

## **Chapter VI**

### **Conclusion**

The general observation of the study “Matrimony as Diplomatic Tool: A Study of Matrimonial Alliances Between Manipur and Neighbouring States (15th to 19th Century)” and how marriage was used as political tool by the monarchies clearly shows a long history of many such alliances prearranged from time to time in pre-colonial North East India. The kingdom of Manipur had its valley area as centre of its administration supported by the hill chiefs. The Rajas of Manipur having ruled in monarchical form of government adopted the policy of both diplomacy and peace in order to keep balance relationship as per need of circumstances that emerged with its neighbours. Similarly, the other neighbouring states also reciprocated the diplomacy. Using marriage alliances as diplomatic tool by the monarchies totally depended on the prevailing political conditions of the kingdoms. In the history of matrimonial alliances between Manipur with its neighbours there were huge numbers of instances that are recorded in the sources available. Manipur had developed matrimonial alliances with its neighbours like Ahoms, Kacharis, Tripuris and the Avas or Burma that included the small Shan states of Burma too.

In context of matrimonial alliances organized between the royal houses of Manipur and Ahom, the study clearly indicates that in all the marriages organized the motive had always been to develop mutual relationship between the two. The principality of Ahom and Manipur had rare contact with each other as the kingdoms located far away due to their geographical position. Both the countries remained interested in dealing with the nearby areas and raiding and plundering them. History of the monarchies also did not contain instances of military confrontations with each other over any issues. The territorial expansionist policies of both the kingdoms never endangered the Rajas of the time. It was only in the first half of 16<sup>th</sup> century that a proper Manipur-Ahom road was constructed for the first time. In later years particularly from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Manipur has emerged as one of the most prominent Hinduized state with the adoption of Hinduism as state religion under the kingship of Meidingu Garib Niwaz. With this change of religion and culture the vision of the Manipur at the eyes of its neighbours also changed gearing their status to a very highly civilized state linked its history with the Indian epic “Mahabharata”. In regard to marriage that was organized between princess Kuranganayani with the Ahom King Rajeswar Singh during second half of 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Ahoms were quite fascinated and adorned with the confirmation that the Manipuris were Kshatriyas and descended from ‘Babruvahan’, son of ‘Arjuna’, the Hero of Indian epic the “Mahabharata”. Thus, the royalist were not only concerned about developing a peaceful relationship between the two kingdoms by means of marriage alliances but also had the intention of linking up with royal houses having descent from high origin. Such reason also had great impact in the life of the princess too. The

role of princess Kuranganayani in assassinating the Moamaria leader Ragha Moran has also been counted on the basis of her belonging to royal house of Manipur. In such marriages the royal women played important roles in the politics of both the kingdoms. Despite solving emergent issues and plausible conflicts it also helped in maintaining cordial relationship between the kingdoms in long run. Political interdependence was also found in the future history of the two monarchies. However, the Ahom-Manipur close contact was of short period and they remained engaged in organizing and stabilizing their kingdom in particular.

The relation of Manipur with the kingdom of Tripura has been recorded from antiquity where marriage alliances between the two took place from early centuries. Both the kingdoms shared boundaries in occasional cases in history. Political, social, economic and cultural contacts between the two kingdoms were common which was further strengthened with occasional association of wed-lock. The unique feature in the history of Manipur-Tripura marriage alliance was that the Rajas of Tripura married not only the royal princesses of Manipur but also Meitei girls belonging to simple wage earner families. However, these girls were basically the settlers of Tripura who migrated to the country due to political or economic reasons. The Rajas of Tripura also married Meitei Princess who was settling at places like Dhaka and Sylhet. Mention may be made of Princess Ratnamanjuri alias Dhaka Rani, daughter of the exiled Meitei King Debendra Singha who had to take flight and settle in Dhaka due to conflict with his brother Chandrakirti Singha on the issue of succession to the throne of Manipur. However, the cause and impact of marrying a princess and a simple Meitei girl by the Tripura Kings differs as like they differ in origin of

their family. In the case of Tripura Raja Rajdhar Manikya marrying Meitei princess Hariseswari, the reason was very much diplomatic as the Meitei King Bhagyachandra alias Jai Singha was on his way to pilgrimage. As a result of the marriage the road condition of Manipur and Tripura had improved and correspondence between the countries became much regular. Cultural assimilation initiated with the entry of royal princess Hariseswari in the palace of Tripura was further extended by future Meitei queens of the palace. The impact of which can be seen even in the cultural life of the Tripuris. However, in cases of Tripura Rajas marrying Meitei girls of simple family impacts were unusual in regard to developing diplomatic relations between the two kingdoms. But, the Meitei queens played important roles in the social and cultural development of the state irrespective of their family origin. Special mention may be made of queen Tulsibati who for the first time took initiative for the development of women education in Tripura. Though there were rare cases of inter-monarchical matrimonial alliances between the two royal houses, the Tripura royal palace was filled with many Meitei Ranis and Maharanis taking important part in the administration of the kingdom. Besides, Meitei culture succeeded to penetrate deeply in the kingdom leading many Tripura Rajas to adorn it. Though there were no direct and immediate advantage of the Tripuri Rajas marrying Meitei girls of simple family but in later years it proved to be an advantage for maintaining a peaceful and friendly relationship between the two royalties. The tradition of wed-lock between the two royal houses even continued in post-independence period too. A unique reason of marriage solemnized was the fascination and adoration of the Tripura Rajas towards the beauty and healthiness of the Meitei girls which was very rare in cases of other

marriage alliances that the Meiteis have organized with its neighbouring kingdoms.

In context to relation between Manipur with the kingdom of Kachari, both the monarchies adopted force and diplomacy in dealing with each other. In the study of matrimonial alliances between the two royalities, there are instances of numerous wed-lock organized during the period between 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Though the Kacharis had to shift their capital from one place to another due to the pressure of Ahoms over them, still its relationship with Manipur was constant till its subjugation by the British East India Company. An overview reveals that the marriage alliances that took place prior to 18<sup>th</sup> century were not of much impactful. However, with the beginning of the said century political activities of the kingdoms began to have great impact in the history of both the kingdoms. The phenomenon of unstable political hold by the Rajas of Manipur led the Meiteis to keep much closer contact with the Kacharis as the country became place of their asylum whenever there were internal or external invasions. Besides they were in close contact with each other in terms of political, social and economic exchanges.

With the proceeding years when the countries began to share common boundaries political inter-dependence became a necessity of the time. Therefore, in such situation development of matrimonial alliance between the two royalities became common with the intention of maintaining mutual relationship between the two. It is quite significant to note that the most remarkable marriage took place towards the last years of Kachari rule at Khaspur (Cachar). The two Kachari princes Krishnachandra and Gobindachandra married the Meitei princess Induprava one after another. In

most of such situations diplomatic marriages were reckoned basically for developing good relationship and to avoid war like situations. But, this marriage turned out to be a misfortune for the Kacharis whereas boon for the Meiteis. The marriage gave easy interference of the Meiteis in the internal affairs of the Kacharis even leading to occupation of Kachari throne by the Meitei princes. On the other side the marriage of queen Induprava with Raja Gobindachandra brought about strained political condition in the kingdom which indirectly led to the verge of its decay. In a sense it can be viewed that marrying ladies of other kingdoms always did not prove beneficial, it also led to its destruction. The impact of wed-lock between two monarchies was not only confined to political affairs but also in the socio-cultural life of both the kingdoms. Many Meiteis who were retinues of the Meitei princesses began to settle in Kachari territory. The migration and settlement of the Manipuris became so regular and huge that even today they form a large population of the present Cachar district of Assam.

In the study of policy of matrimonial alliances between Manipur and its neighbour, the most complicated history of marriage alliances is found with that of the kingdom of Burma. Burma being huge in size and population was ruled by numerous Chiefs independently in their respective areas. The ruling dynasties of Central Burma were unable to subjugate and rule whole of Burma all time. There were very few Kings who succeeded in establishing a unified Burma and ruled then. But, even then the far off Shan states were left to rule by themselves on the condition of giving tribute to their sovereign. Thus, with such feature of the kingdom of Burma, the Rajas of Manipur had to keep relationship not only with the Kings of Central Burma but also with that of the

immediate Shan states in particular. Thus, marriage alliances of Manipur were not only confined with the Kings of Burma but also it was organized with that of some of the Shan states. In every important occasion of matrimonial alliances that took place between the royal houses of Ava and Manipur, the records show that initiative was basically from Ava. Common reason for such alliances was to improve and bring a friendly relationship between the two kingdoms. In viewing the scenario of the marriages that took place in 18<sup>th</sup> century such stride was basically to discontinue the military aggrandizement of Meitei Kings. But, when political power turned favourable towards the Avas after the establishment of Konbuang dynasty in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were changes in the relation of Manipur and Ava. No attempts were made by the monarchies to revive the tradition of wed-lock for the purpose of developing peaceful relationship. Fearful atrocities and treatment done towards one another did not provide them the chance to establish such kind of bond. In a way thereafter both the monarchies engaged themselves in revenging against each other.

An analysis of the marriages organized during the period of the study shows that every marriage had the common reason of bringing close relationship between the royalties as well as kingdoms as a whole. But, some marriages did not always have the expected result and turned out to be of its opposite. Mention has been made of Princess Chakpa Makhao Ngambi who was married to Burmese King Sane in 1704 A.D. Though the marriage succeeded initially to keep cordial relationship, within few years the situation turned to drastic condition when the princess was ill-treated. Thus, the marriage that was organized for peace turned out to be the basic reason for developing

war like situations between the two countries. Brutal and fierce battles became much regular after the incident. It is thus important to note that warm treatment and respect to the princess forms an important feat in such kind of inter-state marriages. However, in future years of Manipuri-Ava matrimonial alliances we do not find instances of such ill-treatment.

It is already stated that Manipur also conducted numerous matrimonial alliances with other Shan states of Burma who settled as their immediate neighbours. Main feature in marriages either with that of the Kabo Chiefs or of the Kyang Chiefs the motive was to improve friendly relationship. Special mention may be that Meitei Kings were very curious and conscious in keeping good relationship with Kabo because of its economic importance. Thus, they maintained both diplomacy and force with the Kabos in respect to keep control the Shan state. However, such situation did not indicate of subordination of the Meiteis towards the Kabos, because Kabo Shans were weaker both militarily and by population as compared to the Meiteis. Vicious raids were conducted by the Meitei Rajas on the occasions of serious rebellions made by the Kabos.

Thus, the matrimonial alliances that took place between Manipur and Burma were conducted as a part of their external policy but at the end it became the most important cause for destroying the relationship between two kingdoms. The devastating invasion of Manipur by the Avas after first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century laid its root in previous marriage alliances that occurred prior to Konbuang rule in Burma.

The study on matrimonial alliances between Manipur with its neighbours – Ahoms, Tripuris, Kacharis and the Burmese kingdoms, there is mention of sending numerous Meitei Princesses in the royal palaces of the



mentioned kingdoms. Rare records are found of Meitei Kings marrying the Princesses of other royal houses. The question naturally arises as to why only the Meitei Princesses were sent to the palace of other kingdoms? Does it show any kind of subordinate status? As to answer of these questions, it is observed that in most cases reference have been made of marriage proposals being sent by the Rajas of the neighbouring countries through envoys along with proper bride price. Evidences are also available where in case of unsatisfactory bride price proposals have been rejected. In context to this a few detailing has already been made when Meitei queen rejected a proposal sent by the Kachari King on the plea of unsatisfactory bride price. Thus, this shows that in such marriages bride price formed an important feature. However, there was also organization of marriages with the neighbouring countries by the Meitei Rajas bound by the circumstances, such as the marriage of princess Kuranganayani with that of the Ahom King Rajeswar Singh as indirectly inferred in the "*Tungkhungia Buranji*". It is also observed that with the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century and after the accession of Meidingu Garib Niwaz at the throne of Kangla the perspective of its neighbours towards Manipur has changed. Again, adoption of Hinduism as the state religion as well as high military valour of Pamheiba made the neighbours seek interest to keep in contact with the country of Manipur. As such, religion also played an important role in developing matrimonial alliances between Manipur and its neighbouring states. Change in religion naturally brought about changes in socio-cultural practices of the Meiteis especially during the second half of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Such new development of the Meiteis particularly the newly created history of Manipur linking with its Aryan origin and their socio-cultural life attracted its

neighbours. The newly converted kingdoms to Hinduism of pre-colonial North East India were always too keen in developing gracious bond with other Hinduized kingdoms.

Accounting the history of the marriage alliances it is also observed that the Rajas of the neighbouring countries always wanted to marry royal princesses rather than of other Meitei girls belonging to simple family except in the case of Tripura Kings. Speculation may be made that it was because Kings were regarded as representative of God on earth. The 'Divine theory of kingship' prevailed in every monarchy and their origin were always connected with the Divinity. In this context the best example is conception of kinship about Delhi Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din Balban (1266-1286 A.D.). After his accession to the throne he took the title of 'Zilli Illahi' or 'Shadow of God' on earth. According to him the heart of the King is the special repository of the God's favour and in this he has no equal among mankind.<sup>1</sup> Thus, with such conception in mind the monarchies of the pre-colonial North East India also regarded the royal ladies of the monarchies to attain such qualities. Therefore, marrying such princesses was natural to produce next generations who will be brave and having divinity in themselves. As such having marriage alliances only with the royal ladies were preferred by the Rajas of every monarchy.

The study of the topic also revealed that behind every marriage organized the sole reason was either to develop friendly relationship or to stem from serious conflicts. There are many records where marriages were organized in time of peaceful situation prevailing between the kingdoms. In such instances it can be clearly said that all the marriages were directly or

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<sup>1</sup> Mahajan. V.D., "*History of India, From Beginning to 1526 A.D.*", S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2001, p-111

indirectly used as diplomatic tool by the Rajas of the monarchies. On the other hand, the Ningthoujas were the only ruling family of Manipur throughout the monarchical days of the state. It was therefore an opportunity on the part of the Meitei monarchs too to give their daughters in marriage to the ruling Rajas of its neighbouring states instead of marrying them off with nobilities and subordinate Chiefs of the kingdom. It was noticed that the Meitei princesses who were married to the neighbouring states acquired high positions in their palaces. But, unfortunately despite such fact some of the marriages organized proved to be dangerous for the monarchies. Situations worsened up and conflict became much more vicious in times. In relation to this we find the instance of princess Chakpa Makhao Ngambi who was married to Burmese King Sane in the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century. The marriage tied up when the relationship between Manipur and Ava was peaceful. While organizing the marriage both Kings of the countries had regarded the development to be security for future danger against each other. But, soon the situation turned to worse and the relationship between the two kingdoms strained. Matters were quite different in context where the Tripuri Rajas married many Meitei ladies irrespective of their family status. Marrying migrated Meitei girls of plebeian family by the Tripura Rajas naturally did not form as part of diplomatic act of the Kings but in future years the adding of Meitei queens in the royal house of Tripura naturally brought the two royalties in close contacts with each other even sharing many cultural ceremonies and functions. Such assimilation of culture could be possible only because of the initiative and the contributions made by the Meitei queens. Again marrying migrated Meitei girls by the Tripura Rajas might be due to the fact that healthy girls belonging to rich

civilization may produce healthy children with full of courage and bravery that was important for maintaining a powerful and stable kingdom in the future.

In the study of the matrimonial alliances that were organized during 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century between Manipur and its neighbouring states it is visible that the royal ladies played the most important role. Though well aware of the fact that they were to live their life in an unknown land with new identity and among unknown people still the ladies did not step behind. It was an important contribution made for their motherland because they knew it well that such steps were to have impact on the political life of the kingdom as a whole. Though man fought hand in hand with their enemies either for conquest a new land or for defense of their kingdom, the royal ladies had in their hand this peaceful weapon to achieve such goals. Such technique was not a new policy for the monarchies of pre-colonial North East India. Since early years it was a tradition in the royal families of the monarchy to have marriage alliances with other countries. Being acquainted with all these traditions the royal princesses opt for little rebellion in regard to their marriage with Kings and Princes of other royalities. In such circumstances many of the Meitei princesses succeeded in contributing to the development of Meitei culture and religion (basically Gauriya-Vaishnavism) in the new places.

Thus, with the above discussions made on “Matrimony as Diplomatic Tool: A Study of Matrimonial Alliances Between Manipur and Neighbouring States (15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century)” it can be said that every monarchy of the pre-colonial North East India adopted marriage ties within and beyond its border as an important political policy. Diplomatic marriage alliances formed as one of the most important technique for the monarchies to develop peaceful

relationship with their neighbours. Royal marriages either organized at the time of peace or war always had its diplomatic value. The Rajas of Manipur utilized this technique with its neighbours without fail whenever the situation demanded.