

# Changing Pattern of Policies: British Relation with the State of Manipur

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## Abstract

*British policies towards the princely states of India has changed from time to time, beginning from the policy of “Non-intervention” in all matters outside its own “Ring-fence” to the policy of “subordinate isolation” commenced by Lord Hastings; which transformed the approach of relation between the princes and the British. Within a span of less than one hundred years, the East India Company progressed from the position of “Primus Inter Pares” to an affirmation of supremacy. This political domination was acquired either through wars or diplomacy. The British conquered Manipur in 1891; and the colonial era in the history of Manipur was started but Manipur had more than a century of relation with the British since 1762. The set up of political agency in 1835 opened a new chapter in the body politic of Manipur and the later period witnessed the establishment of direct administrative control over the entire Naga Hills. After some theoretical and historical background, the paper looks at different kinds of interferences of British observed during princely India. The aim of this paper is to give readers an overview of the British policies and their relations with the state of Manipur.*

**Keywords** - British, Princes, Manipur, Treaties, Policies.

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Manipurasana-leimayol, ChingnaKoynaPansaba,  
HaonaKoynaPanngakpa!*

*My Manipur, prime of the mainland of the land of  
Gold, How bulwarked thou art by the ranges of thine  
hills all round, and sentinelled by the children of  
nature on their round!*<sup>1</sup>

The inception of the East India Company was purely a trading organization. The political disorder and internal disturbances of the time gave them an opportunity to intervene in the body politic of India. By the period from 1818-1857 they have almost accomplished the task of conquering the entire India. Part of the entire sub-continent was directly ruled by the British and the rest was ruled by their respective rulers over whom British exercised paramount power. Within a span of less than one hundred years, the East India Company progressed from the position of “Primus Inter Pares” to an

affirmation of supremacy<sup>2</sup>. This political superiority was acquired either through wars-which resulted in the complete territorial gains<sup>3</sup> or diplomacy-which conferred the British political hegemony upon the princely states of India by the conclusion of treaties and alliances. As prof. Ruthnaswamy put it, “war and diplomacy were the twin spheres of activity of the early period.”<sup>4</sup> The legal character of the Indian states and their rights and duties are chiefly founded on the network of treaties, engagements and *Sanads*<sup>5</sup>, the other source which led to the foundation of British paramountcy in India and its relation with the Native states, are the intermittently decisions about the succession, intervention and the dispute with the ruler. According to Sir William Warner, “the customs or usage, constantly adapting itself to the growth of society, which may be observed in their intercourse are the source from which the rules or principles that govern British relations with the Natives states of India<sup>6</sup>.”

Changing its character from a trading corporation, the east India Company gradually became the supreme political power in India. Through the medium of treaties, only the larger states became associated with the British directly. Supposed by K.R.R Sastry, the British had concluded treaties with about forty princely states<sup>7</sup>. The rest of the states, as said by Ian Copland, were brought in almost accidentally by virtue of their diplomatic or feudal ties with the ‘country’ powers.<sup>8</sup> It is historically important to ascertain the position of the states before they negotiated with the British government.

## II. BRITISH RELATION WITH MANIPUR

Manipur, a native state presently lies at the north-east of the Republic of India. It is confined on the north by a series of hills called Naga Hills (Nagaland); on the north-east, east and south by Burma; on the south-west by Mizoram; on the west and north-west by the present state of Assam. The state comprises of a wide valley, evaluated at 650 sq. m., and an extensive encompassing tract of hilly nation. This does not, nonetheless, seem, by all accounts, to be the original boundary. Its boundaries fluctuated by the quality and shortcoming of its rulers. The boundary of Manipur is partly the international boundary between India and Burma. In some cases they held a significant domain east of the Chindwin River in subjection; at different occasions

their influence broadened just over the Kabaw Valley, a portion of an area lying between Manipur proper and the Chindwin, and, when steered they were driven back to Manipur proper<sup>9</sup>. The boundaries of ancient Manipur, in this way, can't be resolved with accuracy. Colonel McCulloch articulates, "To the east and south the boundary is not well defined and would much depend upon the extent to which the Manipur Government might spread its influence amongst the hill tribes in these directions."<sup>10</sup>

Manipur has a long history before the coming of British; it dates back to the ancient times. Capt. Dun, writing in the Gazetteer of Manipur, observes "There can be no reasonable doubt that a great Aryan wave of very pure blood passed through Manipur into Burma in prehistoric times."<sup>11</sup> It has been called by different names Manipuris called it with "Meitheileipak", it was also called "Kathe" by the Burmese, it was known to Bengali's by 'Moglai' and was called 'Mekle' by the Assamese.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore pertinent to enquire regarding how the name of Manipur came to be related with this hilly track. Some researchers are of the view that the land was given the name of Manipur in or about the eighteenth century A.D. Be that as it may, this view isn't substantial in light of the fact that references to the name 'Manipur' are found in ancient writings. T.C. Hodson is of the opinion that the name 'Manipur' was in existence before the birth of Bhubrahman.<sup>13</sup> Pursued in the middle of Assam and Burma, Manipur has an incredible vital significance. The history of Manipur, nevertheless, before the closing of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was more or less uneventful. Long before the arrival of the British, Burma had exercised her sway over Manipur. But the state soon saw the dawn of new era in its political arena. It was at about this time that Manipur saw one of its greatest leaders in Garib Niwaz (1709-1748) who ruled for quite long and crushed many successive Burmese raids of 1712, 1724 and 1726 set up his influence reaching out over the trans-Chindwin Valley. Soon after his death in 1754, the Kingdom was occupied by Burmese.

The political anarchy and Burmese occupation led the King of Manipur-Jai Singh (Ching-Thang Khomba) to look out for a strong power against the Burmese. Jai Singh was aware of his limited sources which were insufficient to expel the Burmese from Manipur, so he pursued the British for help. It was at this time that Manipur formally came into contact with the British and signed the treaty of Alliance in 1762. It was laid down that the former was to be assisted by the later in recouping the domains from Burma subject to the condition that Manipur Government was to give to the English a lease-free land at Manipur for the establishment of a factory and a fort and also had to pay the expenses of the British troops.<sup>14</sup> Clause of offensive and defensive alliance was additionally incorporated in the provisions of the treaty. But British force failed to expel the Burmese and Manipur continued to remain

under the control of the Burmese. Thus the British were unable to implement the terms of the treaty. The treaty was confirmed by Guru Sham<sup>15</sup> in the following year with some modifications that both the countries will not execute any treaty with the Burma without the consent of each other.<sup>16</sup> It has been seen that after the signing of treaty all the correspondence among Manipur and the British have been stopped from that point. Pemberton rightly observes, "From this period until 1809, we have no trace of any further intercourse with this petty state."<sup>17</sup>

The British followed the policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Manipur. Nevertheless, With respect to period before 1826 there is little debate about the certainty that Manipur was a free sovereign state with the exception of the discontinuous period when the Burmese attacked the state and persuasively possessed it. Even before the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26), the English East India Company came into contact with various semi-independent chiefs and tribes of the North-Eastern Frontier areas. The penetration of the British into the interior and frontier parts of the Northeast India was partly their (British) desire to explore trade potentialities as well as expansion of their trade relations with China and Burma (Myanmar), and also partly due to the invitation for defence by the local native people",<sup>18</sup> which could be seen in the case of Ahom rulers. The natives of the state were likewise in charge of keeping the zone unexplored by others as they firmly contradicted any move for study works. Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh even protested the idea of growing some tea plants in the Political Agent's garden for individual utilization. The purpose behind such sensitivity was that the Maharaja was anxious keeping in mind that Manipur, with the tea developing zones, ought to demonstrate a fascination in the outcasts inviting annexation of the state<sup>19</sup>. Viewed under the circumstances, a few significant comments in such manner might be referred to. It is recorded in a minute by Lord William Bentinck; the Governor-General that prior to the first Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-26, the British East India Company Government possessed no knowledge of the passes connecting Manipur with the British territories<sup>20</sup>. The British at this stage seems to be least interested in subjugating the state of Manipur, instead assisted them against the growing power of Burmese. This was the time when the British advocated the policy of 'Ring-fence' to avoid the confrontation with the Burmese and to make their strong foothold on the Indian soil. As Captain William White has put it clearly that, "Since April 1792 the British administrators in India were forbidden, by a resolution of the British Parliament, to enter into any political alliance, defensive or offensive, so as not to get involved in the national quarrels<sup>21</sup>. It was for this reason that the Government of India, despite favourable reports from David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General in Assam, turned

down an application from Purandhar Singh of Assam requesting for sale of arms to the state<sup>22</sup>.

Matters went to the head when the Burmese powers dominated over Assam and Manipur and sent their armed force to Cachar, it was a consistent danger towards the eastern frontier of the British India. Thus, the British opposed the entry of the Burmese forces in Cachar.<sup>23</sup> This managed an opportunity to restore the old tie between the British and Manipur State. It was, to be valid, the combined exertion of the two that prevailing with regards to repulsing the Burmese from Assam and Manipur by overcoming the Burmese in the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26). In order to drive them out, Gambhir Singh was allowed to raise a contingent known as the 'Manipur levy', paid and officered by the British. Thus the war ended by the signing of treaty called the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 in which Kaboo Valley became a part of the Manipur state<sup>24</sup> and also (Manipur) got the recognition as an independent kingdom by the Burmese. After the Yandaboo treaty, the British slowly consolidated their position in Manipur and turned away from the policy of non-intervention. These developments led them to make their strong footholds in the state of Manipur. Authorities at Fort William understood the significance of direct correspondence among Assam and Manipur immediately after the Anglo-Burmese war; since it would encourage business intercourse in the midst of peace and furthermore, help war endeavours in the midst of hostilities. Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Pemberton were deputed to undertake the survey of Assam and Manipur. They furthermore outflanked in looking for after imperative interest. In 1833, a treaty was signed with the Raja Gambhir Singh known as the Jiri treaty. This treaty accordingly, spoke to an instrument for trade of Jiribam with Chandrapur, and next to each other with this, an exchange and protective coalition between the two governments. In any case, the proviso on arms and ammo turned out to be for all intents and purposes invalidated attributable to the withdrawal of British support to Manipur in 1835. In 1934 they surpassed the Manipur ruler in the optional trade of the addressed Kabow Valley to Burma. From 1835 onwards we saw a new phase in the British-Manipur relation. The British Political Agent became a permanent institution in serving their wilderness interests in Manipur. It was put specifically under the Government of India (GOI) up to 1836. Later on, seeing its outskirts closeness with Assam, it was put under Assam government. The political Agent exercised immense powers in the coming years over the puppet rulers of Manipur. Though they enjoyed some sort of internal autonomy but their external autonomy was limited to the political agent. The Anglo-Manipur war of 31 March 1891 in which British triumph over the Manipur led them to hold directly the administrative affairs of the state by placing a minor on the throne.

### III. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be examined and discussed by clubbing together up to Nara Singh's standard. Up to this time, Manipur was an altogether a sovereign state. Obtaining a few arms and ammo from British by marking few agreements or treaties ought to be comprehended from with a superior perspective. It is worthwhile to both, the fundamental head being the registration of Burmese attack. In regard of External issues and protection, however the British has a slight high ground, it might be treated as equivalent balance. In this manner entirety is that however the British had a slight high ground in External affairs and Defence, they didn't meddle much in Manipur's internal issues i.e. in Manipur power. Thus, British 'non-interference' in the sway of Manipur, including infighting among the rulers for the Throne, stayed flawless. English India connection, however the line of outline was misty in regard of External issues and guard, Manipur remained a sovereign and free royal state without impedance from any side.

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- [2] Sir William Lee-Warner, The Protected Princes of India, London, Macmillan and Co. 1894, P. 86
- [3] Till 1840, the Board of Directors disapproved the political entanglements of the company on the plea that it affected their economic interests. However, after the passing of Pitts India Act and the formation of Board of control, two members of which were of cabinet rank, to supervise and control the "Board of Directors". It was evident that the opposition of the Board of Directors to territorial aggrandizement of the Company did not carry much weight...H.H. Dodwell, The Cambridge History of India, Ed. Vol. v, Delhi, S. Chand & Co. 1956, PP. 200-201.
- [4] M.Ruthnaswamy, British Administrative System in India, London, Luzac & Co. 1939, P. 486.
- [5] Treaty is a consensual agreement between two or more states and necessarily presupposes the separate and independent existence of all the contracting parties. Engagements, although unilateral, are contractual in character. The term Sanad, however raises several important questions. The government of India as well as some well-known authorities have interpreted Sanad as a grant and, on the basis of this interpretation; have made a distinction between the states which have entered into treaties with the British government and those which found on Sanads their authority vis-à-vis the protecting power. Sir William Lee Warner defines Sanad "as a diploma, patent, or deed of grant by a sovereign of an office, privilege, or right." According to Sirdar D.K Sen the word Sanad is used as a synonym for documentary evidence in the security bond under the ICPC (Indian Civil Procedure Code) which contains the following words in Urdu version, "therefore these few words have been recorded by way of security bond to remain as Sanad"... see, Sirdar D.K Sen, The Indian States, London, Sweet and Maxwell, 1930, p 2. Whether Sanad is a grant or not depends entirely on its contents. In political parlance the term Sanad is applicable to an agreement concluded between the two sovereigns. According to Ramusack N Barbara, Sanads were certificates or testimonials of protection or recognition that the British unilaterally extended, much as Mughal emperors had earlier dispensed Farmans...see. Ramusack N. Barbara Indian Princes and their States, London, Cambridge University Press, 2004, P. 52.

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- [10] Major W. McCulloch, *Account of the Valley of Manipur*, Calcutta, Bengal Printing Company Ltd. 1859, p.1
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- [13] Bubraban, the son of Arjuna and Chitrangada, the princess of Manipur, see...T.C.Hodson, *The Meitheis*, London, David Nutt, 1908, p.7
- [14] LeishangthemChandramani Singh, *British Relation with Manipur*, thesis submitted at department of History, university of Guwahati, 1969, p. 11
- [15] Garib Nawaz had three sons, named Sham Shah, Aogut Shah and Bharat Shah. Aogut Shah murdered his father and elder brother but was expelled by younger brother Bharat shah, who reigned for two years and was succeeded by Guru Sham, son of Sham Shah. He associated himself with his brother Jai Singh and ruled alternately till his death in 1764 and the sole authority fell to Jai Singh. Aitchison, C.U, *Treaties, Engagements, and Sunnuds*, vol. I, Calcutta, Savielle&Cranenburgh, 1862, p. 121
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