

Manipur : Palace Politics and Administration

Bimal J. Dev & Dilip K. Lahiri

The early history of Manipur is somewhat obscure, but during the closing years of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century the inhabitants were constantly overrun by the Burmese, who carried off many captives and drove a large number into Cachar and the hills adjoining the Manipur Valley. In 1823 when the first Burmese war brokeout and the Burmese invaded Cachar the East India Company made an alliance with Gambhir Singh and a Manipuri contingent which afterwards reached a strength of 3000 men, was taken into British pay and under command of Capt. Grant drove the Burmese not only out of Manipur but also out of the Kabaw valley as far as Kale. ¹ Subsequent negotiations with the King of Burma ended, however, in the return of Kabaw Valley to the Burmese, an annual payment of Rs. 6,270 being paid to Manipur as compensation. By the Treaty of Yandabo Gambhir Singh was declared independent ruler of Manipur, a position gained with the assistance of the British Government. In Gambhir Singh's death in 1834 his cousin Nar Singh who happened to be the most popular man in Manipur, placed Gambhir Singh's son, Chandra Kirti Singh on the throne and declared himself regent during his nephew's minority. Against this move one of the princes made a plot to overthrow Nar Singh and was expelled from Manipur. The expelled prince matured his plan for another attack on the regent with his base in Sylhet and Cachar but finally lost his life in the encounter. ² In 1844 Gambhir Singh's widow made another attack on the regent but having failed in the plot to murder Nar Singh she fled to Cachar with the youthful Raja and Nar Singh then assumed full control of the State affairs and held it till his death in 1850.

Following the death of Nar Singh, Debendra Singh staked his claim to be the successor and was expelled by Chandra Kirti Singh in collaboration with the sons of Nar Singh and became Raja in his own right. Shortly afterwards, the sons of Nar Singh who had installed Chandra Kirti Singh to power revolted against him and aided Debendra Singh in several attempts to capture power with a base from Cachar. The Princes were warned by the British authorities

that revolutionary activities would lead to their removal to a distant place from the frontier.

Political relations with the British

Political relations of the British with the Manipur State started in 1835 during the reign of Chandra Kirti Singh when a Political Agent was appointed in the State. In the years to come the British consolidated their hold over Manipur and in 1850 the Government of India reminded Chandra Kirti Singh that 'the Manipur State owes its very existence to the British Government and that although the British Government has generally left to the Manipur State perfect independence as to its internal management, it will not tolerate, but on the contrary will visit with its severest displeasure, any act on the part of that State which shall evince an intention of yielding countenance and support to any enemies or rebellious subjects of the British Government'.³ Thus the ruler of Manipur existed but by the sufferance and the countenance of the British Government. The British were however careful not to allow the Raja to oppress the people with their protection. Thus on 3 October 1851 while formally recognising Chandra Kirti Singh as Raja of Manipur and making a public avowal of the determination of the British Government to uphold his reign and to resist and punish any parties attempting to dispossess him, corresponding obligation was also placed on the Raja "to submit to their maintaining a sufficient check over the general conduct of his administration, so as to prevent it from being oppressive to the people and discreditable to the Government which gives it support".⁴ This subservient relationships was no doubt accepted by Chandra Kirti Singh as his position was then completely shaky. It was later asserted that "had he refused to recognise his absolute dependence upon the British Government the Government might have refused to recognize him or protect him and it is well known that at that time he could not afford to dispense with our protection".⁵

But the warnings went unheeded and it was also reported that there was another move to instal a prince from Burma. The latter move unnerved the British authorities which could eventually destroy British influence and hence it was considered necessary to prevent such a contingency".⁶ An year after another attack was made to dislodge Chandra Kirti Singh whose forces subjugated the opposing force even before the British troops could reach the place. For a period of succeeding nine years there was peace in the valley but in 1861 the British troops repelled an attack against the ruling prince.

Subsequently in 1862 and 1865 two more attempts were foiled with the help of British forces. Once again in October 1873 the opposing forces failed to make any headway.

Revolutionary traditions

The history of Manipur has indeed been a record of revolutions and revolutionary atmosphere prevailed no matter whether the Raja was popular or not. In Manipur no ruler could have been more popular than Gambhir Singh who had delivered the country from the cruel oppression of the Burmese yet two attempts against him were made, one of which was very nearly successful.⁷ The large majority of the people did not however care for the changes of the Rajas as they knew that such changes could not benefit them but only add to their oppression. In Manipur the right had always been assumed to be the right to seek superior title to the Raj on account of descent. The British interest was initially to extend help to a friendly chief against attack from outside and in purely internal commotions the policy was never formulated but in the years to come they decided that irrespective of the rights of any other prince, Gambhir Singh's family "has the best right to the Raj" even though at one stage before the installation of Gambhir Singh they were not unwilling to help his elder brothers Chourjeet and Marjeet Singh, the recognised heads of the ruling family of Manipur, to hold the reign.⁸ Certain other developments had also cemented the British support to the maintenance of *status quo*. For example, when some of the Khasis attacked David Scott, Gambhir Singh sent men to his assistance. In addition at the time of the Mutiny the loyalty evinced by Chandra Kirti Singh by despatching troops to the frontier who assisted in the apprehension of mutineers and his offer to despatch help to Assam was a source of strength to the British Government at that crisis. For his loyal support to the British Government both in helping to relieve the besieged Kohima and in the Burmese war he was honoured with a KCSI.

Tikendrajit's ambition and role

After Chandra Kirti's death in 1886 he was succeeded by Sura Chandra Singh who remained occupied with religious observances rather than governing his State. Chandra Kirti's death was followed by severe political instability as his eight sons were divided into at least two parties animated by most hostile feelings towards each other. Sura Chandra was merely *Primus inter pares* and was supported by three uterine brothers Pucca Sena, Samu Hangaba and

Gopal Sena. On the otherside, there were four half brothers-the Jubaraj acting as regent and supported by the Senapati Tikendrajit, Bir Singh and two younger brothers, Dolaroi Hanjaba and Zillah Singh. Several attempts were made to upset Sura Chandra's rule since accession which were finally suppressed only by the employment of Cachar Frontier Police under a British Officer. In February 1891 the Chief Commissioner had anticipated that the Senapati (Tikendrajit Singh), then the most popular of the brothers and a man of bold and turbulent character, could be expected to use his utmost efforts to stir up disaffection and rebellion.⁹ Thus it was dissension among the Raja's brothers, particularly between Senapati and Pucca Sena, which brought about demonstration against the Chief which, though initially started by two younger brothers, was ultimately led by the Senapati. The Maharaja was a miserably weak man and this had ultimately led to an erosion of his authority. In relation to the Senapati and to his brother Kula Chandra Dhaja Singh he had been lenient and friendly and in 1888 he disregarded the advice which was given to him and failed to punish the Senapati. Later, Sura Chandra described them as 'Usurpars' and regretted for having entrusted them with important posts which they had used to oust him from his Kingdom. Sura Chandra also recalled the declaration of Col. James John-Stone, a former Political Agent at Manipur, that "if ever misfortunes befel Manipur, the Senapati would be their author".¹⁰ One of the accusations against Sura Chandra was that he was being influenced by Brahmin priests in his actions. Sura Chandra however denied any occasion where he allowed himself to be ruled by a priest in State matters. The position of the priests was however acknowledged to be of a higher order :

*"The fact is that we are a superior class and castes of Hindus next to the Brahmins, and our religion required us to respect good and learned Brahmin Pundits, of whom on account of our isolated situation there are few in Manipur. The only Pundit Brahmin who can claim to exercise any influence over us and to whom we render the highest respect is our family Guru or spiritual guide who resides in the district of Murshidabad in Bengal and visits Manipur once in three or four years, seldom remaining in the Capital more than two months."*¹¹

Sura Chandra was however loyal and friendly to the British and rendered a number of services to the advantage of the latter including :—

- (a) the relief of the British Garrison at Kohima and the consequent subjugation of the Naga areas ;

- (b) the supply of troops during the Burmese war in consultation with John-Stone and Major Trotter, the then Political Agent;
- (c) the supply of 2,000 levies twice, during the Chin-Lushai expedition and Burmese war ;
- (d) establishment of eight posts in the hills garrisoned by the Manipur troops to cut off the retreat of the Lushais ;
- (e) the deputation of Pucca Sena with a body of 500 troops with the Political Agent Mr. Grimwood to Sangam in the Chin-Lushai area.

The Raja was quite unable to assert his authority over these two turbulent factions and suddenly on 21 September 1990 the palace walls were sealed by two younger brothers and few shot in the air were sufficient to drive Sura Chandra to seek safety in British protection. ¹² The following day contrary to the advice of the Political Agent he proclaimed his intention to abdicate and proceed on a pilgrimage for Brindaban, but on reaching Cachar alongwith three uterine brothers and a few followers he sought the help of the Chief Commissioner and pleaded for reinstatement. Meanwhile, the Senapati, who was the powerful force in State politics, induced his elder brother Kula Chandra Dhaja Singh to occupy the 'Gaddi' and application was made to the Government of India to ratify the succession. The whole question was considered by the Government of India and it was concluded that it would be in the advantage of the Manipur State and to the furtherance of British interest to recognise Kula Chandra in his new position rather than restoring his opponent Sura Chandra. At the same time, the Government of India decided to remove Senapati out of Manipur as a means of punishing him for his lawless conduct towards his elder brother. ¹³

Quinton's Strategy

To give effect to this decision the Chief Commissioner of Assam left Golaghat with an escort of 400 men of the Gurkha Battalions under the command of Col. Skene of the 42 Regiment which with the Political Agent's escort at Manipur and supported by another 200 men *enroute* from Silchar were considered sufficient to quell any possible show of resistance. On 22 March when Mr. J. W. Quinton and his party reached the neighbourhood of Manipur they were met by the Senapati in a friendly manner who had with him two Manipuri regiments. Subsequently, the Senapati avoided attending the Darbar and in the political negotiations the regent too expressed his inability to enforce his brother's arrest. The Chief Commissioner now decided to capture the Senapati, a decision which led to unhappy misunderstandings and the Chief Commissioner

and four other British officials were murdered even though an armistice was arranged between the two opposing forces and the incident took place when the Chief Commissioner was moving under a flag of truce from the Residency to the Palace.¹⁴

Ever since the death of Chandra Kirti Singh in 1886 the Senapati had showed signs of desiring to shake off the yoke of dependence on the British Government and had adopted pronounced strategy of opposition which led the Chief Commissioner of Assam to issue a note of warning to the Raja in 1888 in the following terms: "you should in particular warn the Senapati that any grave misconduct on his part in future, or any attempt by him to establish for himself a position of privilege or superiority which would be inconsistent with the maintenance of order and good Government in Manipur, may compel the British Government to take the matter in hand, in which case the result to him might be very serious".¹⁵ In fact, Sura Chandra Singh never was anything more than a Puppet Raja and same thing could be said of Kula Chandra Singh. The real ruler of Manipur since 1886 had been Tikendrajit Singh who would have established himself on the 'Gaddi' in an attempt to set right the humiliating terms imposed during the reign of Chandra Kirti Singh. In April 1891 an expedition was ordered to Manipur to assert the supremacy of the British Government and to enforce the unconditional submission of the Darbar. The expeditionary force marched in three columns from Kohima, Silchar and Tamu all of which reached the capital on the 27 April 1891. The Tamu column was the only one which met with resistance. On arrival the force found the whole palace evacuated and the arsenal with its guns destroyed. The regent, the Senapati, and other brothers had taken to flight and the leading officials remained hiding in Manipur. Within a month all were captured and the Senapati and his two brothers were tried by Special Commission at which the Senapati was convicted of waging war against the Raja and abetment of the murder of British Officers and was sentenced to death. Kula Chandra Dhaja Singh and his brother were convicted and sentenced to transportation for life along with 13 other persons.¹⁶

Criticism of Quinton's Action

The murdered Chief Commissioner's action was disapproved in the English Press many of which had shown a tendency to regard the Senapati as rather an injured person and had acted as he did under necessary provocation. Criticisms were freely expressed in India as well as in England upon Quinton's proposed method of

effecting the arrest of the Senapati. In the Parliament Sir Richard Temple dubbed Quinton's proposed method of procedure as indefensible.¹⁷ Many others expressed the view that as Quinton contemplated treachery, he thereby gave provocation to the Senapati and drove him to resistance, to counteracts of treachery, and finally to the Commission of murder. The *English Times* deprecated the move for "having a nasty flavour about it."¹⁸

In a letter to the Viceroy and the Governor General of India Kula Chandra Dhaja Singh accused the Chief Commissioner for having acted with cruelty. While describing the incidents leading to a show down he stated :—

"Having killed 11 Keepers of the gate they entered the house of the Jubaraj, cut off the head of two boys, killed three boys by shooting. Having entered the temple, smashed the idol and all the articles with it. Set fire to a village in the neighbourhood of the palace and having set fire to a Brahmin's house, burnt the idol and the cows and everything else. Having tied up the hair of two girl together, threw them into fire and got them burnt. One woman was flying away through panic, who was seized and her hands and ear mutilated. The hand and legs of a man were at first cut off and then he was killed with cruelty. Although there was so much cruel treatment, we did not act in opposition ; but at last they attacked my palace and set fire to it, and then when it could not be borne any longer, and my subjects turned mad and lost my control, they began to fight to protect their wives, children and religion. The fight continued day and night between both the parties in which a large number of my Manipuri subjects were killed. Some sepoy and seven sahobs have been killed. Amongst these the Chief Commissioner and the Political Agent have been killed".¹⁹

In the opinion of Kula Chandra the British Government had been hitherto protecting this petty State of Manipur in a friendly manner and he failed to understand "why, inspite of repeated remonstrances in the present occasion, the Chief Commissioner broke that friendly relation, and acted with such injustice and cruelty". The State was declared forfeited to the crown but a few months later in September 1891 this order was revoked and a Sanad of Chiefship was granted to Chura Chand Singh (then a minor of 5 years of age), the eldest son of Chowbizaima, and a grandson of Nar Singh, and was granted a salute of 11 Guns.²⁰ The Chiefship was declared to be hereditary and to be governed by the law of primogeniture.

Further, under the terms of the Sanad each succession had to be approved by the Government of India. This is how the family of Gambhir Singh was debarred from 'Gaddi'.

Abolition of Slavery

A number of important reforms were initiated during the Superintendency of Maj. H. St. P. Maxwell. One of these was the abolition of *Lalup*, the system of enforced labour, by which the whole Meithei population was divided into four *Pannas* or divisions, which performed *Lalup* for ten days in rotation, so that every male member over 16 years came on duty for ten days in every forty. The people of other clans known as 'Loi' had to pay tribute and perform all sorts of menial duties for the Raja. The burden of this duty generally fell upon the poor and the rich and well-to-do escaped it altogether. In case of sickness the *Lalup* member had either to carry out his *Lalup* or purchase a substitute. This system was a sort of serf-dom which had prevailed from time immemorial. There was no demand for its abolition from the people as everyone endeavoured to escape the heavier and especially the heaviest of all forms of forced labour such as *Laitai* and *Sungsaroi*.²¹ This system was done away with and no labour was demanded as before, except for the maintenance of the roads. In place of *Lalup*, a house tax was imposed as a substitute source of income to carry out the public works of the valley. The Raja too had maintained a good number of slaves whose Chief duty was to cultivate the royal lands, retaining for themselves just sufficient of the produce to sustain life, and to work for the Raja at all times. It had been the custom of the master, on marriage to settle on his wife's family several of his slaves. Favourite ministers and others were also on occasions rewarded by gift of certain number of slaves. Only under very special circumstances were the Raja's slaves released and the great majority had been born into slavery. In 1891 the following persons were found to be working as Raja's slaves.²²

Married couples	..	394
Single men	..	434
Male children	..	288
Female children	..	128
Widows	..	77
Old and infirm persons	..	10

Besides, the ordinary individuals could possess slaves by purchase. When a person was fined in a court of Justice and was unable

to pay, he could be sold to any other person willing to pay the fine, and the slave was retained until he was able to refund the purchase money. In 1892 it was ordered that all persons in slavery to private individuals would cease to be slaves within a period of five years on repayment of purchase money. The other important change during the period of Superintendency had been the introduction of a regular cash assessment throughout the valley in the place of the old system of paying revenue in kind.

Churachand's reign and administrative reforms

During the reign of Chura Chand many other important reforms were initiated. In 1913 water works were completed supplying some 35 thousand inhabitants of the town of Imphal with filtered pipe water from the hills. In the same year *Pothang* system, under which each village was obliged to carry the baggage of touring State officials and to maintain roads, etc within its boundary was abolished at the request of the people. New taxes were imposed especially on land to meet the consequent extra charges on the State revenues. The Police and Judicial departments were also reorganised.²³ It was during the time of Chura Chand that the hereditary title of Maharaja was granted as a mark of recognition to the services rendered during the World War I. As the Maharaja possessed the dynastic salute of 11 guns under the Sanad of 1891 he could become a member of the Chamber of Princes and as a ruling prince in his own right. The fact that he enjoyed limited powers did not affect his position in respect of his right to membership.

During the minority of the young ruler, the Political Agent administered the State as the Superintendent. Meanwhile Chura Chand Singh was educated at the Mayo College from 1895-1901 and the later joined the Imperial Cadet Corps. The Superintendency terminated on 15 May 1907 when Chura Chand came of age. He was formally installed on the 'Gaddi' by Sir Laucelot Hare on 4 February 1908. In 1906 he married Ngangbam Dhanmanjuri (Ibemcha), in 1908 Chingakham Shyamasakhi and Ngangbam Priyasakhi, and in 1912 Chongtham Chetanamanjuri and Haobam Lilabati. In 1925 Chura Chand Singh married Maisnam Subadani Debi.²⁴ During the initial reign of Chura Chand the administration had been in the hands of the Raja supported by an advisory Darbar consisting of a Vice-President, (a member of the Indian Civil Service and whose services were lent to the State by the Government of Assam) and six nominated Manipuri members. The Maharaja was at first the President of the Darbar but since 1916

he had preferred to exercise a merely supervisory control, thus allowing the Vice-President to become President. The control of the various departments of the administration was distributed among the Maharaja, the President and other members of the Darbar. The President was responsible for all matters concerning revenue and finance, while under orders of the Government of India, the hill tribes dependent on the State of Manipur were administered by him on behalf of the Maharaja and were not amenable to the ordinary jurisdiction of the Darbar and other Manipur Courts.²⁶ In cases except those that arose within the British reserve where both parties were Manipuris the Darbar acted as the Supreme Court. It also assisted in the administration of Justice by subordinate courts. In all cases except those that arose within the British reserve in which both parties happened to be Manipuris, the Chief exercised supreme appellate and revisionary powers. Subsequently 14 Panchayat Courts were established in different villages in the valley to deal with petty cases locally. In Imphal, the Sadr Panchayat Court and the Chirap Court each consisting of 6 members had the power of hearing both civil and criminal cases. The Chirap Court had the power equivalent to those of a first class magistrate. As already stated, the hill tribes were administered directly by the President, Manipur State Darbar and his hill assistants, on behalf of the Maharaja. They were not subject to the jurisdiction of the valley courts. On the other hand, the Political Agent's jurisdiction covered all European British subjects and all cases arising in the British Reserve. He had also appellate powers in cases among the hill tribes and the powers of a Sessions Judge in original cases in which the President and his assistants could not pass sentences sufficiently severe. The most important restriction on the powers of Maharaja and the Darbar was in the administration of the Hill Tribes covering an area of over seven thousand square miles and comprising a population of about 150,000. After the Kuki Revolt of 1918 they were, in fact, administered by the Assam Government on behalf of the Maharaja. The direct charge was in the hands of the President of Manipur State Darbar who was an I. C. S. Officer of Assam Cadre. He was assisted by two officer of Assam Civil Service, who were appointed by the Assam Government for the administration of the Manipur Hills and by one Manipuri who acted as Headquarters Assistant. Appeals lay to the Political Agent who was held to be politically responsible for the Hills. Neither the Maharaja, nor the Darbar had any real share in the administration of the Hills. When the question of Mani-

pur's accession to the Federation Scheme under the Government of India Act 1935 was being discussed, the Political Agent of Manipur suggested to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam to retain control over the Hills if the Maharaja decided to accede to the Federation on the ground that "if the State takes over the Hills it will both neglect and oppress the Hill men".²⁷ The tribal warfare between the Kuki and the Kacha Nagas was another consideration which prompted this suggestion. It was therefore suggested 'that the need for excluded areas is even greater in Manipur than it is in British India'. The immediate danger was between Kuki and Kacha Nagas. It was also apprehended that "if they start fighting the conflagration is bound to spread to the Naga hills and North Cachar Hills, and the Lushai Hills and Chin Hills may be affected".²⁸ At one stage it was even suggested that the Political Agent should administer the hills on behalf of the Maharaja instead of leaving the hillmen under the control of the President. The Maharaja of Manipur was also inclined to support this. In Maharaja's view it was not consonant with his dignity that his President should control the Manipur Hill and that he himself should have no say in the administration.²⁹

Anomalous position

The position of the Darbar vis-a-vis the Maharaja was governed by administrative rules framed by the Government of Assam laying down (a) "that full responsibility for the administration rests with the Maharaja who is merely assisted by the Darbar and (b) that the Maharaja may veto any resolution and pass whatever orders he may wish". The Maharaja had full powers and although an officer of the Government was nominated by the Agent to the crown representative to act as the President of the Darbar his position was anomalous as, unless he was prepared to refer every point of difference to the Agent, he and the Darbar had to give way to the Maharaja's wishes. In actual practice there had been continuous frictions between the Darbar and the Maharaja and in the process the Darbar had to surrender to the latter as except for the ultimate resort of a reference to the Agent the Darbar could do nothing. The Political Agent could not put the matter straight because there was no order of the Maharaja which he could refer to the Agent. Thus in 1946 a statement arose when the Maharaja refused to pass orders in cases where it has been necessary to process orders of dismissal by the Darbar against state servants for irregularities.³⁰ The Maharaja also consistently refused to see the President of the Darbar

who had endeavoured to get Maharaja to discuss points of difference and difficulties.

Bodh Chandra - the last reigning king

In 1934 Bodh Chandra was sent into exile in Benaras for having attempted to injure the ruling Chief Churachand by cutting down trees in the sacred groves.³¹ As a result the Chief sent a proposal to the government of India to debar the Jabaraj from succeeding to the 'Gaddi' which was clearly against the terms of Sanad of 1891. Moreover, it was clear that Government could not impose a bar to the accession as a result of Maharaja's wishes alone even if expressed in a formal will. In the official circle it was expressed that the Government of India might be prepared to defer to his wishes on the understanding that "they represent general feeling in Manipur at the time when the contingency of succession arises."³² Finally, the plea of the ruling chief was rejected by the Government of India which upheld the earlier decision that "the ruling chief is not competent to bar by will or otherwise the succession of the eldest son". It was held that 'in practice nothing but the clearest evidences of actual incapacity to rule should be allowed to stand in the way of regular succession" and that "no encouragement should be given to the idea that an eldest son can be set aside at the will of his father."³³

On one occasion in 1939 Bodh Chandra was authorised to act and carry on the affairs of the State on behalf of Chura Chand during his retreat to Nabadwip. At one stage however the Chief had desired to hand over the reigns temporarily to the Political Agent as he was dissatisfied with the Darbar members in whom the 'people in general' had no confidence. He thus wrote, "As I have to go for a change according to the advice of the Civil Surgeon, I am handing over temporary charge of the administration to you, which, I hope, you will please carry on my behalf to the best of your ability. Any matter or matters concerning religion such as Purahitship etc, in which my consultation is unavoidably necessary may please be referred to me."³⁴

In the following year Bodh Chandra was not given an opportunity to rule as the ruling chief was not apparently pleased with the earlier experiment and instead R. K. Bhaskar Singh, the Judicial member was entrusted with the responsibility during the absence of the Chief. This decision was ultimately set aside on the ground that the Maharajkumar, who will succeed in the ordinary course of events is pushed into the background by an apparently arbitrary order, apart from rendering his position extremely difficult and

depriving him of valuable experience.³⁵

Ultimately, Bodh Chandra Singh assumed charge of the administration of the State on 30th September 1941 following the abdication by his father Chura Chand Singh.³⁶ A *Kharia* from the crown Representative recognising his succession to the 'Gaddi' was formally presented by the Political Agent on 18 April 1942. Bodh Chandra Singh went through traditional ceremonies for the coronation of a Manipuri ruler in December 1944. In view of the war strict restrictions were also imposed on the powers of the Maharaja and Political Agent was given the power to act almost like a Regent. As a result Bodh Chandra complained to the Viceroy that "with the limitations of powers thus conferred upon me, I am not in a position to conduct my state administration on the basis of a sole responsibility for any eventuality as a ruler like my father".³⁷ At the sametime like his predecessor Bodh Chandra too rendered complete and full co-operation by placing all the available resources of the state in favour of the Allied forces. Bodh Chandra became Maharaja at a time when the allied forces were in the thick of war. Manipur was almost in the frontline and after the air raid on Imphal on 10 May 1942 the administration of the State brokedown completely. All the Darbar members and almost all state employees fled to places which they believed to be at a safe distance from the capital. The responsibility for the collapse of the Government of the State was squarely put on the Darbar members and the Political Agent informed the Secretary to the Governor of Assam that 'had they stood firm the lesser state servants might have rallied round them and thus saved the good name of the state'.³⁸ In his view "by their pusillanimous conduct and desertion of their post, the members, whatever their virtues may be in times of peace, have failed to show the qualities needed to carry out executive diuties in a war area and they have forfeited the Confidence of the public". He therefore suggested to confer on the President all the executive powers then exercisable by the Darbar as a whole under the rules for the administration of the State with the ultimate control of the administration being retained by the Agent to the Crown Representative. At the sametime the power of the Maharaja to vote the actions of the Darbar was sought to be retained over the President's action. The Governor felt that the withdrawal of this power would be tantamount to deposition of the Maharaja and it was ultimately decided by the Government of India that "the Governor shall accept specific responsibility for ensuring that no action considered by the local military Commander to be necessary or desirable for war purposes

shall be refused, impeded or delayed by reason of Maharaja's constitutional power of veto".³⁰ The Darbar however continued to exercise judicial powers and an opportunity was given to the Darbar members to rehabilitate their image. The restrictions imposed on the Darbar were however withdrawn in December 1943. After the war the whole future of the Indian States was in the melting pot and Bodh Chandra too could not ultimately sail against the tide.

Notes and References

1. Sir James Johnstone, 'Description of Manipur,' *Englishman*, 26 June 1891.
2. Memorandum on the Indian States, 1926, Vol. I, pp. 202-6.
3. File no. Confidential-A, Progs, January 1892, Nos. 1-8 (Assam Secretariat, hereafter AS). Manipur was treated to be a protected state and hence accorded a lower status than 'Semi-Independent' States.
4. Ibid.
5. Confidential Note by the Chief Commissioner of Assam on the Annexation of Manipur, July 1891.
6. File No. 637 (Judicial) of 1874 (AS).
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid ; The popularity of the Chief in power was no guarantee against attempts to destabilise the reign. As office alone conferred rank, the hope of obtaining it was irresistible among the eligibles. The British protection alone provided greater security against revolution.
9. J. W. Quinton to W. J. Cuninghame, 19 February 1891, *ibid*.
10. File No. For A, July 1891. Nos. 1-31 (AS) ; *Disturbances at Manipur*, an official document, September 1891. Admittedly the Senapati was the most popular of all the brothers.
11. Sura Chandra Singh to J. W. Quinton, 14 November 1890, A. S. Proceedings, September 1891.
12. Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Foreign Department, September 1891.
13. File No. For A, September 1891, Nos. 1-388 (AS).
14. Ibid.
15. File No. For B, May 1892, Nos. 24-36 (AS).
16. Ibid.
17. File No. Confid. A, November 1892, Nos. 9-17 (AS).
18. Ibid.
19. Kula Chandra Dhaja Singh to Henry Charles Keith, 25 March

- 1891, File No. For B, March 1891, Nos. 17-23 (AS).
20. File No. S/Misc/141/46 (Governor's Secretariat, hereafter GS).
 21. Annual Report 1892 of Major H. St. P. Maxwell, Political Agent in Manipur and Superintendent of the State.
 22. Ibid.
 23. Memorandum on the Indian States, op. cit.
 24. File No. S/Misc/141/1946 (GS).
 25. Ibid.
 26. File No. States B, March 1940, Nos. 257-267 (GS).
 27. Confidential File No. 2753 of 1940 (GS).
 28. Confdl. File No. 120 of 1936 (GS).
 29. File No. Confdl. States A, June 1940, Nos. 1-41 (GS).
 30. File No. Confdl. A, June 1940, Nos. 67-98 (GS).
 31. Confdl. File No. 81-C of 1936 (GS).
 32. Ibid ; Tupper's Indian Political Practice, 1895, Vol. II, p. 295.
 33. Ibid.
 34. Confdl. File No. 64 C of 1941 (GS).
 35. Ibid.
 36. Maharaja Bodh Chandra Singh who was born in 1908 was the eldest son by Rani Syama Sakhi. He was educated at the Raj Kumar College at Raipur from November 1919 to April 1927. Bodh Chandra married Raj Kumari Tharendra Kishori (Ramu-Priya) of Bodokhemidi, Ganjam Dist. Madras on 5th July 1929. Her Highness who had lived separately from Bodh Chandra for some years was murdered in Benaras in March 1942. The King married again one Ishwari Maharani, the daughter of Prince of Ramnagar in the Champaran district of Bihar. Prince Ramraja was a cousin of the king of Nepal and Ishwari Maharani's mother a daughter of Maharaja of Nepal. Bodh Chandra again married Laisram Kamala Debi who gave birth to a daughter on 26 November 1955.
 37. Confdl. File No. 116 C of 1943 (GS).
 38. Confdl. File No. 52 C of 1942 (GS).
 39. Ibid.