**Manipur Integration**

The picturesque state of Manipur in North-eastern India has a long and culturally rich history. After India gained independence from British rule in 1947, India's first Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, set about the task of integrating more than 565 (approximately) princely states that existed in the Indian subcontinent with the newly formed Indian union. This process of integrating the princely states took place over a period of time. Manipur was one such state which merged with India on 21 September 1949.

One of the staunchest opposition of integration into the Indian union came from the princely state of Manipur. There was much activity before India's independence in Manipur to restore its past glory and independence. Hijam Irabot, a communist leader of Manipur, was one of the forerunners in mobilising people. In 1946, Irabot along with Longjam Bimol formed a political party of Manipur called "Praja Sangh". Irabot wanted an independent Manipur with its own parliament, constitution and cabinet. Instead of the monarchical system, he wanted the representatives of the people to administer the state formed based on socialistic pattern of society. Those who did not subscribe to Irabot's ideas setup a new political party called Manipur Congress, which has no link with the Indian National Congress, to counter Irabot's movement.

The Constitution of Manipur was framed in 1947 by the constitution making body under the initiative of the president of Manipur State Durbar, Pearson. Under the provisions of the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947, assembly election was held in 1948. This election in Manipur was the first ever election held in India based on adult franchise. A coalition government was formed by parties other than the congress. The Manipur Congress, which started working against the Manipur constitution, also launched a movement for the merger of Manipur with India. Irabot and the Maharajah of Manipur, Bodhachandra, strongly opposed the move for merger of Manipur with India. Irabot also strongly opposed the proposal of Sardar Vallabhai Patel to form the state of "Purbanchal" consisting of Manipur, Cachar, Lushai Hills (present Mizoram) and Tripura.

After India's independence Akbar Hydari, the then Governor of Assam, visited Manipur to assess the political situation and explore the possibility for the merger of Manipur with India. Through Hydari's visit the Government of India came to know the king's and people's mind. Dhabalo Singh, president of the ruling party in Manipur, wrote a memorandum to the king on December 17, 1948, conveying his desire that Manipur should remain as a state and autonomous unit enjoying responsible government with the king of Manipur as the constitutional head and with its sovereignty intact. The ruling party's general secretary, N. Ibomcha Singh also stated in another memorandum that majority of the people of the state were against integration or merger. Due to its deep concern over the present international situation, especially the communist uprising in Burma, the Manipur Congress party stood for the consolidation of India through integration and merger of native states, especially Manipur.

The Maharajah of Manipur was invited to Shillong in September 1949 for talks with regard to integration. An already prepared "Merger Agreement" was placed before the Maharaja on the first day of the meeting by Akbar Hydari, whereby Manipur would be merged into the Indian union. The Maharaja stood firm that he could not sign the agreement without prior consultation with the Council of Ministers. The Maharaja was placed under house arrest and debarred from any communication with the outside world. Under such circumstances the Maharaja was forced to sign the "Merger Agreement" with India on September 21, 1949, and Manipur become "Part-C state" of the Indian Union. In Manipur the bargaining negotiation was under stress and there were no rewards to the political actors of the periphery and thus loyalty to the core cannot be expected. The manner in which the merger was brought about has left a residual bitterness that the insurgent groups successfully tap into. A number of insurgent groups regarded the merger as illegal and unconstitutional, and many among the Manipuri intelligentsia are bitter about the way it was affected. In previously separate principalities like Manipur, political integration should involve overcoming parochial loyalties and residual loyalties; however the transitional government's approach failed to overcome these loyalties.