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A Brief Overview of the Political History of Manipur up to 1947 CE

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Abstract

The *Cheithārol Kumbābā* (the royal chronicle of Manipur), claims to trace the history of the Meitei kingdom back to 33 CE, and it ends with the last king Bodhachandra in 1955 CE. Maharaj Bodhachandra introduced responsible government in 1948 in Manipur. On the withdrawal of the British power from India in August 1947, Manipur regained its former status. It became the first part of the sub-continent to hold free elections with full adult franchise in 1948, when a Legislature was set up with the Maharaja as constitutional monarch. After a brief period of independence Manipur was absorbed into the Indian Union on 21st September 1949. Manipur was merged in 15th October 1949 and without the assembly, converted to a Part C State under a Chief Commissioner and then in 1957 to a Territory. After a long agitation, on January 21, 1972, Manipur was affirmed a State again. This paper intends to study the distinctive historical and political status of Manipur taking into account of the manner in which the ancient state of Manipur was forcibly assimilated or taken over by the dominion government of India in 1949.

Keywords: Manipur, Meitei, Merged, Historical, Political, India

As regards political history, there is little or no regular history in Manipur before 33 CE. Because in those days Manipur belonged to several Chiefs, each of them was independent of one another. Hill belonged to the various tribal chiefs and the valley to seven chiefs. In course of time, they began to struggle for suzerainty. In about 33 CE, there are three chiefs in the valley, namely, Mitaya (Ningthouja), Khuman and Moirang, but Mitaya (Ningthouja) became politically superior to the other two. That is to say that Mitaya (Ningthouja) established political sovereignty, however, in the valley. Since then, regular history, though very short started. The *Cheithārol Kumbābā* (the royal chronicle of Manipur), claims to trace the history of the Meitei kingdom back to 33 CE, and it ends with the last king Bodhachandra in 1955 CE.¹

Political History:

Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33-154 CE) was the first historical king of Manipur and reigned for 120 years.² The successor of Pakhangba was his son Meidingu Khuyoi Tompok (154-264 CE), who ascended the throne in 154 CE. Khuyoi Tompok was succeeded by his son, Meidingu Taotthingmang (264-364 CE), who became the King in 264 CE and he ruled for 100 years. After Naokhamba, his son Naophangba (428 CE-518 CE) became the King in

428 CE. Irengba's son Meidingu Loiyumba (1074 CE – 1122 CE) became the king in 1074 CE.³ He ruled for 48 years and died in 1122 CE.

One of the important rulers of Manipur was Meidingu Kyamba (1467 CE – 1508 CE), who became the king in 1467 CE and was crowned at the age of 24 years. In 1597 CE, Meidingu Khagemba (1597 CE – 1652 CE) became the king at the age of 24.⁴

In 1709 CE, Meidingu Garibniwaz or Pamheiba (1709 CE – 1748 CE) became the king at the age of 20. In 1748 CE, he (Garibniwaz) abdicated in favour of his son Chitshai who turned him out from place to place.⁵

Ningthem Chitshai (1748 CE – 1752 CE) had driven out of his father Garibniwaz to Ava in 1750 CE. In 1751 CE, Garibniwaz Maharaja returned from Ava. On receipt of the information of his father's return, Ningthem Chitshai sent four persons to receive Maharaj Garibniwaz, his party and to hide them. Ningthem Chitshai carried away Garibniwaz and his sons, Shyamshai, Kishor Shai, *Bāmon* (Brahmin) Wariba Hanjaba and his son Bramharam Krishna, Sanyāsi Palok Das, Moirang Lanhamba Katwan and his younger brother Pheida Hanjaba Shelungba, Angom Chandramani, Naoroiba Shelungba, Ningthoukhongjam Kamdeb, Ningonba Shymram, Wangkhei Maimu Pheida Hanjaba, Takhen Lambu Lairen Tumba to a place called Tomphang Hiden situated on the bank of the Brahmaputra (Ningthi or Chindwin) river where he killed all of them including Garibniwaz Maharaja. Chitshai was a very unpopular ruler.⁶ After him, his brother Shangoitaba Bharat Shai (1752 CE – 1753 CE) ascended the throne in 1752 CE.⁷ The King with the assistance of all the countrymen had driven out Ningthem Menkhomba (Chitshai).⁸

After the expulsion of Bharat Shai, Meidingu Maramba (Goura Shyam) (1753 – 1759 CE), the son of Shyamshai, the eldest son of Garibniwaz ascended the throne of Manipur in 1753 CE. Ningthem Shangoitaba (Bharat Shai) was driven out to Ava and Khumanthemba Pukhranba Luwang and Oinam Sekmu were killed.⁹ Meidingu Maramba went to attack Ava. The Ava took possession of Kakching Fort. Maramba's brother Jubaraja Bhagyachandra made a strong Fort at Leishangkhong and opposed the advance of Ava, he fought a fierce battle but failed to keep up his position and the country was devastated. The Ava took possession of the country and stayed for 9 days and settled in the country of Meiteis.¹⁰ The king and the people fled to the hills and after the departure of the Burmese returned to the capital. Goura Shyam abdicated the throne in favour of his younger brother Meidingu Chingthang Khomba or Bhagyachandra (1759 CE – 1761 CE) who ascended the throne with his wife Akham Chanu in 1759 CE. In 1762 CE, one Brāhmachāri (celibate) was murdered by his slave at Tangkham as a result of which Meidingu Chingthangkhomba abdicated the throne and Meidingu Maramba ascended the throne for a second time. Meidingu Maramba died in 1763 CE and his younger brother Chingthangkhomba/Bhagyachandra (1763 CE – 1798 CE) again became the King.¹¹

In 1764 CE, the Burmese king Hsinbyusin (1760 – 1773 CE) invaded Manipur in the Kabaw valley. The Manipuri forces were defeated at Tamu. The Maharaja himself went to the field to attack Ava (Upper Burma or Myanmar) and made a Fort at Kakching and fought with Ava by making a barricade with straw but being the King, Bhagyachandra was unable to stand before the enemy, so he retreated. Chingthangkhomba went to Cachar and took shelter in Assam. In the absence of Bhagyachandra, Khellemba (tributary chief of Moirang) negotiated with the Burmese and he was made the tributary king of Manipur

under the Burmese suzerainty (1765 – 1768 CE). In 1767 CE, Chingthangkhomba Maharaja started from Tekhao (Assam) with 80,000 troops to regain his Kingdom of Manipur. So, in 1767 CE, Bhagyachandra or Jai Singh with the help of the Ahoms regained the throne of Manipur by killing the titular ruler, Khellemba.¹² Till 1782 CE, there were several invasions of the Burmese, again and again, but at no place could the Burmese win.

In 1798 CE, during the absence of Maharaja (Chingthangkhomba) on pilgrimage, his son Ibungshi Jubaraja Wangkheirakpa Labanyachandra was in charge of the administration of *Meitei Leipak*. The sad news of the death of Maharaja Bhagyachandra was received and Kirtan of the Maharaja was performed in the Palace for 7 days.¹³

Shri Maharaja Labanyachandra (1798 CE – 1800 CE) became the king at the age of 44 in 1798 CE. In 1799 CE, Tamu (Myanmar) was burnt by the Burmese and the chief of Tamu fled to Manipur. Labanya Chandra personally went to turn out the Burmese from Tamu. Meidingu Loirenhomba (Labanyachandra) died in 1800 CE at the age of 46 after ruling for 3 years.

The third son of Bhagyachandra, Shri Madhuchandra (1800 CE – 1803 CE), the younger brother of Meidingu Loiren Khomba became the king at the age of 36 in 1800 CE. Maharaja's younger brothers – Chourajit and Marjit were promoted to the posts of the Jubaraja and the Senapati respectively. He gave his daughter Indu Prabha to Krishna Chandra (King of Cachar) in marriage.¹⁴ Madhuchandra's reign came to an end with the invasion of Jubaraj Chourajit (1803 CE – 1813 CE) securing help of Cachar and in 1803 CE he occupied the throne at the age of 27. His elder brother Ibungo Madhuchandra fled and took shelter in Cachar after ruling Manipur for 3 years.¹⁵ He made Marjit, the Yubaraj as he supported him in his revolt against Madhuchandra. The Maharaja got the news that Madhuchandra along with Cachar forces arrived at the village of Shamupan and then the two brothers (Chourajit and Marjit) entered Shamupan and there was a fierce fighting between two brothers (Chourajit and Madhuchandra) and Maharaja Madhuchandra and Madanshai died. Maharaja Chourajit won the battle.¹⁶

During his reign, Marjit revolted against him (Chourajit) in 1805 CE. But having failed in the conspiracy, he fled to Burma. He again led the attack on the capital and the royal palace which was under the command of king Chourajit himself. Perhaps, the invading forces were collected by Marjit from the Shans of Kabaw valley but his forces were defeated and dispersed. Marjit fled to Cachar and tried to get help from the king of Cachar. But having failed in this mission, he fled to Burma to get help from the Burmese king. In 1813 CE, the Burmese king sends a military expedition to conquer Manipur and it was accompanied by Marjit Singh. The Manipuri forces were defeated and the King Chourajit and Prince Gambhir Singh fled to Cachar. Marjit (1814 CE – 1819 CE) was appointed as the new king of Manipur in 1813 CE under the Burmese suzerainty and by ceding Kabaw valley to Burma. Marjit had a reign of six years.

The new king Bagyidaw (grandson of Badawpaya), summoned the Manipur king to be present at his coronation ceremony at Ava and pay homage to him which was customary for any vassal ruler in Burma but Marjit refused to attend the ceremony. Then, Bagyidaw sent an invasion army to conquer Manipur. Marjit was defeated and fled to Cachar. Thus, Manipur was brought under the Burmese rule for seven years (1819-1826 CE) which is known as the seven years devastation in the history of Manipur.¹⁷

In 1820 CE, Yumjaotaba, elder brother of Herachandra, became the king and Herachandra, a son of the late king Madhuchandra was made the Yubaraj. Yumjaotaba was the first Manipuri prince to become the king during the period of the reign of terror under the Burmese. Ibungshi Gambhir Singh (the son of Maharaja Bhagyachanda/Jay Singh) came back from Cachar and became the Maharaja of Manipur in 1821 CE and his son Yumjaotaba fled to Ava. The king of Ava came and placed Jay Singh (1821-1822 CE) on the throne of Meitei Leipāk at Thoubal-Moijing and lived at the newly constructed Palace. Maharaja Gambhir Singh went to Cachar. But Jay Singh was replaced by Jadu Singh in 1822 CE. The King of Ava appointed Ibungshi Jadu Singh (1822 CE - 1823 CE) as the Maharaja of Manipur.¹⁸ Meidingu Nongpok Chinglen Khomba (Jadu Singh) became the Maharaja at the age of 33. The Maharaja sent an ambassador to Cachar to call his father (Bhadra Singh) to come and occupy the throne of Manipur. The Maharaja's son Raghab Singh arrived from Cachar in 1823 CE.¹⁹ Meidingu Nongpok Chinglen Khomba died at the age of 35 after reigning for 2 years. Raghab Singh ascended the throne in 1823 CE. Senapati Atongwun and Raghab Singh Maharaj went to Ava in 1824 CE and the Chief of Kale was permitted to take over the charge of Manipur administration with 500 Ava troops. The Chief of Kale (Burma) was replaced by the chief of Samjok or Samsok (Kabaw valley) to administer Manipur. In 1824 CE, Meidingu Nongchup Lamgai Ngamba (Bhadra Singh) took over the throne of Manipur.²⁰

In 1825 CE, Shri Pancha Jukta Gambhir Singh Chinglen Nongdren Khomba Maharaja (1825 CE - 1833 CE) arrived at Maklang with one British gentleman and dispersed the Ava administrator and his followers staying in Manipur and they fled. The Royal Chronicle records his coronation in 1831 CE. Shri Pancha Jukta Maharaja Chinglen Nongdren Khomba returned to Cachar after handing over the charge of Meitei Leipāk to Ibungshi Nara Singh, Senapati. Shri Ibungshi Senapati started for an expedition to Ava and Shri Pancha Jukta Maharaja also joined the expedition to Ava. The Maharaja's party attacked the Ava Fort at Tamu and the battle continued for 5 days and the Ava forces fled in the night.²¹ When the hostility between Manipur and Burma had ceased the boundary between Burma and Manipur was the Ningthi (in Manipur) but the Burmese government protested in a mild form and wanted Kabaw Valley to be returned to them. For 8 years there was controversy as to the fixation of the boundary. At last, in 1832 CE, British Government decided to return the Kabaw valley to the Burma Government and pay the Manipur Government 500 siccā rupees a month as compensation.²² Gambhir Singh was to accept the decision but neither he nor his descendants ever willingly agreed in the decision as they knew that Kabaw valley was their ancestral territory. In 1833 CE, Bar Sahib of Calcutta (Kolkata) requested the Maharaja to lease out some land to Ava for cultivation at Kabaw valley at annual revenue of Rs 6000 because they had no cultivable land and the Maharaja accepted the proposal. Accordingly, Grant Captain Major Sahib, Pemberton and Mr. Dunn Sahib went to demarcate the land at Kabaw Valley.

Meidingu Chinglen Nongdren Khomba Maharaja died at the age of 47. Chandrakriti Singh (1834 CE - 1844 CE), the son of Meidingu Gambhir Singh, ascended the throne at the age of 2 (two) and Nara Singh the younger brother of late Maharaja became the Senapati, who with the assistance of dignitaries used to administer Manipur.²³ Ibungshi Nar Singh, Senapati was appointed as Jubaraja in 1834 CE.

In 1840 CE, Tribhuvan Singh and Ram Singh came to fight for the throne and reached the Palace but they were killed in the battle. In 1844 CE, Nabin stabbed Nara Singh but was caught and killed. After reigning for 10 years Chandrakirti Singh was taken to Cachar by his mother and Nara Singh became the Raja of Manipur.²⁴

Jubaraja Nara Singh (1844 CE – 1850 CE) became the Maharaja of Manipur in 1844 CE at the age of 51. In 1850 CE, Chiba, Meleikhomba and Akoijam Taba came from Cachar to obtain possession of the throne by force of arms but it was frustrated and two of them were killed. Meleikhomba was sentenced to death by making him drowned. Nara Singh died in 1850 CE after a reign of six years. After him, Maharaja's younger brother, Jubaraj Debendra Singh (1849 CE – 1850 CE) ascended the throne at the age of 47 and his son, Sangkar Singh was appointed as the Jubaraja in 1849 CE.²⁵ In 1850 CE, Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh arrived from Cachar and tried to capture the throne of Manipur. Maharaja Nonglen Khomba (Debendra Singh) fled to Cachar after reigning for 3 months.²⁶ Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh (1850 CE – 1886 CE) entered the Palace at daybreak at the age of 19 years and occupied Maharaja's residence in 1850 CE.²⁷

Angou Senapati with some of his brothers fought for the throne but having failed and then fled to Cachar. In 1852 CE Naol Singh, Pheiraba and Kanhai Singh came from Cachar to obtain possession of the throne by fighting but failed. In 1862 CE, Maipak and Keipha Sana raided Manipur from Cachar for the throne but they were defeated and repulsed. In 1874 CE, Koireng (Tikendrajit Bir Singh) was appointed as Katwan.

In 1886 CE, Chandrakirti Singh died after reigning for 37 years at the age of 55 and he was succeeded by his son Surachandra Singh (1886 CE – 1890 CE). On this very day Borachaoba revolted but was defeated, and fled. He made his brothers Kula Chandra the Yuvaraj (prince) and Katwan (Tikendrajit) the Senapati (army leader). In 1890 CE his steps brothers (Kula Chandra and Tikendrajit) attacked the palace at night and Surachandra took shelter in the Residency and refusing any assistance offered by the British government, he left Manipur.²⁸

Kulachandra (1890 CE – 1891 CE) became the Maharajah of Manipur. Surachandra Maharajah made representation to the Governor-General of India; according to his orders the Chief Commissioner of Assam came to Manipur to recognise Kulachandra as the Maharajah and arrest Tikendrajit. Being unable to arrest Tikendrajit civilly, Chief Commissioner tried to affect his arrest by force of arms. In doing this they fired against the palace. Then interchange of bullets between Manipur and British followed. The British were defeated; one English officer was killed by the mob and four were sentenced to death after due trial and consideration by the Top Garod (Military court) according to law which was for the time being in force.²⁹ The British declared war. Manipur was defeated. The cases of Kulachandra, Tikendrajit and others were tried by the British. Kulachandra and others were sentenced to transportation for life and Tikendrajit, Thangal and some others convicted and sentenced to death.³⁰ Major Maxwell became the political Agent and Superintendent of Manipur.

The British Government then appointed Churachand Singh (1891 CE – 1941 CE), great grandson of Maharaja Nara Singh, as the Maharaja of Manipur at the age of 8 in 1891 CE.³¹ During his minority; Political Agent administered the state as the Superintendent of Manipur under the direct supervision of the Chief Commissioner of Assam.³²

The coronation ceremony of Shri Churachand Maharaja was held in the presence of the Chief Commissioner at Uttra of the main Palace and Lak Sahib took hold of the hand of the Maharaja and handed over to him the administration of the country. When Maharajah attained his majority, he ruled over the state with a Darbar as his advisors.

A telegram arrived that 'Shrijut Churachand Maharaja had been conferred with the title of K.C.S.I. (Knight Commander Star of India) in addition to C.B.E. (Commander of British Empire) by Bilāt (British) Maharani (Queen of England)'.³³ Shrijut Maharaja proceeded to Shri Nabadwip.

In 1941 CE, a telegram of the death of Churachand Maharaja arrived from Nabadwip. On that day, the eldest son of the late Maharaja, Bodh Chandra Singh's (1941 CE – 1955 CE) coronation ceremony was performed.³⁴ Shrijut Maharaja Bodh Chandra's coronation ceremony was performed by the Political Agent by the order of the Viceroy.³⁵

He (Maharaj Bodhachandra) introduced responsible government in 1948 in Manipur. On the withdrawal of the British power from India in August 1947, Manipur regained its former status. It became the first part of the sub-continent to hold free elections with full adult franchise in 1948, when a Legislature was set up with the Maharaja as constitutional monarch. After a brief period of independence Manipur was absorbed into the Indian Union on 21st September 1949. Manipur was merged in 15th October 1949 and without the assembly, converted to a Part C State under a Chief Commissioner and then in 1957 to a Territory. After a long agitation, on January 21, 1972, Manipur was affirmed a State again. Bodhachandra died in 1955. Maharajaship was given to his 2nd son of the 2nd Rani by the Government. Shrimati Maharani performed the Shraddha ceremony of the Shrijut Maharaja.

Conclusion:

The Merger was a great landmark and a turning point in the history of Manipur. The Merger was a political decision forced on Manipur through the Maharaja, by the Government of India to merge into dominion of India, in the wake of rising Indian nationalism after India's independence which had echo in the political life of Manipur during the period.

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