

# **ABSTRACT**

**MATRIMONY AS DIPLOMATIC TOOL:  
A STUDY OF MATRIMONIAL ALLIANCES BETWEEN  
MANIPUR AND NEIGHBOURING STATES  
(15<sup>TH</sup> TO 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)**

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*By*  
**Memchaton Singha**  
**Ph.D Registration No. Ph.D/1338/10 dated 24.9.2010**

**Supervisor**  
**Prof. Sajal Nag**

**Co-supervisor**  
**Dr. Suryasikha Pathak**



**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
JADUNATH SARKAR SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE**

**ASSAM UNIVERSITY  
SILCHAR-788011, INDIA  
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## **Statement of Problem**

The state of Manipur and its neighbours during the period between 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries had monarchical form of government. Like every monarchy of the world, for centuries the tradition of wed-lock between kingdom of Manipur and its neighbouring states were at continuous process. The Rajas of Manipur with the requirement of the time adopted the policy of organizing marriages as peaceful diplomatic step with its neighbours, especially with the states of Ahoms, Tripuris, Kacharis and Burma/Ava. This was further added with that of the Shan states within the periphery of Burmese dominion. The fluctuating political runs of the kingdom led the monarchs of the state to adopt the policy of both force and diplomacy, of which marriage alliance was one of the most important instrument applied. Diplomatic marriages played an important role in maintaining peaceful relationship among the monarchies and negotiated numerous conflict situations. However, some marriages failed in this objective that led to deterioration of relationship among the kingdoms. In such marriages the royal women were used as pawn in the politics of the men.

The organizations of diplomatic matrimonial alliances between the ruling families of pre-colonial North East India were a common phenomenon. In such kind of marriages concept of marriage was quite different from marriages that are solemnized among normal families. Generally, marriage is understood as socially or ritually recognized union (or legal contract) between a male and a female who are further constituted by arrangements between two families and the exchange of promises. But, in regard to inter-dynastic marriages it has to be looked at different level. Marriages between two royalties in monarchical form of government were mostly backed by diplomatic motives. In such marriages formation of kinship was not limited within the families engaged in the marriages but had direct connection with the political relationship of the kingdoms as a whole. The entry of new queen in the palace was supplemented by settlement of new community people in the kingdom who accompanied the princess. The monarchies of pre-colonial North East India thus adopted matrimonial alliances with their neighbours as an external policy to develop friendly relationship or to avoid unwanted conflicts.

The account of matrimonial alliances between Manipur and its neighbouring states between 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is recorded in chronicles and many of other sources of the states. In the history of Manipur, the instance of inter-dynastic marriage can be seen since the first recorded Raja of Manipur Meidingu Nongda Lairen Pakhangba who married Meitei Leima Laisna, sister of Poireiton. Here it is important to note that Poireiton is narrated in history as immigrant in the land of Manipur during 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The detail history from which route Poireiton entered Manipur is well described in the book called "*Poireiton Khunthok or Migration of Poireiton*". He has been identified as contemporary of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba who challenged the throne of Kangla (Manipur). This naturally indicates of Poireiton having a territory under his control. The homeland of Poireiton is mentioned as 'Khamnung Sawa'. The place has been identified with Kangla in eastern Tibet and tri-junction of Tibet, Burma and India.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Poireiton was an immigrant who later permanently settled in Manipur. Meitei Leima Laisna therefore was also an immigrant who belonged to different origin and tribe as compared to the Meiteis. Hence, in regard to this the marriage of Meidingu Pakhangba with Laisna can also be considered as inter-dynastic marriage.

The history of matrimonial alliances between kingdoms of Manipur and Ahom are recorded in the royal chronicles of the states like "*Cheitharol Kumbaba*" of Manipur and in Buranjis of Assam like "*Ahom Buranji*" and "*Tungkhungia Buranji*". Besides, the details of the marriages are further supplemented by other literary sources. The kingdoms of Manipur and Ahom had their establishment far away from each other and were in rare diplomatic correspondence due to their geographical locations. But, despite such, matrimonial alliances between the ruling families took place though in few. The chronicles of the states provide references of marriage alliances between the two monarchies from the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century which continued up to the 18th century. The most remarkable marriage alliance took place during the reign of Meitei King Bhagyachandra alias Jai Singha (1759-1761 & 1763-1798 A.D.) and the Ahom Raja Rajeswar Singh. Meitei princess Kuranganayani was married to the Ahom King. The political distress created due to Burmese devastation of Manipur led the Meitei King to flee from his kingdom. Finally, it was with the help of the Ahom King that Raja Bhagyachandra reoccupied the throne of Manipur and drove out the Burmese invaders.

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<sup>1</sup> Singh, W.I., "*The History of Manipur (An Early Period)*", Manipur Commercial Co., Imphal, 1986, p-252 & Kabui, Gangmumei., "*History of Manipur, Vol-I, Pre-Colonial Period*", National Publishing House, New Delhi, 2011, p-79

Generally, it is observed that as accomplished with the help rendered Raja Bhagyachandra gave princess Kuranganayani in marriage to the Ahom King Rajeswar Singh. In future years the Manipuri princess played an important role to resurrect the Ahom dynasty during the course of Moamaria rebellion.

The Rajas of Manipur also conducted numerous matrimonial alliances with the kingdom of Tripura. References trace back marriage alliances between the royal houses from the time of Tripura Raja Taidakshin, grandson of King Trilochana who belonged to mythical period.<sup>2</sup> However, history of wed-lock between the two kingdoms become much clear as they are found recorded in the royal chronicles of the states “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*” and “*Sri Rajmala*” from the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century that continued up to 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mention of most important historical marriage with proper detailing is stated towards the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century. The ruling Tripura King Rajdhar Manikya II married Manipuri princess Hariseswari, daughter of Meitei King Bhagyachandra alias Jai Singha. Besides numerous royal marriages organized, the Rajas of Tripura also married Manipuri girls of simple families who had immigrated to Tripura and also in places like Dhaka.

In the study of the diplomatic marriage alliances between the royal families of Manipur and the Kacharis, the references of the earlier marriages prior 19<sup>th</sup> century are found only in the sources of history of Manipur. About such instances the Kachari sources are silent as there is absent of chronological records maintained by the Kacharis during their rule. According to the Meitei sources the tradition of wedlock between the royal houses started from the second half of 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Manipuri princesses who were married to the Kachari country were known as “Mayang Leima” or “Kachari queen”. The first reference of such marriage according to the Manipuri chronicle “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*” took place in 1557 A.D. The name of the princess is recorded as “Mayang Leima Monshambi”.<sup>3</sup> The tradition of wed-lock between the kingdoms of Manipur and Kachari continued till the last years of Kachari rule at Khaspur where the last two rulers of Cachar Prince Krishnachandra Narayan and his brother Gobindachandra Narayan married Meitei Princess Induprava. She became one of the important reasons for the downfall of the Kachari kingdom.

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<sup>2</sup> Menon, K.D., “*Tripura District Gazetteers*”, Govt. Of Tripura, Agartala, 1975, p-70

<sup>3</sup> Singh, Lairenmayum Ibungohal & Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh., “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*”, Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1989, P-26

The kingdom of Manipur also organized numerous marriage alliances not only with the ruling Rajas of central Burma but also with other petty Shan states of Burma that were situated at the immediate border of kingdom of Manipur. The mention of first Manipuri-Ava marriage alliance is found in 11<sup>th</sup> century and the practice continued till first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is important to note that references of unsuccessful marriages between the two monarchies are also recorded in the sources.

Matrimonial alliances were thus used as diplomatic weapon in the politics of monarchy and inter-dynastic marriage in itself was a diplomatic practice. The marriages took place during 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century between Manipur and its neighbouring states and the formation of new kinship among them led to creation of better relationship. Though the marriage alliances were used for bringing peace and negotiations but it did not always bring fruitful results. Marriage relations exposed differences in culture and religion that sometimes exacerbated the hostilities they were intended to resolve. As in the history of Manipur-Ava marriage alliances we find the reference of Meitei princess Chakpa Makhao Ngambi who was married to Burmese King Sane during 18<sup>th</sup> century. As the Burmese King failed to treat the Meitei princess properly the Manipuri-Ava relationship deteriorated leading to harsh raids upon each other. Such types of marriages reduced women into pawn in transaction between men. They served both as negotiators and brides exchanged in politically arranged marriages.

Thus, there is a need to study the numerous matrimonial alliances that took place between Manipur and neighbouring states during 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century and to examine the politics behind such alliances. An attempt has been made here to study on the causes and results of the marriage alliances took place and how far the marriages were successful in their objectives. Besides, it will also try to understand how royal women were used as a tool of diplomacy among the monarchies.

### **Objectives of the research study**

The study has specific aims and objectives set. They are:-

- To give an account of matrimonial alliances and political relationship between Manipur and neighbouring states during 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century in pre-colonial North East India.

- To study the causes and results of the marriages organized between the monarchies.
- To examine how far the political marriages worked in maintaining diplomatic relationship between the states.
- Finally, an attempt of the study is to understand the role of women in such diplomatic marriages organized.

### **Review of Literature:**

Few works are done on the theme of diplomatic matrimonial alliances that took place in Europe and in India but the subject matter has been looked upon and written partially by the Historians. However, an important work which directly linked with the theme of the research work is “*Matrimonial alliances and Ancient Indian Polity, (c 600 to c. CE650)*”, by Preeti Prabhat. The author has given an account of all the marriage alliances that took place among various monarchies during the period from 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C to 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Mention is made of Sotas-Mahajanapadas, of the Nandas, Mauryas, Sungas, Satavahanas, Cedis, Indo-Greeks, Sakas, Pallavas and Kushanas, the Imperial Guptas, Vakatakas, the later Guptas, Maukharis and Vardhanas. She discussed about the political motives behind organization of such marriage alliances and of their results. Such marriage alliances in many occasions led to better economic, political and cultural relationships. In this regard, some of the examples cited are Indo-Greek marriage alliance that brought about economic benefits to the Mauryas. Significance and result of the marriage alliances that took place has been discussed by the author. Similarly with the theme of the present study by the researcher the work of Preeti Prabhat also focused on how marriage diplomacy was used by the monarchies to deal with its neighbouring states and far off kingdoms in time of war and peace.

Beside this there are some books related on the cited theme like “*Papacy, Monarchy and Marriage, 860-1600*” by David D’Avray published in 2015. The author basically made an analytical study of the role of Pope in the royal marriages during 860-1600. The power and institution of a monarch and church has been defined through the marriages organized. The King-Church relationship along with how far the Pope had their control over the life of a King is discussed by the author. Finally, the author presented his arguments about the hidden connections that existed despite having a valid law, how annulment of social norms was done in the higher strata of the society. “*Marriage*

*alliance in late Medieval Florence*” is a work by Anthony Molho, the author has emphasized on finding the reasons on how many of the Florentine elite families succeeded in surviving for long period of time when personal freedom and commerce were growing in large scale during the period of the work. Adoption of marriage alliances as the main tool by the families for their long standing status and dependencies is the main focus of the study. The aspect of dowry in such marriage alliances between the families is given vital importance. In the system of such marriage alliances among the nobility of the Florence, they choose the best of other noble family with whom the wedlock was to tie up. The prominent example cited is, the majority of Rinuccini children being married to the other Florentine households. On the theme of nature of marriage in whole Europe, David D’Avray has written a book with the title “*Medieval Marriage, Symbolism and Society*”. The author discussed about various marriage symbolism that existed during the medieval period and with the span of time how it along with the marriage laws led to formation of Church’s marriage system. Interesting facts are discussed like, as a benefit a person who married a widow or a virgin woman was exempted from capital punishment. “*History of Scotland*” by Neil Oliver is another important work dealing with the theme of the research work. Generally, the book basically deals with long history of Scotland, beginning with the early settlers of Scotland progressing with foundation of its own monarchy and finally leading to its fall at the hands of Auld Enemy. In the monarchical days of the kingdom, diplomatic marriage alliances were used as major political step. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, where there was full of war fares and aggressions against each other, the Scottish did not remain aloof. In the game of politics the minor Scottish queen Mary Stuart was married to the Dauphin of France in 1558. The marriage was genuinely a step of diplomacy by both France and Scottish. Many such instances of marriage diplomacy adopted by the Scottish monarchs are part of the book. But, the author recorded this aspect of diplomacy as just a partial fraction of the whole history of Scotland.

In the history of Mughal India adoption of matrimonial alliances by Mughal Emperor Akbar as an important diplomatic tool is a well-known fact. Many books written on Medieval India has mentioned about his policy. Among them the book of Ruby Lal called “*Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*” is an important collection not only for Akbar’s diplomacy towards to Rajputs but also for his initiative to deal peacefully with other states in order to make them his political allies. The book tried to

relate on gender relationship and their role in the politics of Mughal court. The author made an attempt to understand the Mughal harem and how far the happening of Mughal domestic palace influenced the politics of the empire.

The marriage diplomacy adopted by the monarchy of England and France are recorded by many historians as part of their writings. *“England Since 1485”* by V.D. Mahajan is a book basically concentrated on giving a complete history of England beginning from the cited year up to 20<sup>th</sup> century. But, without pointing out and discussions on the marriage diplomacy adopted by the monarchs and queens of England, a total history of England remains incomplete. However, not much analysis and interpretation of the marriage diplomacy is attempted by the author. It has been presented as partial part of the dynastic politics of England.

Thus, these are some of the books discussed which are directly or indirectly related with the theme of using matrimony as diplomatic tool during monarchy. Except author Preeti Bardhan’s book *“Matrimonial alliances and Ancient Indian Polity, (c 600 to c. CE650)”*, the other books available made only partial reorientation of the theme. Again, the subject matter of women i.e. how they were used as tool in the political game of the monarchies is almost an untouched area. Though historians have partially touched the area of diplomatic marriage alliances, few attempts has been made to understand the role of the royal ladies in the course of such marriage alliances. Few modern writers who are interested in gender history took effort to study the area. *“Royal Mughal Ladies and their contributions”* by Soma Mukherjee is an important work related to the issue of role of women in the politics of men. The author has written on contributions of the Mughal ladies in every aspect of the kingdoms, such as in politics, economy, education, culture etc. Their life in the harem is also discussed in details. Many Mughal ladies like Aisan Daulat Begam, Khanzada Begam, Gulbadan, Hamida Banu Begam, Rukaiya Begam, Jodha Bai, Nurjahan etc. are main focus of the study.

Though there is no any book written on the theme of diplomatic marriage alliances in the pre-colonial North east India, however, some of the related books on history of North East India and its states in particular are also reviewed here.

An edited book by Naorem Sanajaoba called *“Manipur Past and Present, The Ordeals and Heritage of a Civilization, Vol-IV, Pan-Manipuris In Asia and*



*Autochthones*” has all the articles related to political, social, economic, cultural and religious life the Meiteis settled outside Manipur such as in states of Assam, Tripura as well as in countries like Burma and Bangladesh. The introduction written by the editor with the title “Roots Beyond Root” is of immense value as it provided numerous references about migration of the Meiteis outside Manipur where marriage alliances during the monarchies are regarded to be one of the basic causes.

The book “*Ahom-Tribal Relations (A Political Study)*” by Lakshmi Devi emphasized basically on the policy adopted by the Ahom monarchs towards both plain and hill tribes with whom they came into contact during their 600 years of rule in Assam. During their rule in Assam they came in contact with various tribes, of which some are – Moran, Borahis, Kacharis, Mikirs, Abors, Khamtis, Singphos etc. There are also details about assimilation of various tribes under the fold of Ahom confederacy and the policies adopted by the Ahom rulers to subjugate them are also discussed.

A book written by two authors i.e. L. Biramangal Singha and Pannalal Ray with the title “*Itihaser Aaloke Tripura-Manipur/ Itihaski Mityengda Tripura-Manipur*” published in the year 2007 is written in both Bengali and Manipuri languages. The authors focused on history of long term relationship between Manipur and Tripura particularly from 15<sup>th</sup> century. A brief discussion is also made on matrimonial alliances between the two states during 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century though not in details.

The book “*Status and Empowerment of Tribal Women in Tripura*” is a book authored by Krishna Nath Bhowmik. In the book the author has discussed about status and empowerment of four major tribal women in Tripura namely – the Tripuri, the Reang, the Jamatia and the Chakma in details. This study begins with early years of monarchical Tripura that continues up to 21st century.

“*Maharani Induprabha (a historical novel)*” by Kambrambam Nilakanta Singha is an important historical novel on Meitei Princess Induprava and her stay in the Kachari kingdom. The book is a historical novel that seems more or less a historical account. The book basically emphasized on marriage of the Meitei Princess, daughter of Manipur King Madhuchandra with the Kachari Raja Krishnachandra Narayan in 1802 A.D. It also concentrated on Krishnachandra narrating to his Meitei Queen the history of the Kacharis.

Beside such works, there is no any work done on diplomatic marriage alliances that took place between Manipur and neighbouring states during (15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century). Again, the role of women in these marriage alliances is an untouched area. Thus, there is a need to study the numerous matrimonial alliances that took place between Manipur and neighbouring states during 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century and to examine the politics behind such alliances. An attempt has been made here to study on the causes and results of the marriage alliances took place and how far the marriages were successful in their objectives. Besides, it will also try to understand how royal women were used as a tool of diplomacy among the monarchies.

### **Methodology**

The methodologies adopted in this research work are empirical and analytical and this is supplemented by oral traditions in the form of personal interviews conducted and oral stories. In the process of historical enquiry of the research both primary and secondary sources are used in large extent. Many archives and libraries are visited for collecting the sources.

The State Archives of Manipur, Assam along with District Record Room of Cachar, Assam has been of great importance. Numerous chronicles of Manipur such as Cheitharol Kumbaba, Ningthourol-Lambuba, vol-I, A Detailed History of the Kings of Manipur, Manipur Itihas Meitei Puran - Bijoy Panchali, Garib Niwaz Charit and such important early books are collected from the State Archives of Manipur. These books are of immense help for understanding the political, social, cultural, economic and religious history of Manipur. As like numerous Government letters related to the work are also collected from the State Archives of Assam. From the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati various Burnajis of Assam are collected that contained the whole history of Ahom rule in Assam and their policies. The Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), Guwahati helped gathering numerous articles published in various NEIHA sessions. Books related to history of Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Kachari rule in various parts of Assam are gathered in large number from ICHR. The District Library of Cachar and Cachar District Record Room, Silchar helped with numerous materials related to history of Cachar, Kacharis at Khaspur and finally the subjugation of the kingdom of Kacharis and Cachar by the Britishers.

Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura was another major source for data like the state chronicle of Tripura Sri Rajmala (Vol I to IV), Imperial Gazetteers, Tripura District Gazetteers etc. Various secondary sources like articles in magazines, journals and books were consulted which were preserved in the Birchandra State Central Library, Agartala. The Krishna Kanta Handique Library-Guahati University has numerous published and unpublished thesis and dissertations which was of immense value in relation to conducting the research work.

Centre of Myanmar Studies, Manipur University, Manipur was of great help in collection of books related with the history of Burma as well as their relationship with the state of Manipur. Various books, published and unpublished thesis and dissertations collected from Manipur University Central Library, Manipur proved as important source for studying various aspects of understanding the relation of Manipur with its neighbouring states.

Besides collecting books, visiting the Manipuri settled areas in the states of Assam and Tripura helped in gathering knowledge on oral traditions like folk songs and tales of the place prominent among the Meitei settlers of the places. A number of personal interviews were conducted among which the most significant was that of Maharajkumari Tamphasana, Palace compound, Manipur. She is the daughter of Late Maharaja Buddhachandra of Manipur. In 1963, she was married to Tripura prince Maharajkumar Sashadhar Bir Bikram Kishore Deb Barman, son of Tripura Raja Bir Bikram Kishore Deb Barman. Her experience about her marriage with the Tripura prince was of immense help in conducting the research work.

In addition, a variety of records, documents, books etc. from various digital libraries viz. Digital Library of JNU, Delhi, Stanford Junior University, Burma, Cornell University Library, US, University of Wisconsin, Library, Osmania University, Library etc. was accessed. The websites like [www.archives.org](http://www.archives.org), [www.assam.org](http://www.assam.org), [www.burmalibrary.org](http://www.burmalibrary.org), e-pao (online Manipuri daily newspaper), Manipur was also major source of collecting sources. Besides the mentioned libraries many other libraries are also visited by the researcher for collecting materials related to the research work.

In the process of the research work three different versions of Manipur chronicle “Cheitharol Kumbaba” has been used. Of the three, the main Cheitharol Kumbaba is

written in Manipuri language edited by L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, published by Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1989. The other two are translated in English language. One of which is translated and edited by Nepram Bihari having titled “The Cheitharol Kumbaba, The Royal Chronicle of Manipur”, spectrum publication, Guwahati, 2012 and the other by Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt with the title of the chronicle as “The Court Chronicles of the Kings of Manipur, The Cheitharon Kumpapa, Vol-I & Vol-II”. The author made no edition of the original Manipuri text and confined with the translation.

### **Chapterisation**

The dissertation has been organized into six respective chapters.

### **Chapter I**

The introductory chapter basically introduces the theme of the study, Statement of problem, Review of literature, Research objectives, Research methodology and short statement of the chapters etc. The area and period of the research work is well stated in this chapter. The concept of diplomatic matrimonial alliances and how it differs from normal or casual marriages has also been discussed in the chapter.

The history of matrimonial alliances between Manipur and its neighbouring states of Ahom, Tripura, Kachari and Burma between 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries during monarchy has been discussed. Diplomatic marriage alliances between the ruling families were common practice in the past all over the world. For the reasons of their states it was done as part of political policy or tradition. The developments of kinship either restrain or promote aggressions between kingdoms. It was an important external strategy in Europe. By the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century it was a common practice among the rival dynasties of Europe to arrange diplomatic marriages for developing peace between them. One of such instance is in 1559 A.D. Cateau - Cambresis peace treaty took place when double marriage of Henry II and Catherin De Medici’s daughter Elisabeth to Philip II of Spain and of Henry’s sister Marguerite De Valois to Duke Emmanuel Philibert of Savoy was authorized. This succeeded to bring an end to the conflict between the Hapsburg and Valois over Italy. In mainland India the most famous example is the Rajput policy of Mughal Emperor Akbar for consolidating peaceful negotiation with the Rajputs, the most powerful rivals of the Mughals at the time. In the policy of negotiations with the Rajputs

the marriage of Emperor Akbar with the Rajput princess Harka Bai alias Jodha Bai is quite remarkable.

Likewise many such diplomatic marriage alliances were organized by the Rajas of Manipur with its neighbours. Matrimonial alliance was one of the most important techniques adopted by them for appeasement within and beyond the kingdom. The active period of adoption of wed-lock within and beyond its kingdom was prevalent during the period from 15<sup>th</sup> century, a period when state formation in the valley of Manipur completed and that continued till their occupation by the British government. Such marriages not only developed kinship between the royal houses but also led to settlement of many Manipuris in different part of state who went along as retinues of the Meitei Princesses and vice versa. Assimilation of cultural and social norms was quite common between the monarchies. However in some cases such marriages gave easy interference in the internal affairs of the monarchies as was the case in Kachari kingdom. Again, all the marriages did not always serve the purpose of developing good relation among the monarchies on the contrary led to worsen kinship.

In such diplomatic marriage alliances the women played an important role by participating as the main bride in such bridal exchange. They also had the responsibility to carry a long relationship and to avoid creating conflict situations among the monarchies as far as possible.

## **Chapter II**

The chapter deals with diplomatic marriage alliances that took place between Manipur and Ahom during 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before going through detail discussion on the marriage alliances a brief pre-colonial history of Manipur and Ahom rule in Assam are discussed.

Though the kingdom of Ahom and Manipur had few contacts with each other where there find no any strained relationship. It was thus mutual correspondence which was boosted up my organizing matrimonial alliances between the two monarchies. In this chapter, an account of all the marriage alliances that were arranged between the royal houses of Manipur and Ahom has been made. An analysis has been made to understand the causes and result of the marriages organized and how far the diplomacy of marriage succeeded to fulfill their intended purpose. Historical records trace back the beginning of

Ahom-Manipuri marriage alliances from 16<sup>th</sup> century that continued till 18<sup>th</sup> century. In such marriages, there was not only exchange of brides but also of numerous presents between the two royalties. The chapter also discusses about the role played by Meitei princess Kuranganayani during Moamaria rebellion in the Ahom kingdom and how did she helped to resurrect the kingdom from the yoke of the rebellers.

### **Chapter III**

The third chapter gives an account of Manipuri-Tripura matrimonial alliances that took place between 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The chapter begins with a brief history of Tripura till it joined the Indian Union on October 15, 1949.

The states of Manipur and Tripura were two independent princely states of pre-colonial North East India. The state chronicle of Tripura "*Sri Rajmala*" traces back the tradition of wed-lock between Manipur and Tripura since antiquity. In this chapter an account of Tripura–Manipuri matrimonial alliance that took place from 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century are discussed along with the probable causes. It also emphasizes on various impacts of the marriages in political, social and cultural life of the royal house of Tripura. Contributions made by the Manipuri Ranis and Maharanis for the developments of the kingdom have been discussed in brief. Finally, it discusses about various diplomatic values of the matrimonial alliances that took place during the centuries. The most prominent cases of matrimonial alliances between royal house of Manipur and Tripura are recorded towards the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century that continued even in the post-independence period. The tradition of adding Meitei wives in the royal house of Tripura was followed by many Tripura nobilities who married Meitei ladies as their wife settling in many parts of Tripura and Dhaka. Besides, a unique feature in the history of Tripura-Manipuri marriage alliance was that many Tripura Rajas also married girls from Meitei plebeian families.

### **Chapter IV**

In this chapter the history of diplomatic matrimonial alliances that took place between Manipur and the Kacharis during 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries has been discussed. At the outset of the chapter a brief summary of the history of Kacharis who ruled in different parts of Assam has been discussed.

Kacharis and the Manipuris retain an important place in the history of North East India. Like every monarchy the ruling Kings of Kachari and Manipur adopted the policy of diplomacy and force for territorial expansion and to avoid conflicts with its neighbour that includes peace treaties and marriage alliances. It is important to note that in the sources of Manipur the 'Kacharis' are recorded as 'Mayang'.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, a chronological list of Manipuri-Kachari marriage alliances is chocked out from the available sources. An analysis has been made to understand the causes behind the marriages organized and of their results. In the study of the diplomatic marriage alliances between the royal families of Manipur and the Kacharis, the references of the earlier marriages prior 19<sup>th</sup> century are found only in the sources related to the history of Manipur. The first reference of such marriage according to the Manipuri chronicle "*Cheitharol Kumbaba*" took place in the second half of 16<sup>th</sup> century and the tradition of wed-lock between the royalties continued till the last years of Kachari rules. The available sources has recorded a total number of 8 (eight) marriage alliances that occurred between the two royalties. Of all the marriages occurred, the most significant wedding alliance took place in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1802 A.D. the Meitei Princess Induprava, daughter of Meidingu Madhuchandra was given in marriage to the Kachari Raja Krishnachandra Narayan. After the death the Kachari King Maharani Induprava was remarried by Raja Gobindachandra Narayan, brother of the late Kachari King. The marriage brought about discontentment among the Kachari subjects. The marriage helped easy interference of the Manipuris in the political affairs of the Kacharis and succeeded to destroy the solidarity of the Kacharis. Finally, the assassination of the last Kachari King Gobindachandra in 1830 A.D.

## Chapter V

Like the previous chapters, a historical account of the diplomatic marriage alliances organized between the kingdom of Manipur and Burma during the course of study has been discussed. However, a summary of the history of Burma has been discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Burma (Myanmar) was a vast land of many ethnic tribes. Like many Indian princely states Burma had also maintained their

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<sup>4</sup> W.I Singh states that the application of the term Mayang is to all outsiders of non-Mongoloid origin. As such, the term Mayang is also used to identify the Kacharis too. When the Kacharis shifted their capital at Maibong and Khaspur and they became the intimate neighbour of the Manipuris, they were generally termed as Mayangs in all the Meitei sources. Therefore, all the references mentioning the term Mayang in the available sources are considered to identify as the "Kacharis" in this research work

independent status until they were defeated by the British during three (3) Anglo-Burmese wars in 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the history of Manipur-Burma matrimonial alliances the Rajas of Manipur organized matrimonial alliances not only with the Rajas of Central Burma but also with many Shan states of Burma. Special mention may be made of Shan states like Pong, Kyang and Kabo/Kabaw. Diplomatic marriage alliances between the two monarchies are recorded from 11<sup>th</sup> century and it continued till the first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century. The marriages organized during the centuries were to build up good relationship between the two royalties. The most impactful marriage took place in the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Meitei King Charairongba (1697-1709 A.D.) gave his sister Princess Chakpa Makhao Ngambi in marriage to Burmese King Sane who ruled Burma from 1698 to 1714 A.D. But beyond the expectation of monarchs of both the kingdoms the relation between the two strained inspite of developing a mutual friendship. After this event raids and counter raids between the two kingdoms became a regular practice. However, the last Manipuri-Ava marriage took place in 1741 A.D.

## **Chapter VI**

This chapter deals with the ultimate findings of the whole dissertation. The general observation of the diplomatic matrimonial alliances between Manipur and neighbouring states during 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and how marriage was used as an important tool by the monarchies clearly shows that the tradition of wed-lock between royalties was adopted by the monarchs as the safest weapon to restrain conflicts with its enemy. The Rajas of Manipur like many other adopted the policy of marriage alliances within and beyond the kingdom of Manipur as means for appeasement with its enemies as well as friends.

The study of the topic “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 Raha 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 royalties, 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 royalties 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>5</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 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

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<sup>5</sup> Mahajan. V.D., *"History of India, From Beginning to 1526 A.D."*, S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 2001, p-111

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 royalties. 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.