

Chapter IV

Marriage as diplomacy between Manipur and Kachari states (15th to 19th century)

The Kacharis like that of Manipuris has ruled in various parts of pre-colonial North East India. Though the Kacharis failed to form a state of its own like that of Manipur but they left to us long glorious history without which the history of North East India remains incomplete. Both the kingdoms retain an important place in the history of the region having provided numerous works of praise. The Kacharis who had their last days of rule in Cachar lost its status of princely independent states in 1854 A.D. and that of Manipur in 1891 A.D. Since then the name of the Kachari kingdom began to shroud in the larger history of British dominion and as such after the Independence of India in 1947 too. However, a glimpse in the pre-colonial history reveals that the kingdoms of Manipur and Kachari maintained relationships which combined of both warfare and friendly correspondence. They came in acute contact with each other during the last days of Kachari rule in Cachar when the kingdoms began to share common boundary. The correspondence between the two was for the purpose of trade, domicile, diplomacy, religion, as place of shelter etc. Again, in the medieval times, flourishing trade centers sprang up at Mohung-Dijua and Rangarung, Mohung-Dijua was place situated on the frontiers of Ahom and

Kachari kingdom and at this place, the Ahoms, Nagas, Kacharis and Manipuris exchanged their goods.¹ Further, the internal political turmoil and regular forceful external aggressions in the states necessitated the monarchies for political inter-dependence. Such as, in course of Burmese invasions in Manipur, the Kachari kingdom was regarded as their favourable place of asylum by the Meiteis. The Kacharis on the other hand was mostly in political conflicts with its neighbours like the Ahoms, Jaitias, Koches etc. Therefore, such situations compelled them to keep in good terms with their immediate neighbour, the Meiteis. Nonetheless, the Manipuri-Kachari relation was further augmented by marriage alliances between the royal houses of the kingdoms. Thus, the inter-state marriages in the two royal houses were a common phenomenon which begins from 16th century and continued till the first half of 19th century.

However, prior to further detailing about the historical chronology of wed-lock in the royal houses of Manipur and the Kacharis, a brief background history of the Kacharis and the Manipuris will be appropriate. As a brief history of Manipur has already been provided in the IInd chapter, therefore, a short history of kingdom of Kachari is described hereafter.

History of Kacharis

The Kacharis like many other tribes of North East India had a strong rule of their own in the pre-colonial years. They are known by different other names as, in the Goalpara district of Assam and North Bengal districts of West Bengal are known as 'Mech', in the Brahmaputra Valley, Bodo or Bodos, and in the

¹ Bhattacharjee, J.B., "*Cachar Under the British Rule in North East India*", Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p-15

North Cachar Hills, Dimasa or Dimacha.² In the plains of Cachar, they are known as Barmans.³ Sir Edward Gait has mentioned that the Kacharis are the earliest inhabitants of the Assam Valley.⁴ They trace their origin as a branch of the great 'Bodo' race and their Mongoloid features point to their having originally arrived in Assam from China or Tibet.⁵

The Dimasas or 'the children of Big Water'⁶ or Kacharis are said to have ruled a big kingdom. According to Captain Fisher, the Kacharis gradually set up a big kingdom comprising Assam, Sylhet, Tripura and Cachar keeping their original headquarters at Kamrupa. Their kingdom thus comprised of the whole area starting from Kamrupa down to the Bay of Bengal. Fisher informs us further that they were gradually expelled from Kamrupa by the Rajas of Koch Behar and that their kingdom was subsequently divided into two parts. The southern part of the said kingdom came under the rule of a prince said to be the younger son of the King who established the house of Tripura.⁷ In this regard Dr. Nalini Ranjan Roychoudhury has documented that Trilochana married a princess of the neighbouring Hedamba kingdom. The Hedamba King adopted the first son Drikpati of King Trilochana and his daughter. But, Drikpati, the King of Hedamba country being the first son of Trilochana claimed the throne of his brother Dakshin, the King of Tripura. Dakshin had to flee from his kingdom and

² Census of India, 1891, pp-224,228 & Gait, Sir Edward., "*A History of Assam*", 3rd, 1984, (reprint), p-247

³ Sen, Gouri., "*Life in Kachari Kingdom at khaspur*", Partha Datta, Vivekananda Road, Silchar, 2003, p-10

⁴ Gait, Sir Edward., "*A History of Assam*", Guwahati, 1984, (reprint), p-247

⁵ Rhodes, N.G., & Bose, S.K., "*A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis, As Seen Through Coinage*", Kolkata, 2006, p-3

⁶ Barman, Uttam Chandra., "*The Dimasas and The Ancient History of India, The Saraswati – A Lost River : The Dimasa – A Lost Nation*", vol – I, Uttam Chandra Barman, Silchar, Assam, 2011, p-1

⁷ Fisher, Captain., "*Memoir of Sylhet, Kachar and the adjacent districts*", J.A.S.B. IX, Part : II, 1840, pp-829,830 & Sen, Gouri., "*Life in Kachari Kingdom at khaspur*", Partha Datta, Vivekananda Road, Silchar, 2003, p-11

established a new capital on the bank of the river Barak.⁸ Thus, it relates that the Kacharis and the Tripuris were kith n kins since antiquities. The Kachari Kings were called as Herambeswara, Haidambesvara or Herambadhiswara, all synonymous with the Lord of Hedamba⁹ and in the final phase, the Dimasa-Kachari kingdom was popularly called the ‘Herambarajya’.¹⁰ The background goes that in the tradition of the Kacharis they claimed descend from one ‘Ghatotkacha’, son of Bhima (the second Pandava of the epic Mahabharata) from his demon wife Heramba (the Kachari princess).

The history of the Kacharis prior to the advent of the Ahoms in Assam is quite clumsy due to absence of the written records but with the advent of the Ahoms in Assam a reliable history of the monarchy can be attained. The “*Kachari Buranji*” recorded that the Dimasas believe that they once ruled the whole of Kamruli (Kamarupa?)¹¹, but political and military pressure made them shift to Sadiya, on the northern bank of Brahmaputra, where they founded the Halali kingdom.¹² The Sadiya Kacharis was bounded by Sadiya on the east, the river Dikhou on the west, the river Dihing on the north and Kendurgi on the south.¹³ On the eve of Ahom penetration in Assam the boundary of Kachari kingdom extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra, from the Dikhu to the Kallang, or beyond and included also the valley of the Dhansiri and the tract which now forms the North Cachar sub-division.¹⁴ Realizing the strength of the

⁸ Roychoudhury, Nalini Ranjan., “*Tripura Through the Ages, A short History of Tripura from the earliest times to 1947 A.D.*”, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p-2

⁹ Rhodes, N.G., & Bose, S.K., “*A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis, As Seen Through Coinage*”, Kolkata, 2006, p-4

¹⁰ Rhodes, N.G., & Bose, S.K., “*A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis, As Seen Through Coinage*”, Kolkata, 2006, p-i

¹¹ Bhuyan, S.K., “*Kachari Buranji*”, Gauhati, 1951, p-Foreward vii.

¹² Rhodes, N.G., & Bose, S.K., “*A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis, As Seen Through Coinage*”, Kolkata, 2006, p-5

¹³ Bhuyan, S.K., “*Kachari Buranji*”, Gauhati, 1951, p-VIII

¹⁴ Gait, Sir Edward., “*A History of Assam*”, Guwahati, 1984, (reprint), p- 237

Kacharis and the difficulty to overthrow them the first Ahom King Sukapha pondered on expansion towards north and north east of the Kachari territory. The task of subduing the Kacharis was initiated by Sukapha's son Suteupha and succeeded in pushing back the Dimasas up to Namdang towards the end of the thirteenth century, which came to be recognized as the boundary between the two neighbours for about two hundred years.¹⁵ From Sadiya the Kacharis moved their capital to Dimapur and founded a strong fortress. The peaceful rule of the Dimasa was again disturbed in the last decade of 15th century. The hostilities with the Ahoms were renewed in 1490 A.D. and a battle was fought on the Dikhu river where the enemies were sacked by the Dimasas and were forced peace agreement. But soon in 1526 A.D. war broke out between the two in which Ahom forces gave crushing defeat to the Kacharis and pushed them back to Namdang. The Kachari city of Dergaon was also occupied. However, it was finally in 1531 A.D. during the reign of Ahom King Suhungmung that the serious hostility regained when the Kacharis opposed the construction of a fort at Marangi by the Ahoms. In this engagement Detcha (brother of Kachari Raja) who was leading his forces was killed by the enemy. The Ahoms army under their powerful King succeeded to advance towards the Kachari capital Dimapur and to defeat them. The vacant throne was filled up by installing one Kachari named Detsung as the new King under the suzerainty of the Ahom supremacy. But, the peace settlement broke soon and finally in 1536 A.D. the Ahom army occupied the capital Dimapur. Detsung was captured and put to death.

The Dimasas retreated further after this defeat and moved southwards leaving behind whole the Dhansiri valley. Eventually, they constructed their new

¹⁵ Bhattacharjee, J.B., "*Cachar Under British Rule in North east India*", Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p-5

capital at Maibong (modern North Cachar Hills) near Mahur river. The name Maibong also literally means abundance of paddy, Mai (paddy) and Bong (abundant).¹⁶ A strong wall was constructed all round for better protection of the new capital and good number of temples were erected, making Maibong a capital fit for the Dimasa Kings and their aristocracy.¹⁷ The Ahom King installed one Madan Kumar alias Nirbhoynarayan, son of Detsung as the new Kachari King at Maibong. After this the Kachari rulers were called 'Thapita-Sanchita' (established and preserved).¹⁸ The adoption of Hindu name Nirbhoynarayan by the Kachari King indicated that he adopted the Hindu religion and thus accepted the Brahmins as Dharmandi Guru. Subsequently, the Brahmins became the spiritual guides of the Dimasa Kings, and obtained the title of 'Raj Pandit'.¹⁹

Meanwhile, Koch territorial aggrandizement under Raja Naranarayan (1540-1584 A.D.) and his powerful Commander-in-chief Chilarai alias Sukladhvaj (1552-1603 A.D.) (Raja's younger brother) brought a new epoch in the history of the region. In 1562 A.D. they subdued the Ahom and the Dimasa kingdoms as well as Jayantia, Khyriem, Dimarua, Manipur, Sylhet, and Tripura. The defeated rulers acknowledged the Koch suzerainty and agreed to pay annual tribute, besides war indemnities and presents.²⁰ The defeat of Tripuris in the plains of Cachar brought a complete end to Tripuris authority on the land. The victors made Cachar a crown colony under a Governor and left behind contingent of its army at Khaspur (earlier called Brahmapur). As such, Kamal

¹⁶ Rhodes, N.G., & Bose, S.K., "*A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis, As Seen Through Coinage*", Kolkata, 2006, p-18

¹⁷ Soppit, C.A., "*An Historical And Descriptive Account of Kachari Tribes in North Cachar Hills*", Shillong, 1885, p-4 & Rhodes, N.G., & Bose, S.K., "*A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis, As Seen Through Coinage*", Kolkata, 2006, p-18

¹⁸ Bhuyan, S.K., "*Kachari Buranji*", Gauhati, 1951, p-20

¹⁹ Bhattacharjee, J.B., "*Social and Polity Formations in the Pre-colonial North East India*", New Delhi, 1991, pp-138-140

²⁰ Bhattacharjee, J.B., "*Cachar Under British Rule in North east India*", Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p-6

Narayan alias Gosain Kamal was appointed as the Governor of Cachar.²¹ The Koches who remained in Cachar were known as Dehans after Dewan or the Governor²². On the other hand with the rise of the Koches the Ahoms had lost its hold over the Kacharis. Taking advantage of the situation the Kacharis extended their territory which included greater part of Nagaon, North Cachar Hills. They also gradually initiated their extension in the plains of Cachar.

With the beginning of 17th century there renewed the conflicts of the Kacharis with its neighbours. The issue started when Dhanmanik (1580-1596 A.D.), the Jayantia Raja refused to allow the Dimasas to trade with Sylhet through his territory.²³ This annoyed the Kachari Raja. The matter took serious turn when the Dimarua Chief, Pravakar, a vassal of the Kacharis was detained by the Jayantia King. At this the Dimasa King Jasanarayan demanded the release of Pravakar but it was turned down by Dhanmanik. This ultimately led Jasanarayan to invade Jayantia in which the Kacharis were victorious and compelled Pravakar to accept Kachari suzerainty. They were also to pay an annual tribute to the Kacharis. Dhanmanik also gave two princess to the Kachari King and made over his nephew and heir-apparent, Jasa Manik, as a hostage. To commemorate this victory Satrudaman alias Jasa Narayan assumed the title "Asimardan".²⁴ Soon after Dhanmanik died and Jasa Manik was made the new Jayantia Raja under the over lordship of the Dimasas. Jasa Manik resented this but was unable to give open opposition. Therefore, he hatched a plan to drag the two great enemies, the Kacharis and the Ahoms in war. Thus, Jasa Manik

²¹ Bhattacharjee, J.B., "*Cachar Under British Rule in North east India*", Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p-7

²² Bhattacharjee, J.B., "*Cachar Under British Rule in North east India*", Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p-8

²³ Bhattacharjee, J.B., "*Cachar Under British Rule in North east India*", Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p-8

²⁴ Gait, Sir Edward., "*A History of Assam*", Guwahati, 1984, (reprint), p-241

offered his daughter to the then Ahom King Pratap Singh on the condition that he should fetch her not by the usual route of Gobha, but through the Kachari territory.²⁵ When the proposal reached to Kachari court at Maibong Jasanarayan strongly refused the passage on the suspicion that the Jayantias may in future try to raid his country. As consequence was the attack of Kachari territory by the Ahom forces in 1606 A.D. But, invaders faced a severe defeat and the Ahom General Sundar Gohain got assassinated. The than Ahom King Pratap Singh desired for revenge against the Kacharis but the probable clash with the Mughals refrained him to act as such. On the other hand, to commemorate his victory against the Ahoms, the Kachari King Jasanarayan assumed the title 'Pratapnarayan' and also changed the name of his capital from Maibong to Kirtipur. Jasanarayan declared himself to be an independent and sovereign ruler and so forth of the Kachari kingdom. The existence of an independent Kachari kingdom caught the attention of the mighty Mughals. The Kacharis tried hard to defend the invaders but they were too strong to stop and they succeeded in subduing the Kacharis. To prevent further inroads in the capital Maibong Jasanarayan concluded a peace treaty with the invaders. He gave 40 elephants and a lakh of rupees for the Emperor, 5 elephants and Rs. 20,000 for the Subadar, and two elephants and Rs. 20,000 for Mubariz Khan, the thanadar of Bandasal who commanded the invading force.²⁶ Only on agreeing to pay a huge compensation both in cash and kind King Jasanarayan somehow could save his capital city from the critical Mughal attack.

On the other side the Mughal-Ahom conflict also did not last for long time and peace was established in 1639 A.D. Realizing the political

²⁵ Bhuyan, S.K., "*Kachari Buranji*", Gauhati, 1951, pp-21-25

²⁶ Gait, Sir Edward., "*A History of Assam*", Guwahati, 1984, (reprint), p-242

transformation, the Kacharis opted for resuming the old friendship with the Ahoms. But, soon the conflict resumed shortly during the reign of Kachari King Tamradhvaj (1695-1707 A.D.) and the Ahom King Rudra Singh (1696-1714 A.D.). Tamradhvaj proclaimed not only the independence of his kingdom but also refused Ahom supremacy over them. In order to cease the Kacharis and to bring them under submission the Ahom King Rudra Singh in 1706 A.D. dispatched the huge Ahom forces of 70,000 to invade the Kacharis. The Dimasas made strong resistance but the enemies were too strong and huge in number to hold permanently. Ultimately, Tamradhvaj had to flee from its capital Maibong and took refuge at Khaspur, in the plains of Cachar, whence he sent an urgent appeal for help to Ram Sing, Raja of Jayantia.²⁷ But in reverse to expectation of Tamradhvaj for help, the Jayantia Raja took advantage of the situation to overpower the Kacharis and imprisoned the Kachari Raja. At this being helpless Tamradhvaj's queen Chandraprabha somehow managed to send a letter to the Ahom King for help begging forgiveness for earlier deeds. Ahom King Rudra Singh being pleased came forward to quick release of the Kachari Raja from the imprisonment. Thus, the Jayantia Raja was asked for immediate release of the Kachari King, on refuse of which the Ahom King dispatched a strong army against the Jayantias and overpowered them and occupied the territory. Tamradhvaj was released and in return he agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Ahoms as well as accepted their suzerainty. After this many scholars believe that Khaspur had become the capital of the Hedamba kingdom. But, it was quite doubtful as the writings of Sir Edward Gait mentioned that an inscription excavated on a rock cut temple at Maibong described Harishchandra Narayan as

²⁷ Gait, Sir Edward., *"A History of Assam"*, Guwahati, 1984, (reprint), p-243

“Lord of Hidimba”.²⁸ This indicates that Harishchandra Narayan, a later Kachari was ruling at Maibong. The same scholar mentioned that in 1736 A.D., the reigning Kachari monarch was named Kirti Chandra Narayan and mentioned of his appointing one Maniram Vazir of Barkhola.²⁹ Similarly, Dr. Gouri Sen in her book “*Life in Kachari kingdom at Khaspur*” giving reference from the writings of A.C Choudhury wrote that two Copper plate inscriptions in Bengali indicates that the next King Kirtichandra Narayan (1736-55 A.D.) appointed one Maniram Laskar of Barkhola (situated in the plains of Cachar) as his ‘Ujir’ (minister). She also pointed out that this creates an impression that perhaps the capital was shifted to the plains of Cachar.³⁰ Though confusions prevails on shifting of capital from Maibong to Khaspur, as far the chronology of the Kachari Rajas, sources clearly specify that the contemporary Kachari Raja of Ahom King Rajeswar Singh (1751-1769 A.D.) was Sandhikari. The reference leis in the event that in the end of 1764 A.D. the mighty Burmese forces invaded Manipur and crushed its subjects severely which led the than Meitei King Jai Singha to flee from his kingdom and took refuge at Kachari capital Khaspur. The Kachari King Sandhikari helped the fugitive Raja to gain support and help from the than Ahom King Rajeswar Singh to drive out the Burmese from Manipur. An inscription excavated at Khaspur mentioned that in 1771 A.D. Harishchandra was the ruling Kachari King and he erected the palace at Khaspur in the same year.³¹ Harishchandra was succeeded by his son Krishnachandra Narayan in 1774 A.D. and later by his brother

²⁸ Gait, Sir Edward., “*A History of Assam*”, Guwahati, 1984, (reprint), p-244

²⁹ Gait, Sir Edward., “*A History of Assam*”, Guwahati 1984, (reprint), p-244

³⁰ Sen, Gouri., “*Life in Kachari Kingdom at Khaspur*”, Partha Datta, Vivekananda Road, Silchar, 2003, p-24

³¹ Gait, Sir Edward., “*A History of Assam*”, Guwahati, 1984, (reprint), p-245

Gobindachandra Narayan (1813-1832 A.D.). It was during the reign of the two brothers that the long years of Kachari rule came to an end.

Krishnachandra Narayan's period of rule was encircled by all round troubles in the kingdom which weakened the political and economic hold of the state. This naturally gave opportunity to the neighbouring powers for aggressions and interference in the Kachari kingdom creating an arena for conflict. He was basically surrounded by the territorial aggrandizement from the mighty Ahoms, the Manipuris and the British East India Company. Krishnachandra at the initial years of his rule had good terms with the Ahoms but the outbreak of Moamaria rebellion in the Ahom kingdom altered the situation. The Kachari kingdom became an asylum for the Moamaria rebels which Krishnachandra failed to extradite to the Ahom when demanded. This strained the relationship between the two and the Ahom army marched towards the Kacharis in 1803 A.D. and by 1805 A.D. the Kacharis were inflicted heavy defeat by the Ahoms. But, peace soon regained on the condition of paying annual tribute by the Kacharis. The distress of Krishnachandra was added from the British policy of extending their trade interest in the Kachari territories. This pondering danger was definitely to hamper the independent status of the Kacharis and Krishnachandra was well acquainted with the upcoming trouble. This was not the end, Krishnachandra came in close relationship with the Rajas of Manipur. His indirect participation in the war of successions among the sons of Meitei King Jai Singha (1759–1761 and 1763–1798 A.D.) brought the Kachari administration near the Meitei princes. They found an easy interference in the internal affairs of the Kacharis. The fugitive Meitei princes took best place of shelter as Cachar whenever there emerged necessity. Thus, Raja Krishnachandra was always entangled in the political

intrigue of Manipur. After the death of Krishnachandra in 1813 A.D. his brother Gobindachandra Narayan succeeded the Kachari throne. The new King was also encircled with various problems from his initial years of succession. Again he became unpopular among his subjects by marrying queen Induprava, widow of his brother Krishnachandra. This lost him the trust and support of his nobles. In due time of his rule one Kohi Dan, who was taking care of northern hilly tracts rebelled and tried to establish an independent kingdom. Gobindachandra however could check the rebellion and Kohi Dan was put to death. But the rebellion was soon resumed by Kohi Dan's son Tularam. Tularam could keep tide hold of the northern hilly tracts and Gobindachandra had to accept the deprivation. Along with this, the Kachari King soon came in the grip of invasions made by the Meitei princes. In 1818 A.D. the Kachari kingdom was attacked by Manipuri Raja Marjit Singha. However, the invaders were repelled by the Kacharis with aid from the exiled Manipuri prince Chourjit and Gambhir Singha. After this help the two Manipuri brothers could hold a strong position in the Kachari kingdom. But the worst was waiting in the coming years. Marjit who was a puppet King under the Burmese supremacy was ousted from his country by the Burmese forces and being helpless took refuge at the Kachari territory and joined his brother Chourjit Singha. Soon the three strong Meitei princes seized the kingdom of Kacharis from its ruler Gobindachandra. The whole Cachar (excluding North Cachar Hills) was divided among the three brothers in three parts and administered from their respective capitals for six years from 1819-1824 A.D. The exiled King Gobindachandra who took refuges at Sylhet sought the help of Company's army to regain his lost throne but he did not receive any favourable response. Gobindachandra thus appealed the Burmese for help in reoccupying his kingdom

from the Meitei usurpers. This time Gobindachandra was pleased with the Burmese response to reinstate him to his throne. As thus, the Burmese forces who were master of Brahmaputra valley launched their invasions in the Kachari kingdom. In January 1824 A.D. the Burmese forces entered the plains of Cachar and this brought to notice the British authorities at Sylhet. Comprehending the political ordeal of the time David Scott, the first British Commissioner of Cachar signed the Treaty of Badarpur with Gobindachandra on 6th March 1824 A.D. By the terms of the treaty British recognized Gobindachandra as tributary ruler who agreed to pay Rs. 10,000/- to the British annually.³² The involvement of Britishers led to the outbreak of first Anglo-Burmese war which continued from 1824 A.D. and concluded with the signing of treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 A.D. Though Gobindachandra regained his lost throne with the aid from the Britishers but the aggressive attitudes from two powerful man of the time in the name of Gambhir Singha and Tularam always endangered him and insecured his position. The enmity between Tularam and Gobindachandra however ended in 1829 A.D. when on the advice of David Scott Gobindachandra recognized Tularam as his ‘Senapati’ and formal charge of the hills which he already held.³³ But, Gobindachandra failed to refrain from the aggressive attitudes of Meitei Prince Gambhir Singha. Finally, on 24 April 1830, Gobindachandra along with several members of his family were assassinated. It was suspected by Scott that the whole conspiracy to murder the Cachari Raja was organized by Gambhir Singha, the Raja of Manipur. According to Fisher some of the Cacharis holding high positions in the court were also involved in the conspiracy.³⁴ Two years after the death of

³² Datta, D., “*Cachar District Records*”, Silchar, 1969, p-12

³³ Barpujari, S.K., “*History of the Dimasa, From the earliest times to 1896 A.D.*”, Autonomous Council, N.C Hill, Assam, 1997, p-74

³⁴ Datta, D., “*Cachar District Records*”, Silchar, 1969, p-15

last Kachari King Gobindachandra, the territory of plains of Cachar was annexed to the British dominion.

Manipuri-Kachari matrimonial alliances (15th to 19th Century)

As stated above, Kacharis and the Manipuris retain important place in the history of pre-colonial North East India. Like every monarchies the ruling Kings of Kachari and Manipur adopted the policy of diplomacy and force for territorial expansion and to avoid conflicts with its neighbours that included peace treaties and marriage alliances. Thus, the Manipuri Rajas in Manipur summoned several marriage alliances within and beyond its kingdom to escape from both internal and external troubles and aggressions. Many Meitei princesses were sent to kingdom of Ava (Burma), Nepal, Tripura, Ahom etc. and vice versa. Similarly, the rulers of Kachari kingdom also followed the tradition of wedlock with its nearby kingdoms like Ahom, Koch, Jaintias etc. However, such marriages in some occasions revealed the subordinate status of a tribe or kingdom. In this regard the scenario of Ahom-Kachari relation was different. The Kacharis were regarded as ‘Sachita Thampita’ or ‘Preserve and protected’ under the Ahom sovereignty. Despite its subordinate position the Kachari rulers of the time married ladies from the royal house of Ahom. For instance during the reign of Ahom King Pratap Singh (1603-1641 A.D.), the Kacharis were subordinate to the Ahoms but the alarm of the Muhammadan invasions in his kingdom compelled Pratap Singh to pursue peace arrangement with the Kacharis. The Kachari King at this asked for an Ahom princess in marriage. As such, he was given a daughter of one of the chief nobles, who was

escorted by the Buragohain to his capital.³⁵ Thus, matrimonial alliances between the kingdoms were thus a kind of technique which every monarchy followed with the requirement of the time and circumstances.

Since very early period the kingdom of Manipur and Kacharis maintained contact with each other. The relation was a mixture of warfare and friendly diplomatic correspondence. The state chronicle of Manipur '*Cheitharol Kumbaba*' traces back the beginning of Manipuri-Kachari relation from the time of Meitei King Kongyamba (1324-35 A.D.). The King fought a battle at 'Hinglen Ching' (ching - mountain) and defeated the 'Mayang' invaders. In the encounter Mayang Maiba Samloiba Aapheraja Thangyan Kanba, Tingkaraja Washakpa, Lakasumkatao, Aring Arang was captured by the Meiteis.³⁶ The second encounter took place in 1504 A.D. during the reign of Meidingu Kyamba, in which the Mayang forces were again defeated by the Meitei royal army. Likewise the counter and re-counters between the forces of the two continued with intervals. The conflict became graver during the time of Meitei King Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.) and Meidingu Garib Niwaz (1709-1748 A.D.). In 1606 A.D. the Mayang forces led by one Sanongba invaded Manipur but Laiyingthou (Lord) Khagemba defeated the Mayangs and Sanongba was detained as captive.³⁷ After this defeat the Mayangs made no any further incursions in the territory of the Meiteis. However, long years later the Manipuri-Kachari conflict was renewed during the reign of Meitei King

³⁵Gait, Sir Edward., "*A history of Assam*", Surjeet Publications, Delhi, (reprint) 2008, p-109

³⁶ Singh, Lairenmayum Ibungohal & Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh., "*Cheitharol Kumbaba*", Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1989, P-16

*Sanongba was the brother of Meidingu Khagemba. Prince Sanongba revolted against his brother for capturing the throne, at this he was defeated and driven out from the Meitei Kingdom. Sanongba took flight and settled at the Kachari territory.

³⁷ Bihari, Nepam., (edited & translated), "*The Cheitharol Kumbaba, The Royal Chronicle of Manipur*", Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2012, p-51

Garib Niwaz alias Pamheiba. Garib Niwaz was one of the most powerful Meitei King during whose reign the glory of the kingdom reached its height. Eminent scholar like Jyotirmoy Roy has compared Garib Niwaz with that of great Indian King Harshavardhana for his military achievements on one hand for bringing religious revolution in the Manipur valley.³⁸ Manipur was Sanskritized and Hinduism was adopted as the state religion. The King has in his credit the successful invasions of Ava, Tripura and many other neighbouring kingdoms. The military ability of Garib Niwaz was proved by his achievements against simultaneous invasions raided by the Burmese on one side and the Tripuris on the other. In one of the invasion against Ava, Garib Niwaz was aided by the Kacharis. R.M. Nath has mentioned that Garib Niwaz snatched a portion of Cachar from the Tipperah King.³⁹ However, the relation between the monarchies followed in continuous process until the monarchies became British protectorate.

In the midst of incursions and aggressions the tradition of marriage alliances between the royal families of Manipur and Kacharis remained an important part. The basic aims behind most of the marriages were either to establish a friendly relation or to manage uncontrollable political turmoil. The Manipuri princesses who were married to the Kachari country were known as “Mayang Leima” or “Kachari queen”. In the study of the marriage alliances between the royal families of Manipur and the Kacharis, the references of the earlier marriages prior 19th century are found only in the sources related to history of Manipur. About such instances the Kachari sources are silent as there

³⁸ Roy, Jyotirmoy., “*History of Manipur*”, Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1999, p-43

³⁹ Sanajaoba, Naorem., (ed.) “*Manipur past and present, The Ordeals and Heritage of a Civilization, Vol-IV, Pan-Manipuris in Asia and Autochthones*”, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2005, pp-217-218

is absent of the records or 'Vamsabalis' 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 16th century. 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".⁴⁰ The then ruling monarch of Manipur was Meidingu Chalamba (1546-1562 A.D.) and that of the Kachari was perhaps Nirbhoyanarayan (1536-1559 A.D.) or Meghanarayan (1556-1583 A.D.). It is important to note that the marriage between the two royalties occurred when the Koches began military aggrandizement in the kingdoms of Ahom, Kacharis and even the Manipuris. Such political instability might have led the two royalties to tie the knot of marriage which will heighten the friendship between the two kingdoms. Added, the forces of the two kingdoms may assist each other in military requirement at that hour. Incomplete references create difficulty to identify whether the princess was daughter or sister or a mare relative of the ruling King. Similarly, the unavailability of authentic chronological list of the Kachari Kings disabled to identify exactly the name of the Kachari Raja. In this regard the statement of W.I. Singh created much controversy where in his book "*The History of Manipur, (An Early Period)*" he stated that Monshambi or Monshambi the Meitei princess was married to Teidakhin the King of Tripura. It is further said that in 1533 A.D. Panchom Dakhin invaded Manipur. He is believed to be a brother of Dakhin, possibly the fifth younger brother. It is reasonable that a contemporary of a grandson of Panchom Dakhin could have reached a marriageable age in 1557 A.D. the year

⁴⁰ Singh, Lairenmayum Ibungohal & Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh., "*Cheitharol Kumbaba*", Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1989, P-26

in which Tei-dakhin the grandson of Dakhin a brother or contemporary of Panchom Dakhin attained a marriageable age and married Monshambi the Meitei Leima.⁴¹ In support of this statement the writer further stated that up to the middle of the 16th century A.D. the Kacharis had not properly established their kingdom in present Cachar area. They were mainly confined in North Cachar Hills and Dimapur area. There was no significant kingdom on the south, west and south-west of Manipur by that period except the kingdom of Tripura and some small cities or principalities mainly inhabited by Tibeto-Burman tribes. Matrimonial relations were confined mainly to these regions.⁴² But, despite such statement we need to consider the fact that the Meitei princesses who were married in the kingdom of Tripura were called as “Takhel Leima”. In this aspect princess Monshambi is recorded as “Mayang Leima”. Considering this we can assume that princess Monshambi was given in marriage to the Kachari King though they had their settlement at Maibong. The record of the second Manipuri-Kachari marriage alliance is found in 1566 A.D. The “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*” recorded that “In 1488 saka, the year of Haisnam Maknang, Meidingu Mungyamba participated in the boat race and went on an excursion also. An elephant called Fanamba was born. Mayang Leima Tarungambi went to her country.”⁴³ Thus, this marriage was organized just after nine (9) years of the previous marriage. The ruling Meitei monarch was Mungyamba (1562-1597 A.D.) whereas the name of the Kachari King can be identified as Meghanarayan (1556-1583 A.D.). The marriage alliance was

⁴¹ Singh, W.I., “*The History of Manipur (An Early Period)*”, Manipur Commercial Co., Imphal, 1986, pp-164-166

⁴² Singh, W.I., “*The History of Manipur (An Early Period)*”, Manipur Commercial Co., Imphal, 1986, p-166

⁴³ Bihari, Nepam., (edited & translated), “*The Cheitharol Kumbaba, The Royal Chronicle of Manipur*”, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2012, p-46

conducted again during Koch's supremacy over the Kacharis who settled at Maibong. The Manipuri Raja Mungyamba on the other hand succeeded to stabilize the political condition in Manipur. His military achievement included subjugation of the hills of Manipur and even succeeded to defeat many Shan areas. Observing the political conditions of both the monarchies it is visible that Manipur was an emerging kingdom whereas the Kacharis were in the grip of the Koches. In such situation perhaps the Kacharis opted to extend hand for friendship with the emerging Manipuris by organizing matrimonial alliance.

This was followed by much wedlock between the two royal houses in future years. In 1585 A.D. during the reign of same Meitei King another Meitei lady entered the royal palace of Kacharis. It is recorded as "In 1507 Saka, the year of Wombam Tora, Mayang Leima Koirembi left for her country".⁴⁴ The than Kachari King was Yasonarayan (1583-1601 A.D.). But unavailability of related sources fails to give details about the marriage occurred and the causes behind organizing such matrimonial alliance. However, it is noteworthy that the marriage was conducted at such hour when the Koches under their King Naranarayan (1540-1587 A.D.) along with his powerful Senapati Chilarai reached the height of its military power. The Koches conquered many of its neighbouring kingdoms including the mighty Ahoms. The kingdom of Kachari and Manipur also came under the suzerainty of the Koches. The Koch Vamsabalis recorded that "after the conquest of Kachar, Naranarayan and Chilarai sent Katakis or ambassadors to the King of Manipur demanding his submission. The Manipuri King who may be identified with Muktawaali Singha or Ripu Singha alias Meanglea (1561-1579), having heard of the victorious

⁴⁴ Bihari, Nepam., (edited & translated), "*The Cheitharol Kumbaba, The Royal Chronicle of Manipur*", Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2012, p-48

campaigns of the Koch King in the kingdom of Assam and Kachar, submitted of his own accord and agreed to pay him an annual tribute.”⁴⁵ The Manipuri King mentioned in the above statement is unavailable in the dynastic list of the Meitei rulers and no any sources of Manipur mentioned of any King who ruled from 1561-1579 A.D. Whereas according to state chronicle of Manipur “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*” the mentioned years falls within the reign of Meidingu Mungyamba. Despite such doubts and confusions, the fact of Manipuri-Kachari matrimonial alliances of 1566 A.D. and 1585 A.D. took place during the midst of such political instability in both the kingdoms created by the mighty Koches. Records further reveal that “In 1525 Saka, Tonshenu, the wife of the King of Mayang went to her country and an elephant called Mayamba also arrived.”⁴⁶ This thus refers of another marriage alliance between the two kingdoms. The year of the marriage falls within the reign of Meitei King Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.) and the Kachari King Indra Pratapnarayana (1601-1610 A.D.). As regard the marriage W.I. Singh gave different view that princess Tonshenu was not married to the Kachari King. According to him, in the year 1591 A.D. Mungyamba subdued Tonshen a principality of the Mayangs believed to have been located near Linglei in present Mizoram and in the same year a princess was born to him. The princess was given the name Tonsen-nu or Tonshenu from the name Tonsen. She was given in marriage to a Tonsen chief when she was hardly 13 years of age in the year 1603 A.D.⁴⁷ But, it still remains a matter of puzzlement as no proper supporting materials are available. In 1630 A.D. the reference of the next Mayang Leima is recorded in the state chronicle of

⁴⁵ Nath, D., “*History of the Koch Kingdom 1515-1615*”, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1989, p-61

⁴⁶ Bihari, Nepram., (edited & translated), “*The Cheitharol Kumbaba, The Royal Chronicle of Manipur*”, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2012, p-51

⁴⁷ Singh, W.I., “*The History of Manipur (An Early Period)*”, Manipur Commercial Co., Imphal, 1986, p-162

Manipur. “In 1552 Saka, the year of Nongpokpam Ngangba, the Para river was dug. Mayang Leima Hakwanthem Chanu Ponchenbi left for her country.”⁴⁸ This marriage was solemnized during the reign of the same Meitei King but the Kachari King was either Naranarayana or Bhimbalnarayana. According to W.I. Singh Sana Ponchembi was a girl of Bengal origin and she was given the title Mayang Leima. The family title Hakwanthem was allotted to a Bengal family. The Bengals by about this period were not included in the category of Mayangs.⁴⁹ Despite such argument the mention of Mayang Leima entering the Mayang country in the royal chronicle clarify the fact of the marriage arrangement. A glimpse on the political scenario of the period shows that the Kacharis have made powerful stronghold at Maibong. But, they were under the threat of aggressions from the Mughals on one side and the Ahoms on the other. On the other hand, Meitei King Khagemba was a powerful ruler who had in his credit conquest of even some villages of China. Taking in account the political circumstances, with the initiative from the Kacharis the two royalties perhaps organized the marriage in order to develop a friendly relationship. This step of the Kachari King can be regarded as a peaceful diplomacy adopted to strengthen his position when the kingdom was undergoing threats from his other neighbours.

It is interesting to note that the next reference is not of Manipuri-Kachari wed-lock but of marriage proposal which got rejected by the Meiteis. The “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*” thus recorded that “In 1592 Saka, the bride price of the Meitei Leima (Princess) to be married with the King of Mayang arrived

⁴⁸ Bihari, Nepram., (edited & translated), “*The Cheitharol Kumbaba, The Royal Chronicle of Manipur*”, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2012, p-54

⁴⁹ Singh, W.I., “*The History of Manipur (An Early Period)*”, Manipur Commercial Co., Imphal, 1986, p-163

consisting of a bullock driven palanquin etc. which her mother objected because the price was too little and hence sent back in the month of Kalen (May). The King of Mayang sent an elephant and other items.”⁵⁰ The mention of bride price indicates that it was perhaps a tradition for groom’s party to present gifts on the occasion of sending marriage proposals. It also clearly indicates that an excellent quantity of present had to be gifted on the eve of marriage proposal. However, in next year in 1593 saka (1671 A.D.) we find mention that on 17th Inga (June) Mayang Leima Keisam Chanu Tangkhombi left for her country.⁵¹ Proceeding of marriage indicates that obtainable bride price was fulfilled by the Mayangs. The event took place during the reigning years of Meidingu Paikhomba (1666-1697 A.D.) and the Kachari King Birdarpa Narayan (1644-1681 A.D.). Birdarpa Narayan when came to power had himself free from the Ahom supremacy as the Ahoms were busy in dealing with the Mughals. But, his policy changed after 1667 A.D. when the Ahoms under Raja Chakradhvaj defeated the Mughal intruders. The Kachari King now tried to re-establish the old friendship with the Ahoms to escape further conflict. It was in few years after this incident that marriage alliance with Manipur was planned. When marriage proposal was rejected by the Meiteis the Kacharis must have taken quick initiative to satisfy the demand of the Manipuris as they were not ready to add a new enemy at that hour of time. In a way the motive behind the marriage was to build up friendship with the Manipuris.

⁵⁰ Singh, Lairenmayum Ibungohal & Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh., “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*”, Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1989, p-47

⁵¹ Singh, Lairenmayum Ibungohal & Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh., “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*”, Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1989, p-47

The histories of Manipuri-Kachari matrimonial alliances cited are mentioned only in some of the sources. But, the available informations fail to cite detailing about the marriages discussed above. Mention may be made that this limited informations about the noted marriages are chocked out only from the Manipuri sources where Kachari sources are silent. The missing of such minutiae made vital segment of the history of both the kingdoms vacuum. However, regardless of such loopholes assumption may be made that the matrimonial alliances were solemnized with the objective to set up a strong associations between the kingdoms.

In the history of wed-lock tradition between the two royal houses, the marriage union with appropriate detailing is recorded in the state chronicle of Manipur, of Meitei princess Haripriya alias Pravabati, daughter of Meidingu Garib Niwaz alias Pamheiba (1709-1748 A.D.) with the Kachari prince Ramchandra Narayan, son of Kachari King Kirtichandra Narayan (1737-1745 A.D.).⁵² The marriage brought about changes in strained Manipuri-Kachari relationship which went to low ebb since the time of Meidingu Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.).⁵³ It has already been stated that the Meiteis under Meidingu Garib Niwaz was at the height of its power and glory. Similarly, the Kachari Raja was also a powerful ruler of the time but unfortunately the kingdom was always at threat by the aggressive design of the Jayantias along with that of the occasional raids made by the powerful Ahoms. Therefore, he was in the sphere of stabilizing the political condition of his kingdom. Realizing the political circumstances of the time and to avoid clashes with Manipur in future years,

⁵² Singh, Mangi Laishram & Longjam Mani Singha., *“Manipur Itihas Meitei Puran, Bijoy Panchali, Garib Niwaz Charit”*, Bhakti Shastriya Samaj, Imphal, 1966, p-107

⁵³ Singh, Mangi Laishram & Longjam Mani Singha., *“Manipur Itihas Meitei Puran, Bijoy Panchali, Garib Niwaz Charit”*, Bhakti Shastriya Samaj, Imphal, 1966, p-106

the Kachari Raja Kirtichandra Narayan decided to establish gracious relation with the Meiteis. Thus, with this motive the Kachari Raja sent some of his envoys to the royal court of Manipur with a proposal to handover one of the daughters of King Garib Niwaz for his son Prince Ramchandra Narayan or Sandhikari Raja⁵⁴ in 1742 A.D. The state chronicle of Manipur “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*” has recorded that the Kachari envoys consisted of ‘Mazumdar of Lakhimpur with 56 men arrived including the watchman of paddy go down on Saturday, the 26th’.⁵⁵ In this regard, an 18th century Manipuri chronicle recorded that Kachari King Kirtichandra Narayan sent his religious ‘Guru’ Purnananda to seek the hand of the Meitei princess. Thus, Guru Purnananda approached to the court of Meitei as an envoy of the Kachari King. He expressed the willingness of his Raja and to handover one of the Meitei King’s daughter for Prince Ramchandra Narayan (son of Kirtichandra Narayan). But, Garib Niwaz stayed back little to agree to the proposal on the fact that the Kacharis were not in good relations with the Meiteis since many years and to give his daughter in marriage to enemy’s kingdom was not acceptable. But, his insecurity was cleared by Guru Purnananda on behalf of the Kachari King.⁵⁶ Being satisfied Meidingu Garib Niwaz agreed to hand over his daughter princess Haripriya in marriage to the Kachari prince. As such the marriage ceremony was organized at the royal palace of Manipur and it was performed according to the Hindu rituals by performing ‘Yajna’. The “*Chietharol Kumbaba*” again recorded about the event as “In the year 1666 saka or 1744

⁵⁴ Barman, Nalinindra Kumar., “*The Queens of Cachar or Herambo and The History of the Kachchhari*”, Lakshmi Prasad Barman, Barkhola, Cachar, 2007, p-126

⁵⁵ Bihari, Nepram., (edited & translated), “*The Cheitharol Kumbaba, The Royal Chronicle of Manipur*”, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2012, p-105

⁵⁶ Singha, Laishram Mangi & Longjam Mani Singha., “*Manipur Itihas Meitei Puran, Bijoy Panchali, Garib Niwaz Charit*”, Bhakti Shastriya Samaj, Imphal, 1966, pp-106-109

A.D., the year of Thanga Takhen... A party went to receive the prince of Mayang on Sunday the 28th... Sanahan with his younger brother went to receive the prince of Mayang on Monday, the 4th... The prince of Mayang arrived on Friday 18th. On the second day of the month of Ingen (July) was Saturday and the marriage 'yajna' was performed. The wife of the King of Mayang was provided with a residential building on the first day of the lunar month. Sankranti of Ingen was on Monday, the 4th. The prince of Mayang was escorted to Thangjam Yumpham on Tuesday, the 5th. Ningthem and Shija went for a pleasure trip to Karathong to eat mangoes on Saturday, the 9th. The Mayang was received for a joint meeting on Saturday the 10th and a grand boat race between Naharup and Ahallup was held on Monday, the 25th in which the prince of Mayang also participated. The princess betrothed to the prince of Mayang was escorted to her husband on Wednesday, the 27th.⁵⁷ About the marriage it is quoted in the book "*A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis, As Seen Through Coinage*" that "Kirtichandra married a Manipuri princess and this has been recorded in *Vijay Panchali*, an eighteen century chronicle of Manipur". But, as already stated, the said chronicle identifies the Kachari prince who married the Meitei princess as Ramchandra Narayan, who was the son of ruling Kachari King Kirtichandra. However, different scholars have their views on the chronology of the Kachari Kings of the time. After completion of marriage and all the ceremonies, the Kachari King left for his kingdom along with Meitei queen Haripriya. The newly wedded bride and groom were escorted by the elder brother of the princess, prince Ngaubram, her mother and many other attendants. The royal chronicle recorded that "the first day of the month of

⁵⁷ Singh, Lairenmayum Ibungohal & Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh., "*Cheitharol Kumbaba*", Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1989, P-110

Hiyanggei (November) was Thursday. Katwan went to repair the road leading to Mayang for the journey of the wife of the King of Mayang on Tuesday, the 12th. The prince of Mayang and his wife proceeded to phuba for site seeing on Thursday, the 22nd and returned on Sunday the 25th. All the royal ladies and unmarried girls joined a drinking party in honour of the wife of the prince of Mayang. The prince of Mayang went to Kangla on Monday the 3rd, and on that day Haripriya, the daughter of Hidakshungbi was escorted to Mayang with her mother... Ibungo Ngaubram returned after escorting his younger sister, the wife of the King of Mayang on Monday, the 20th.⁵⁸ Queen Haripriya after staying for about 45 years in the Kachari kingdom breathe her last in 1788 A.D. Record confirms that “In 1710 saka, the wife of King of Cachar died on Wednesday, the 4th... Maharaja Jai Singha went to Cachar to perform the shraddha ceremony of his paternal aunt, the wife of the King of Cachar on Monday, the 16th.”⁵⁹

An overview of the marriage shows that it proved to be great benefit in developing a strong Manipuri-Kachari bond which continued till the states became British protectorates. However, like the previous instances unfortunately the Kachari sources are again silent about this marriage and do not provide any supportive information. It is only the chronicles and the other Meitei sources which provided every single detail about this matrimonial alliance. Sometime later the Kacharis have transferred their capital from Maibong to the plains of Cachar at Khaspur. As a result, they became the immediate neighbour of the Meiteis. It gave opportunity to the Meiteis an easy

⁵⁸ Singh, Lairenmayum Ibungohal & Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh., “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*”, Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1989, p-111

⁵⁹ Bihari, Nepam., (edited & translated), “*The Cheitharol Kumbaba, The Royal Chronicle of Manipur*”, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2012, p-135

penetration in the kingdom of Kacharis and chooses it the best place to take refuge or shelter whenever there aroused political instability due to internal discord or external aggressions. Reference can be made that during the reign of Meitei King Jai Singha alias Bhagyachandra (1759-1761 & 1763-1798 A.D.) Manipur was undergoing political volatility due to internal dissensions and external invasions especially from the Avas or Burma. The powerful invasions of the Avas took place in 1764 A.D. under their King Hsinbyushin (1763-1776 A.D.). In this encounter the Meiteis failed to defend the invading Ava forces and had to retreat. King Jai Singha and his subjects were compelled to flee from the kingdom and took shelter in nearby areas and forests. Jai Singha immediately took flight and entered the neighboring kingdom of Cachar which was his paternal aunt Haripriya's palace on February 1765 A.D. Sometime after his stay at Kachari palace, Jai Singha narrated all the happenings took place at Manipur and requested the than Kachari King Sandhikari to render help in driving out the Burmese from Manipur. Though the Kachari King desired to extend his help but it was a time when the Kacharis themselves were too weak to face the strong forces of Burma. In addition, the Kacharis were a tributary state under the powerful Ahoms. But, Raja Sandhikari advised Jai Singha to search for the help of the than mighty Ahom King Rajeswar Singh (1751–1769 A.D.). Thus, with the help of the Ahom King the Meitei Raja succeeded to drive out the Burmese forces from Manipur and the throne was recovered. It was therefore only at the initiative of the Kachari Raja that the Meitei King decided to seek help from the mighty Ahoms. Thus, friendly relationship that developed due to the matrimonial alliances has helped the kingdoms to support and help each other in times of difficulty.

In the history of Manipuri-Kachari diplomatic matrimonial alliances, the most significant wedding alliance took place at the beginning of 19th century. It is rather providential that for the first time the historical sources of both the kingdoms provided adequate information about the marriage having their own elucidation. The matrimony took place during the reign of Meitei King Madhuchandra (1800-1803 A.D.) and the Kachari King Krishnachandra Narayan (1774-1814 A.D.). In 1802 A.D. Meitei Princess Induprava daughter of Meidingu Madhuchandra was given in marriage to the Kachari Raja Krishnachandra Narayan. About the marriage proposal and event of the marriage “*Cheitharol Kumbaba*” recorded that “The year of Thangka Khunchao, Sakabda 1723 (1801 A.D.).....The month of Phairen (January/February) began on Wednesday. 9 Thursday the Sankranti of Lamta began. 22 Friday, Boryet, the Mayang Mantri and the Hidang of Hidakphanpa (Institute), these three and others, a total of two hundred and seventy-five people arrived with (dried) fish from Mayang.....25 Monday, they took the fish for the hand of the princess.⁶⁰ Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt, an eminent scholar of Manipur opined that fish which the Kacharis envoys carried along with them was likely to be gift as a prelude to asking the princess’s hand in marriage. If it was the bride price, the value seems to have gone down from elephants to fish (probably dry or fermented).⁶¹ As regard to bride price it has been noticed that in the previous marriages mentioned above, a marriage proposal by the Kacharis were rejected by Meitei queen to give her daughter on the ground of inefficient bride price. As compared to the above reference of

⁶⁰ Parratt, Saroj Nalini Arambam., “*The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur, The Cheitharon Kumpapa, vol.2 (1764-1843 CE)*”, Foundation Books, Delhi, 2009, p-61

⁶¹ Parratt, Saroj Nalini Arambam., “*The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur, The Cheitharon Kumpapa, vol.2 (1764-1843 CE)*”, Foundation Books, Delhi, 2009, p-61

fermented or dry fish as bride price an assumption prevail that with the proceeding years the bride price was reduced. Another version may be that the bride price was fixed according to the exiting political conditions. However, after the arrival of the bride receiving Kachari group, in the early next year of 1802 A.D. the marriage was solemnized and the princess was escorted to her husband's land. It is further recorded in the same book referred above that "In the year of Laisram Aachou, Sakabda 1724 (1802 CE). 10th Monday was the Cheiraopa, the New Year's Day in the month of Sachiphu, 17 Tuesday, Sicha the Mayang Leima left for Mayang country. She scattered *sen* (currency coins) at the market place before her departure...The month of Yingen (June/July) began on Friday. 4 Monday, Yipungo Pheirapa, the son of Yipungo Loirenkhompa and Haopam the Nongthonpa, these two, returned after escorting the Mayang Leima."⁶² Upendrachandra Guha in his book "*Cacharer Itibritta*" stated that "Maharaja Krishnachandra married princess Induprava, daughter of Manipur Raja Madhuchandra. The marriage created discontentment in the kingdom and it became one of the reason for the downfall of the Kachari kingdom."⁶³ Unlike the Meitei sources the details of the marriage is not found in the Kachari sources. The solemnization of the matrimonial alliance was the outcome of the ongoing political smash in the kingdoms of Manipur and Cachar. Manipur, after the death of Raja Jai Singha was tainted with fratricidal wars among his sons, namely, Sanahal, Labanya Chandra alias Rabinchandra, Madhuchandra, Tulasijit, Chourjit, Marjit, Daoji alias Khongjai Ngamba and Gambhir Singha. The royal brothers being power

⁶² Parratt, Saroj Nalini Arambam., "*The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur, The Cheitharon Kumpapa, vol.2 (1764-1843 CE)*", Foundation Books, Delhi, 2009, pp-61,62

⁶³ Guha, Sree Upendrachandra., "*Cacharer Itibritta*", Sopan Publishers, Kolkata, (reprint), 2012, p-97

hungers made Manipur hot bed of intrigues. Prince Madhuchandra, the third son of Raja Bhagyachandra alias Jai Singha, ascended the throne of Manipur in 1800 A.D. by assassinating his elder brother Labanyachandra with the help of other royal brothers. Understanding clearly the intensions of his brothers, the new King in order to placate his brothers conferred them with various high posts. But, his policy proved a failure and a brother Yuvaraj Chourjit revolted against the King. Being unable to hold the attack Madhuchandra had to flee and sought refuge in the Kachari palace at Khaspur. The exiled Raja was helped by the than Kachari King Krishnachandra Narayan to reacquire the lost throne. Thus, as a gratitude for the help extended by the Kachari Raja, King Madhuchandra gave his daughter princess Induprava in marriage to him.⁶⁴ However, opinion differs among scholars regarding the time of marriage. According to Jyotirmoy Roy, a joint force of Chourjit and Senapati Marjit threw attack on Madhuchandra. Madhuchandra was defeated at the battle of Sangaitthem and fled to Cachar in 1806. Chourjit after occupying the throne appointed Marjit as his 'Juvaraj' and Senapati. In the meantime Madhuchandra entered into an alliance with Krishnachandra, the ruler of Cachar, by giving his daughter Induprava to him.⁶⁵ Whereas scholars like Gangmumei Kabui and R.K. Jhalajit opined that the marriage alliance was organized by Madhuchandra before Chourjit revolted against him in 1803 A.D. The "*Cheitharol Kumbaba*" also recorded the year of marriage in 1802 A.D., which was a year prior to the rebellion of prince Chourjit. Therefore, the later opinions revealed seems much probable than that of Jyotirmoy Roy. On the other hand the political scenario in kingdom of Cachar was also not better than Manipur, Krishnachandra was

⁶⁴ Kabui, Gangmumei., "*History of Manipur, Vol-I, Pre-Colonial Period*", National Publishing House, New Delhi, 2011, p-284

⁶⁵ Roy, Jyotirmoy., "*History of Manipur*", Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1999, pp-72,73

unable to rule peacefully either. The Kacharis were always at the threat from its neighbours like the Jayantias, Ahoms and most importantly from the mighty East India Company who became their immediate neighbour and shared a common boundary at Badarpur. Krishnachandra however in 1796 A.D. even sent letter to the Governor-General that the fifth Collector of Sylhet Henry Lodge created disturbance by imposing trade restrictions between Sylhet and Cachar.⁶⁶ Along with this problem Krishnachandra came in conflict with the Ahoms on the cause of giving asylum to the anti-Ahom people. He even had to face defeat at the hands of the Ahoms in a war which continued from 1803 to 1805 A.D. The war broke out when Krishnachandra refused the expulsion of many rebel Moamarias and some Ahom subjects from the Kachari territory. The Company's officers, on the other hand was at the verge of pursuing trade with the Kacharis and this act of the British created tensions in the Kachari territory. At such juncture Krishnachandra pushed himself to interfere in the palace plotting of the Meitei princes. Counting all such situations Krishnachandra was at worst encircled by troubles which bore no good future of the Kacharis. Therefore, understanding the ongoing state of affairs of the time the Manipuri-Kachari matrimonial alliance was a credit to both the kingdoms.

But, deplorably the friendship was for short period of time, within a few years the Kacharis had to face numerous invasions from the later Manipuri princes. Krishnachandra's reign proved as the era of profound infiltration of the Manipuri princes in the political scenario of the Kacharis. The Kachari King ruled the kingdom for some more years and died in 1813 A.D. Krishnachandra

⁶⁶ Datta, D., "*Cachar District Records*", Silchar, 1969, p-1

was succeeded by his brother Gobindachandra Narayan in the same year and ruled till 1830 A.D. From very beginning the reign of Gobindachandra was filled with political chaos and disorder which never made the King to rule peacefully. In the midst he had to placate his kingdom for six years and took asylum at Sylhet. In this due six years Cachar was under the rule of three Meitei princes, namely, Chourjit, Marjit and Gambhir Singha. It was not the end, further, one Kaso-Dau or Kashichandra who was the in-charge of the hills of the Kachari kingdom revolted against the King. Therefore, Gobindachandra got the rebellers assassinated but his son Tularam escaped in the hill and declared himself independent. The murder of Kaso-Dau made Gobindachandra unpopular among his hill subjects. The unpopularity and discontent of the subjects became weightier when he married Induprava, widow of his late brother Krishnachandra Narayan. This act of Gobindachandra was against the will of the Kachari subjects and created an immense gap with them. In the “*Cachar District Records*” in a letter written on 1.10.1837 by J.G.Burns, it is recorded about the marriage that ‘It is admitted that a marriage after the ancient Cacharese manner did take place between Govind Chandra and Indra Poorva which those adhering to these customs considered legal but which the professors of the reformed tenets held in abhorrence.’⁶⁷ Ignoring the opposition of his subjects Raja Gobindachandra bestowed Rani Induprava as his Chief queen. The people did not appreciate the act of Gobindachandra as it was against the social norms of the time. According to Dimasa-Kachari tradition the rulers were rarely allowed to marry outside their community. Even if their rulers happened to take wives from amongst the princesses of neighbouring

⁶⁷ Datta, D., “*Cachar District Records*”, Silchar, 1969, p-48

potentates, they were not given the position of the chief queen...Thus Kamaladevi, for Jayantia princes was denied the position of the chief queen.⁶⁸ The discontentment of the people was therefore a sudden reaction of the marriage, it is mentioned in various sources that Raja Gobindachandra had illicit relationship with Induprava during the lifespan of his elder brother Krishnachandra. Just after accession to the throne he married Induprava, widow of his elder brother. Despite having his many Kachari queens like Chandrakola, Tubang Di, Tain Di, Induprava was bestowed the Chief queen.⁶⁹ This act of Gobindachandra created tensions and dissensions in the kingdom. The establishment of such relationship led many scholars to doubt and criticize the character of both Raja Gobindachandra and Rani Induprava. In regard to Gobindachandra's character it is recorded in "*Cacharer Itibritta*" that "Maharaja Gobindachandra was a man of bad character. It is said that the beautiful girls being scared used to put on dust and old cloths over their body to hide their beauty. In case, any news about the beauty of a girl reached the ear of the King then there were reasons to be of frightening."⁷⁰ Being a man of such character it can be assume that perhaps Gobindachandra had an attraction towards queen Induprava, his sister-in-law in relation even during the lifetime of his elder brother Krishnachandra Narayan. Rani Induprava was a lady full of beauty and charm with intelligence. Gobindachandra perhaps was thus fascinated by the beauty and such qualities of the Meitei princess. The beauty of Induprava is praised in such a way that "Do you like to see the golden sun-

⁶⁸ Barman, Nalinindra Kumar., "*The Queens of Cachar or Herambo and The History of the Kachchhari*", Barkhola, Cachar, 2007, p-166

⁶⁹ Guha, Sree Upendrachandra., "*Cacharer Itibritta*", Sopan Publishers, Kolkata, (reprint), 2012, p-107 & Rhodes, N.G., & Bose, S.K., "*A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis, As Seen Through Coinage*", Kolkata, 2006, p-59

⁷⁰ Guha, Sree Upendrachandra., "*Cacharer Itibritta*", Sopan Publishers, Kolkata, (reprint), 2012, p-108

shine? Ah ! go and see Ranee Induprava, without waiting for spring or autumn! And should you desire to enjoy the sweet full moon light of midsummer night, never count Tithis (dates of lunar cycle) you need simply to be nearer and have a look at the Herambo queen.”⁷¹ Eminent local scholar of Silchar, Cachar, Assam Sanjib Deblaskar in an interview with the scholar has said that in the days of his Grandmother, as heard from her, people from distant places visited the Kachari palace just to have glimpse of the beauty of queen Induprava. Whereas, scholar like Late Pandit Bhuban Mohan Vidyarnab of Silchar termed Induprava as ‘Cleopatra of Cachar’.⁷² Like, Induprava, Raja Gobindachandra Narayan was also a man of intelligence with good look. He was well versed in Sanskrit and Bengali language and has in his credit compositions like “Gobinda-Kirtan” and “Maha Rasotsob-Lilamrit”.⁷³ However, not going further discussions on this issue, the main points lies in the fact that the marriage of Gobindachandra with Induprava brought about internal political conflicts within and outside Kachari palace. The marriage is compared with that of Henry VIII did it in England disregarding the popular sentiment.⁷⁴

The marriage being against the will of the people was bound to shake the political stability of the Kacharis. It brought about drastic changes in the political scenario of Cachar. Taking advantage of the situation, as mentioned earlier, rivals in person of Kachadin revolted against the King which was later continued by his son Tularam supported by other disgruntled officers of

⁷¹ Barman, Nalinindra Kumar., “*The Queens of Cachar or Herambo and The History of the Kachechhari*”, Barkhola, Cachar, 2007, p-167

⁷² Barman, Nalinindra Kumar., “*The Queens of Cachar or Herambo and The History of the Kachechhari*”, Barkhola, Cachar, 2007, p-166

⁷³ Guha, Sree Upendrachandra., “*Cacharer Itibritta*”, Sopan Publishers, Kolkata, (reprint), 2012, p-107

⁷⁴ Sen, Gouri., “*Life in Kachari Kingdom at Khaspur*”, Partha Datta, Vivekananada Road, Silchar, 2003, p-39

Kachari kingdom. Soon after the marriage, circumstances compelled Gobindachandra to come under the political clutch of the Manipuri princes. Again, the marriage provided an ample opportunity to the Meitei princes to interfere in the political affairs of the Kachari kingdom. It was such that they succeeded to destroy the solidarity of the Kacharis and drive out its Raja Gobindachandra from the throne. Finally, the murder of the King which was the outcome of a deliberate plan, occurred on the night of 24 April 1830, when a band of Manipuris in league with the Manipuri members of the Raja's body guards entered the Haritkar palace, hacked the Raja into pieces and set fire to the capital-complex.⁷⁵ Raja Gobindachandra had no legal heir to the throne of Cachar from any of his wives. Therefore, another situation of discomfort and misfortune knocked on the door of future of the Kachari kingdom on the question of next successor to the Kachari throne. Many claimants appeared like Tularam, Gambhir Singha, Rani Chandrakola and Rani Induprava also put her claimed being the eldest queen of the late Raja Gobindachandra. Her claim was supported by British officer Scott but it was rejected by other officers on the plea that the Kachari subjects would not accept the queen. However, the failure to find a competent claimant for the Kachari throne finally led the British authority to take complete possession of the Kachari country on 14th August, 1832 A.D. Thus, the glorious eras of the Kachari rule came to an end with the death of Raja Gobindachandra. After few years in 1852 A.D. the hill areas of the Cachar was also annexed to the British colony. Finally, the whole country of Cachar came under the direct rule of the Britishers. The blame of many scholars of Induprava being the reason for the downfall of the Kachari

⁷⁵ Bhattacharjee, J.B., "*Cachar Under the British rule in North East India*" ,Radiant Publisher, New Delhi, 1977, p-52

kingdom was to some extent reasonable in their views but it cannot be denied that strong personality with high intelligence and strong military power of a King is necessary to keep a kingdom strong. In this regard, an analysis of the Gobindachandra's personality and character fails to fulfill such criteria. Therefore, instead of blaming alone the Meitei princess for the downfall of the mighty Kachari kingdom, it will be apposite to consider the other circumstances like the political, economic, social, cultural etc. which holds their root years back that collapsed the basic foundation of the Kacharis.

Despite many conflicting views on the marriage, its effects and importance, it is also noteworthy that the marriage brought about cultural assimilation between the two monarchies. The Meitei queens carried alongside many cultural traditions of the Meiteis in the Kachari kingdom. Findings shows that Hinduism had already started taking deep rooted in the reign of Kacharis at Maibong. As a continuous process of Hinduization, at Khaspur in 1790, Raja Krishnachandra and Gobindachandra performed the formal act of conversion. They were basically the staunch follower of Saivism and Saktism. Temples at places like Sonaimukh, temple of Mahakalbhairab near Khaspur etc. were constructed by the Kings. The religious believe of the Kachari royal family took a turn after the entry of princess Induprava in the royal house of the Kacharis. At the influence of the princess the Kachari royal families began to bend towards Vaishnavism. Since the reign of Meitei King Garib Niwaz alias Pamheiba Hinduism became much prominent in Manipur. With the passing years people became deep rooted in the new religion. Princess Induprava, daughter of Madhuchandra was also grand-daughter of Rajarshri Bhagyachandra alias Jai Singha. A devoted follower of Vaishnavism, credit for

the introduction of the great Manipuri 'Rasa Leela or Rasa Dance' in Manipur goes to King Bhagyachandra. Like her father and grand-father princess Induprava was a devote follower of Vaishnavism. Such an influential lady was she that after her marriage in the Kachari kingdom she could convince King Krishnachandra and many other to convert their faith to Vaishnavism. It is stated that though after the marriage of Krishnachandra with Manipuri princess Induprava the Vaishnava cult was patronized by the royal family but in the Kachari kingdom yet the process started much earlier.⁷⁶ During the reign of Raja Gobindachandra introduced the "Maharash Leela" in Kachari kingdom which has its origin in Manipur. Thus, in the realm of cultural life of the Kacharis Rani Induprava brought enormous transformation in their cultural practices.

Rani Induprava had close attachments with the Meitei settlers of Cachar. Under the initiative of the Kachari Raja Krishnachandra in 1787 A.D. a Siva temple was erected near Sonaimukh upon the hill of Chandragiri (it is at present located around 3 kilometer south of Sonai market). There are two inscriptions inscribed on the walls of the main temple. The inscriptions contained the information that the temple was constructed by a Minister called Jay Singha Barman under the supervision of King Krishnachandra. After the marriage of Meitei princess in the Kachari kingdom and being a lady of religious nature Induprava visited the Siva temple at Chandragiri. The princess was accompanied by many Meitei attendants and assistants in that journey. She was also joined by the Meiteis settled scattering in many areas of Cachar. In a pamphlet of 1999 written by Ningonbam Madanbabu, Khuraijam Nabakanta

⁷⁶ Sen, Gouri., "*Life in Kachari Kingdom at khaspur*", Partha Datta, Vivekananda Road, Silchar, 2003, p-74

Luchingpuren it is recorded that “from that time after Kali Puja and the next three Sundays after ‘Ningol Chakkaoba’, the Meitei queen along with various Meitei settlers of Cachar as showing their oneness of having same origin and love among them meet together to worship and provide offerings to the god”.⁷⁷ But, with the span of time the number of Sundays were reduces to only one which falls just after the ‘Ningol Chakkaoba’ from 1987 A.D. Even today the tradition is still followed by the Meitei retinues settling in various parts of Cachar. The Meiteis called the hill where the God resides as ‘Sivaching’ (sivalord Siva, ching-hill) and the Non-Manipuris as ‘Sivtilla’ having the same meaning.

In the history of Manipuri-Kachari diplomatic matrimonial alliances during 15th to 19th centuries we find references of eight marriage alliances that were organized between the two kingdoms. But, none of the Meitei queens had children from their husbands. It is noticed that of the mentioned eight marriage alliances organized, scanty of sources disable us to peep into the details of the events. However, it was only the marriage of princess Induprava with the Kachari Rajas Krishnachandra Narayan and Gobindachandra Narayan, of which references are found in large numbers. In addition, the absent of a chronological record of the rulers of Kacharis created difficulty to cite exact names of the Kachari Kings with whom the Meitei princesses were married to. The issues were more difficult with the earlier marriage alliances prior 18th century where there find neither proper record nor detailing in the sources of both the states. But, matter becomes much clear from the time of marriage of

⁷⁷ Hodamba, N.D., (ed.) “*Mayang Leibakki Aroiba Leimaren Induprava amasung Chingu panganbagi khubam oiriba Sivaching*”, “*Leimaren Induprava*”, Leihau Leipokching Umanglai Panganbagi Khubam, Sonai, Nov- 2008, p-12

princess Haripriya with the Kachari prince Ramchandra. In much of the cases, the scarcity of the sources stood as barrier to gather informations related to organization of such inter-dynastic marriages. It kept in darkness various aspects like how, when and why the matrimonial alliances were conducted. However, an attempt has been made to find out the answers by making an analytical study of the existing circumstances of the time. As a result of the findings, it can be seen that in most of the marriage alliances especially from 17th century the political situation necessitated the two dynasties to tie up the wed-lock. The view of the study also reveals that the Manipuris took ample advantage of the friendship that developed due to wed-lock between the two royalities. It made for easy territorial expansion of the Manipuris in one hand and assimilation of Manipuri culture with that of the Kacharis on the other. In view of the Kacharis, it was quite dreadful diplomatic steps which led them to suffer terribly. The Kacharis lost Political hold from their own kingdom to the hands of the Manipuris. The matrimonial alliances adopted by the monarchies to develop a peaceful relationship turned out to be unfruitful. But, such practice of wed-lock was part and parcel of the foreign policy of every monarchy in the pre-colonial North East India in order to build up mutual relationship with their neighbours and to avoid probable war like situations.