former had voluntarily abdicated. Surachandra Singh had no knowledge of English and he came to know of it after he reached Cachar. He telegraphed to the Viceroy asking for help: "Just now opening Political Agent's pass learn that I abdicated, wholly untrue. Political Agent misunderstood me, shall submit full representation later on, solicit reconsideration and help." 24

At Silchar, Surachandra Singh wanted to meet the Chief Commissioner of Assam. But as the latter was then away from Silchar, the ex-Raja went to Calcutta and arrived there on 12 October, 1890; and on 14 November, he submitted a detailed statement to the Viceroy. The Government of India was not unwilling to restore Surajichandra Singh to the throne, but Grimwood strongly objected to such a course of action in consideration of the difficulties which the Government would have to face if the ex-Raja was allowed to return to Manipur. The Chief Commissioner of Assam also concurred in the opinion of the Political Agent. The Government of India, however, expressed considerable doubt as to whether the course recommended was advisable; and observed that if they acquiesced in the coming to power of Kulachandra Singh, Tikendrajit Singh, a man who was known to be hostile to the British, would be the power behind the throne. In view of the difference of opinion between the Government of India on the one hand and the Chief Commissioner and the Political Agent on the other, there was

a prolonged discussion. After a good deal of correspondence, the Government of India issued its final order, in February 1891, to the effect that Kulachandra Singh would be recognised as the Raja of Manipur if he agreed to the following conditions: (a) he should allow the Political Agent to keep 300 soldiers in the Residency, (b) he should administer the country according to the advice of the Political Agent and (c) he should agree to the externment of Tikendrajit Singh from Manipur and help the British Government in this respect.

Lord Lansdowne, the then Governor-General of India, believed that Kulachandra Singh would agree to all these proposals.

At the same time, Surachandra Singh was informed that he would not be restored to his throne, but he would be allowed to reside at a place selected by the Government, receiving only a pension. "The decision of the Government of India" R.C. Mazumdar writes, "to say the least of it is very curious. It accepted the revolution as a fait accompli and condoned the person who got the greatest benefit of it, but banished another who was not known to have been taken any actual part in it but whom they held without any positive evidence as its chief instigator." It is curious to note that though Tikendrajit Singh had every chance of occupying the throne, he never attempted to overstep his elder brother Kulachandra Singh. In all probability he supported the cause of the rebels not for his personal gain but because of his hostility.

to Surachandra Singh, who was always sympathetic to the cause of his uterine brothers. Kulachandra Singh who derived the greatest benefit was allowed to enjoy his ill gotten gain and the Senapati was singled out for punishment, though according to all evidence it was his younger brothers who made the coup.

Nonetheless, the Government of India suggested that the decision about Manipur should be kept a close secret until it was announced by Mr. Quinton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam. The latter was advised to take sufficient force with him even though no resistance was apprehended. The Chief Commissioner left Calcutta on 21 February 1891, and started for Manipur from Golaghat on 7 March by the Kohima route with an escort of four hundred Gurkha soldiers under the command of Colonel Skene and a few civilians. An additional body of two hundred Gurkhas was directed to proceed from Cachar to Manipur.

Quinton's intention was to require Kulachandra Singh and Tikendrajit Singh to meet him at a Durbar on his arrival to announce the decision of the Governor-General and to arrest the latter prince and take him away into exile in India. The Government of India concurred in the plan of the Chief Commissioner mainly because they took the Durbar as a meeting between the Raja and his courtiers27. On 21 March 1891, Grimwood went to Sekmai, twelve miles from the Capital, to meet the Chief Commissioner and only then he came to know about the

plan to arrest Tikendrajit Singh. The visit of Quinton caused great consternation in Manipur as it was generally believed that he was bringing Surachandra Singh with him in order to restore him to the throne. This eventuality was anticipated to the authorities in the Capital of Manipur and preparations were made to resist the ex-Raja should he return to Manipur.

**QUINTON'S PLAN:**

Quinton arrived at the Capital on the morning of March 22, 1891, and the Durbar was scheduled to be held on the same day. The Chief Commissioner asked Kulachandra Singh to attend it with all his brothers. In the meanwhile the doors of the Durbar room were all closed with the exception of the front door and guards were stationed in the adjoining rooms and also around the Residency. According to Mrs. Grimwood, the Head Clerk of the Agency, Rashik Lal Kundu was engaged to translate the orders of the Government of India into Manipuri. Before the translation was completed, Kulachandra Singh and all his brothers arrived at the Residency gate at the appointed hour. There was no one at the gate to receive them. Besides, they were not allowed to go beyond it and thus kept waiting at the gate before the translation was completed. Mrs. Grimwood rightly observed that if the princes were not kept waiting at the gate, things might have ended differently.

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While Tikendrajit Singh was standing at the gate he was informed as to the arrangements of guards posted at different corners in the Residency. The former, who already had some suspicion about the motive of the Chief Commissioner, was convinced that the Durbar was only a trap to arrest him, and, therefore, left for the Palace along with prince Angur Sana Singh. When the translation was ready, the Chief Commissioner was not prepared to have the Durbar without Tikendrajit Singh. He refused even to see the Maharaja without Tikendrajit Singh. Grimwood, persuaded Kulachandra Singh to send for the latter, but the messenger came back with the information that Tikendrajit Singh was too ill to leave the Palace. Accordingly, the Durbar was adjourned till 8 A.M. of the following day.

Next day, at the appointed hour, a message reached from Kulachandra Singh that Tikendrajit Singh could not attend the Durbar as he was indisposed. After the failure of his plan to capture Tikendrajit Singh in the Durbar Hall, Quinton decided to send Grimwood, along with another officer Mr. Simpson, to the Palace and communicate to the Raja the decision of the Government of India. With this object in view, the Political Agent and Simpson left the Residency at about 4 P.M. of the 23rd March and communicated decision of the Government to Kulachandra Singh. The latter expressed his appreciation for the recognition accorded to him, but expressed his inability to arrest and hand over Tikendrajit Singh.

29. Ibid., pp. 184-186.
30. Ibid., p. 190.
Singh. However, when Grimwood sought an interview with Tikendrajit Singh he was allowed to meet him, but to no purpose.

On the failure of his plans, Quinton was much aggrieved. He decided to arrest Tikendrajit Singh on the same night by suddenly invading the Palace. He called a secret meeting of the military officers and expressed his desire to effect the arrest of the prince by force. Though the officers were rather hesitant in view of the paucity of British troops in Manipur at that precise moment, the will of the Chief Commissioner ultimately prevailed. He ordered Lieutenant Brackenbury, Captain Butcher and Lieutenant Lugard to seize Tikendrajit Singh at his Palace.

Accordingly, at about 3–30 A.M. the British troops made a surprise attack on Tikendrajit Singh. Not finding the latter in his house the raiders killed some of the guards and other inmates of the house, seized the household god called Brindabanchandra and the jewels dedicated to the deity. Another body of the troops entered the village lying east of the Palace and burnt down ten or twelve houses.

The Chief Commissioner’s attack on the Sepapati’s residence changed the whole situation. It threw Tikendrajit Singh on the offensive. To save the lives of the excited subjects he took up arms, and fighting continued for the whole day. At nightfall, the British troops had exhausted

31. Progs. of the Indian Historical Records Commission, Vol. XXXV; Appeal to the Governor-General in Council by the ladies of the Royal family of Manipur.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
all their ammunitions. The hope of arresting Tikendrajit Singh was long given up; even the safety of so many lives at the Residency appeared to be in great peril. When the position of British troops thus became extremely critical they sounded the bugle. Though the Manipuris were in a position of vantage and under no obligation to cease fire, they did so without any parley. This showed that the Manipuris were not inspired by their thirst for vengeance upon the British for their treacherous attack in the morning.

Quinton wrote to Kulachandra Singh proposing a cessation of hostilities: "On what condition will you cease fire on us and give us time to communicate with the Viceroy and repair the telegraph?" Shortly a message came from the latter stating that "I had never any intention to fight with you, but as your troops attacked the Palace my men had to fight in self defence. There is none in my Palace who can read and understand English. But as I received your letter immediately after cease fire I take it that you want to conclude peace. If your soldiers give up arms I shall conclude peace with you in a moment." On receipt of this letter, the Chief Commissioner wanted to discuss about the terms directly with Kulachandra Singh and Tikendrajit Singh for further clarification. With this object in view Quinton, Colonel Dicken, Mr. Cossins, Lieutenant Simpson and Grimwood went to the Palace.

34. Mrs. Grimwood, op.cit., p.216.
35. Ibid., pp.214-215.
36. As quoted by Masmudar in British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance, p.725.
along with a Gurkha bugler without seeking safe conduct either from Tikendrajit Singh or Kulachandra Singh.

In the Palace, the British officers and the Manipuris could not arrive at a final decision as to the terms of the agreement. By that time a large crowd, including some soldiers, were anxiously waiting outside to know the result of the conference. Tikendrajit insisted upon the British officers surrendering their arms. He said: "Your conduct has made us afraid. So unless you give up arms we cannot rely on your oral assurances," but the latter refused. On the failure of negotiations, Tikendrajit asked his brother Angou Sana Singh to escort the British officers and see them safely out while he himself returned to the Top-Garod. While coming out of the Palace the British officers were attacked by the excited crowd. Though Angou Sana Singh tried to save them Grimwood was speared to death and Lieutenant Simpson was struck on the head with a sword and wounded severely. To save the remaining officers, Jatra Singh, a store-keeper of the Raja, at once forced open the door of the Durbar Hall and put them inside. On hearing the noise, Tikendrajit Singh personally came to the place, and at his instance some guards were posted around the Hall for their protection.

By that time Thangal also came to the spot and had a long discussion with Tikendrajit about the fate of the British officers. The former pointed out that since the afore-

38. General Thangal was one of the important ministers of the State. For some time he was minister, Burmese affairs. He occupied a high position in the Court of Manipur.
said officers were guilty of waging war against the Government of Manipur they should be punished, but the latter held a different view. In the course of their discussion Tikendrajit fell asleep out of sheer exhaustion. Availing of the opportunity Thangal, called in Yeng Karba (Yang Khoiba), the Chief orderly, and told him that Tikendrajit Singh had ordered that the British officers be handed over to the executioner. Accordingly, they were chained and beheaded by the public executioner. The Gurkha bugler who accompanied them was also not spared. As Quinton and his party did not come and the firing from the Palace began, everybody in the British Residency thought that all chances of peace had gone and the Chief Commissioner and his party must have been arrested. There was no question of defending the Residency, because the British troops had exhausted their ammunition including the usual reserve ammunition kept in the Government Treasury and subsequently Mrs. Grimwood and a few British officers with two hundred Gurkha soldiers left the Residency on the night of 25 March, 1891. Orders were issued to all the Police outposts at Bishenpur, Leimatak and Khoubum to check their escape; Mrs. Grimwood was to be spared. Mr. Melville, the then Superintendent of Telegraphs, who came to Manipur and left the State on 23 March, 1891, was pursued and killed at Mayangkhang, on the Imphal-Dimapur Road, along with Mr. O’Brien, his companion. But Mrs. Grimwood and her party effected their escape and reached Cachar by the old Cachar route.
The manner in which Quinton handled the situation was a subject of considerable controversy both in England and in India, especially in respect of his action in inviting the Senapati (i.e., Rikendrajit Singh) to the Durbar with the intention of arresting him. Lord Lansdowne supported the Chief Commissioner. He reported to the Secretary of State:

"........... It is the right and duty of the British Government to settle succession in subordinate Native States ...........

Manipur is a subordinate Native State. We render it independent of Burma. We have recognised successions in Manipur and have asserted suzerainty in many ways ........... we could not permit a revolt against a chief recognised by us to remain wholly successful and unpunished and virtual authority in Manipur to pass into the hands of Senapati ......... the real leader of the revolution of September 1890 ........ Under the circumstances we decided that Senapati should be removed from the State ....

As to the merits of Quinton's proposed action (the decision to arrest the Senapati in a Durbar) there was certainly nothing unusual in announcing our orders in a formal Durbar, including the order for removal of Senapati ......."39

The British Government, though bending their support to the policy of the Government of India and exonerating Quinton from any imputation of treachery, condemned the Chief Commissioner for summoning the Manipuri Princes to the Durbar which was almost universally understood to be held for ceremonial purposes only.40

39. Viceroy's Telegram to the Secy. of State, 5 July, 1891.
40. Secretary of States' Despatch No.9, 24 July, 1891.
The reason for the contemplated removal of Tikendrajit Singh was his suspected complicity in the Palace Revolt of 1890. Quinton did not explain it to the Senapati before 23 March, 1891. The Chief Commissioner, therefore, blundered seriously in the mode of executing the decision of the Government of India. The internment of Tikendrajit Singh was also not for life, because His Lordship in Council held the view that he should be given an allowance and be permitted to return to Manipur and succeed to the throne after the death of Kulachandra Singh. The Chief Commissioner did not convey this decision to Tikendrajit Singh in time; on the contrary, he made an unprovoked attack on the house of the latter, killed the guards and other inmates and burnt down the adjoining villages. Evidently, had Quinton arrested Tikendrajit Singh in a more straight forward way, perhaps, the disaster of 1891 could have been averted.

MANIPUR WAR OF 1891:

The news of the murder of the Chief Commissioner and his party was reported to Lieutenant Grant, who was by that time posted at Tamu, by a Jemadar of the Gurkha Rifles from Manipur. On receipt of the news, Grant wired the Government of India to this effect and he himself marched towards Imphal on 28 March 1891 with fifty soldiers of the 12 Madras Infantry and thirty of the 42nd Gurkha Rifles. His advance was intercepted by a strong Manipuri force at Thoubal.

fourteen miles from the Capital. While making a serious encounter with the latter, Grant received a communication from the Government of India to withdraw his force and to await further reinforcements of British troops from Burma. Accordingly, he began to retreat; but he was followed and attacked by the Manipuris. The timely arrival of Major Leslie and Cox with four hundred Gurkhas and two mountain guns, however, saved him from total destruction. The British troops drove Manipuri sepoys and stockaded themselves at Palel, twenty six miles from the Capital, till the arrival of General Graham, the Commander of the Tamu Column.

When the news reached the Government of India, three Columns of British troops were immediately sent to Manipur from Kohima on the north, Silchar on the west and Tamu on the south. General Collett was appointed as the overall Commander of the whole operation and the Kohima Column was led directly by him.

On receipt of the news of the advance of British troops the Manipuris inside and outside the State became agitated and felt greatly concerned over the fate of the State. The Manipuris in Cachar, Dacca, Shillong, Golaghat, Nabadwip and other places in and around Assam tried to enter the State and fight in defence of the ruling family. However, before any help from them could reach Manipur General Collett's soldiers entered the Capital without any opposition. Shortly

42. Shakespeare, Colonel, History of the Assam Rifles, pp.178-180.
after it the troops from Cachar also converged on the Capital. The only serious opposition to the march of the British troops on Manipur was offered at Palel under the command of Major General Paona Brajabasi. On 23 April, 1891, a decisive battle was fought at Khongjom, near Palel, in which the Manipuris were utterly defeated. When this news reached the Capital, Tikendrajit Singh volunteered to advance towards Khongjom. But the War Council, headed by Kulachandra, did not approve of his leaving the Capital at that critical moment. The local sources suggest that he went underground and planned to seek help from China against the British. With this object in view, he went up to the Chussad Kuki villages and sought asylum there. The British troops, in the meantime, assembled at the Palace and hoisted, on 27 April, 1891 the Union Jack over the Capital.

**THE TRIAL:**

Before the fall of the Capital, Kulachandra Singh, General Thangal, along with others went underground. General Collett set up a price upon their heads and by 23 May, 1891 some of them were arrested and others surrendered voluntarily. When the news reached the Chussad Kukis, they betrayed Tikendrajit Singh. The latter came down to the Valley and surrendered voluntarily to Khelendra Subadar, a Manipuri Police Officer.

43. The memorial stone of Major General Paona Brajabasi at Khebaching, 19 miles to the south of Manipur records: "Major General Paona Brajabasi, age 58 years, the valiant Hero of Manipuri died for Fatherland on Thursday, the 23rd April, 1891 Superhuman in battle devoted unto death."

After the surrender of Tikendrajit Singh the Government of India set up a Special Tribunal with two military officers and one Civil Officer under the Presidentship of Lieutenant Colonel St. John Mitchell to try Kulachandra Singh, Tikendrajit Singh and Angou Sana Singh. They were charged with (1) waging war against the Empress of India; (2) abetment to the murder of four British officers and (3) murder. The Tribunal did not allow the accused to produce lawyers from outside the State. Tikendrajit Singh appointed one Janaki Nath Basak, a resident of Imphal, who in his own admission said that he was not a lawyer and never had any experience of how criminal trials were conducted. Thus fifteen witnesses were examined on behalf of the prosecution and six for the accused persons. The Tribunal found Tikendrajit Singh guilty on the first and second count and not guilty on the third; he was sentenced to death. Kulachandra Singh and Angou Sana Singh were found guilty of waging war against the Queen Empress and both of them were sentenced to death. Thangal, Miranjan Subedar, an ex-soldier of the 34th Native Infantry, and Kajao, who actually killed Mr. Grimwood were tried and found guilty and were sentenced to death and the other thirteen accused persons were sentenced to transportation for life.

It is not unlikely that the Government of India had already decided upon the punishment to be meted out and the Tribunal sat only for the sake of legal formality. Both Kulachandra Singh and Tikendrajit Singh appealed to the Governor.

46. Ibid., pp. 732-739.
General against the decision of the Tribunal, but they were allowed to submit written petition only. *Man Mohan Ghosh, a Barrister from Calcutta, filed the written petition on behalf of Kulachandra Singh, Tikendrajit Singh and the other accused. Ghosh contented that the British forces had attacked the house of Tikendrajit Singh and the palace of Manipur without a formal declaration of war and the palace guards had returned the fire in self-defence. Regarding the charge of murder, he also pointed out that definite responsibility of issuing the order had not been assessed beyond doubt either upon Kulachandra Singh or Tikendrajit Singh."As regards the charge of abetment of murder" Ghosh further contended that "the evidence adduced by the prosecution entirely fails to establish the complicity of the Jubaraja, and that, on the contrary, there is enough on the record to raise a strong presumption in his favour, that he was entirely opposed to the murder of the British officers, and that the orders of the fongol (Thangal) General were carried out in spite of his protests and without his knowledge."47

The Governor-General, nevertheless, confirmed the death sentences passed on Tikendrajit Singh, Thangal, Niranjan and Kajao and commuted the sentences of Kulachandra Singh and Angou Sana to transportation of life.47a. The order was announced on August 13, 1891 and in the evening of the same day.


day Tikendrajit Singh, Thangal, Miranjan and Kajao were publicly hanged in the Polo ground. Kulachandra Singh and Angou Sana were taken out of Manipur and deported to Andaman along with the other thirteen accused persons.

The trial of the Manipuri princes by the Special Tribunal is open to severe criticism. Article 2, of the Treaty of Yandaboo did not define very clearly the exact status of Manipur; there was no subsequent treaty to indicate that it was a vassal state either of Burma or the British. Theoretically, the British Government had no suzerainty over Manipur, but the State acted as a subordinate ally. However, this position was not "based in legal right but from the natural right of the strong over the weak fortified by the prerogatives of a Paramount Power, a role assumed by the British in India since 1818". No doubt a certain amount of protection under certain conditions were entered into in certain treaties but it does not mean that Manipur was a vassal State of the British Government in the true sense of the term. In clause 7, of the Agreement of 18 April, 1833 it was laid down that "in the event of anything happening on the eastern frontier of the British territories the Raja (of Manipur) will assist the British Government with a portion of his troops." Jan Mohan Ghosh, in his appeal, again pointed out that "in 1865

and again in 1867 the High Court of Calcutta held that the Raja of Manipur was an Asiatic sovereign in alliance with the queen.\footnote{Ibid., p.734.}

The accused persons were, therefore, "not British subjects and the Tribunal set up by the Government of India had no jurisdiction to try them, and the section of the Indian Penal Code under which they were charged with waging war against the Queen was not applicable to them." Moreover, the judges who tried the case, including Lieutenant Colonel St. John Mitchell himself, had no legal training, and had no knowledge of judicial procedure to be followed during the criminal trial. Partha Singh, who acted as the interpreter had no knowledge of English. He translated the Manipuri version of the depositions of the witnesses into Urdu and Major Maxwell, who conducted the case on behalf of the Government translated it again into English. There were, therefore, a series of mistakes and omissions in noting down the depositions of the witnesses. Jatra Singh in his evidence said:

\begin{quote}
As soon as Jubaraja (Tikendrajit) began to talk with Thangal about the order said to have been given by the General (Thangal) to kill the Sahibs (Quinton and his party), I came away without waiting to learn what reply the Jubaraja made to the General.\footnote{As quoted by Hazumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.736.}
\end{quote}

But the Special Court recorded as "Jubaraja did not say anything." Similarly, Usurba Singh in his deposition said:

\begin{quote}
Jubaraja told Thangal that the Sahibs must...\end{quote}
not be killed on any account." But this was not recorded by the Court. Since Janaki Nath Basak, who was not a lawyer and who never had any experience of how criminal trials were to be conducted, could not cross examine the witnesses and no pleader from outside the State was allowed to engage in the trial, the real facts of the case could not be brought before the Court.

Tikendrajit Singh had to pay extreme penalty not because he was waging a war against the Government of India but because of his domineering personality, something which the British Government could not tolerate in any native ruler. This was revealed by the Under Secretary of State for India in his speech in the British Parliament. After referring to his ability, good character and popularity of Tikendrajit Singh he expressed, "Governments have always hated and discouraged independent and original talent, and they have always loved and promoted docile and unpretending mediocrity. This is not a new policy. It is as old as Tarquinius Superbus; and although in these modern times we do not lop or cut off the heads of the tall poppies, we take other and more merciful means of reducing any person of dangerous pre-eminence to a harmless condition."

51. A Ibid.
The trial of the Manipuri princes hardly deserves to be called a trial and the punishment meted out to Tikendrajit Singh had been regarded by many as judicial murder. The authority which the British Government undoubtedly exercised over Manipur was, therefore, not based on any legal right but was mainly derived from the natural right of the strong over the weak. Man Mohan Ghosh observed: ".... having regard to the nature of the tribunal and the manner in which the trial was conducted, the accused belonging to the royal family of Manipur were practically undefended and had not received any fair and impartial trial which the humblest British subject would have claimed as a 'matter of right'. The trial, naturally, created a great sensation in all Assam and Bengal. In a letter to Lord Cross, the then Secretary of State for India on 8 and 10 August, 1891, even Her Majesty Queen Victoria expressed her sincere regret on the death sentence passed on Tikendrajit Singh. Captain Hearsey, a Military official of the time, rightly observed: "The trial of the accused princes had been one of the most outrageous farces and parodies of justice that have ever yet been exhibited to the Indian nation."

With the execution of Tikendrajit Singh Manipur lost her independence and the Government of India appointed Churachand Singh, son of Chowbi Yaima and a great grandson of Mar Singh, a boy of five, as the Raja of the State and a

54. From the letters of Queen Victoria, as quoted by Iqbaluddar in his book British Paramountcy etc., pp.738-39.
Sanad was given to him to this effect. The Sanad provided that (1) he (Churachand Singh) would get the title of the Raja of Manipur and a salute of eleven guns; (2) the Chiefship of Manipur, the title and salute would descend in his family according to the law of primogeniture, provided the succession was approved in each case by the Government of India; (3) the permanence conferred by the Sanad was subject to ready fulfilment by him and his successors of all orders of the British Government regarding the administration of the State, the hill tribes, the armed forces of the State and any other matter in which the British Government might be pleased to intervene; (4) so long as his House was loyal to the Crown and faithful to the conditions of the Sanad, he and his successors would get the protection and favour of the British Government. The Sanad provided for the complete subordination of the Manipur State, and for the payment of a yearly tribute, which was fixed in 1892 at Rs 50,000 payable from 2 August, 1891. And for the treacherous attack on British officers a fine of Rs 2,50,000 was also imposed in 1892 and this was allowed to be paid off in five yearly instalments. Thus, the year 1891 marked a turning point in the history of Manipur. Whatever might be his earlier status, under the Sanad, the Raja was relegated to the position of a tributary vassal.

56. See Appendix G.
Hereafter, he could not wage war nor negotiate peace with any power without the consent and approval of the British Government. Even in his internal administration and in relations with neighbouring hill tribes he was subjected to the supervision of the British Political Agent, permanently stationed at Imphal. Any maladministration or oppression on his part was sure to be visited with serious consequences. The Sanad of the year 1891, thus, established British Paramountcy in Manipur.
Appendix-G

The Sanad given to Churachand Singh, son of Chowbiyaima and great grandson of Raja War Singh of Manipur (Notification No.1862-E, 18 September, 1891):

"With reference to the notification in the Gazette of India No.1700E, dated 21st August, 1891, regarding the regrant of Manipuri State, it is hereby notified that the Governor General in Council has selected Churachand, son of Chowbiyaima, and great grandson of Raja War Singh of Manipur, to be the Raja of Manipur.

The Sanad given to Churachand is published for general information.

The Governor General in Council has pleased to select you, Chura Chand, son of Chowbi Yaima, to be Chief of the Manipur State; and you are hereby granted the title of Raja of Manipur and a salute of eleven guns.

The Chiefship of the Manipur State and the title and salute will be hereditary in your family, and will descend in the direct line by primogeniture, provided that in each case the succession is approved by the Government of India.

An annual tribute, the amount of which will be determined hereafter will be paid by you and your successors to the British Government.

Further you are informed that the permanence of the grant conveyed by this Sanad will depend upon the ready fulfilment by you and your successors of all orders given by
the British Government with regard to the administration and your territories, the control of the hill tribes dependent upon Manipur, the composition of the armed forces of the State, and any other matters in which the British Government may be pleased to intervene. Be assured that so long as your House is loyal to the Crown and faithful to the conditions of this Sanad you and your successors will enjoy favour and protection of the British Government."