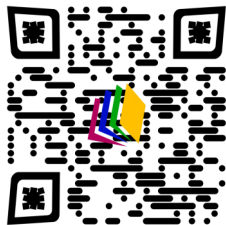




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## Immediate Consequences of the Battle of Imphal, 1944

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Manipur was dragged into the Second World War in the form of the Battle of Imphal in 1944. The Battle of Imphal which broke out in 1944 was a part of the Burma Campaign of the British 14th Army against the Japanese 15th Army and the Indian National Army. The Battle of Imphal was considered as one of the greatest battles ever fought in the history of modern warfare. Manipur was turned into a battleground when the Japanese and the Indian National Army came and invaded Manipur, which was under the protection of the British from March to July in 1944. As a result of the Battle of Imphal, the whole of Manipur suffered to the extreme. Most of the people had no food to eat nor houses to shelter themselves. Food was rationed by the British who were in Manipur in order to supply to the armies that were fighting against the Japanese and the Indian National Army. The British also destroyed and burned local food storages after the villagers were evacuated so that the Japanese and the Indian National Army would not find any food as and when they enter these villages. The Japanese and the Indian National Army on the other hand sent out as many food foraging parties to as many villages they could in order to supply themselves since they received no food supply from during the Battle from the captured villages. Houses were also requisitioned by both the opposing armies. The situation became worst when the Battle ended because the villagers could not cultivate their fields during and immediately after the Battle which resulted in famine like situation in most of the villages. Many villages that were destroyed during the Battle could not even find timber or thatch to re-establish their villages again. In addition to that, the British were still requisitioning houses even after the Battle ended because they were planning to attack and recapture Burma which had fallen to the Japanese in 1942. All these factors had a great consequence to the people of Manipur.

**KEY WORDS:** Imphal, Battle of Imphal, Battle of 1994, British East India Company, Manipur, Buma, Indian Navy

### **Society**

The Battle of Imphal had seriously affected the socio-economic and political life of the people of Manipur. When the Second World War ended in 1945, in appreciation for the support rendered to the Allies by the Maharaja of Manipur and the people, King-Emperor George VI of England remitted the annual tribute of 50,000 payable by Manipur to the British Crownmaking Manipur a non-tributary British colony from 1945 to till they leave India in 1947 after

the declaration of Indian independence.

After the INA and the Japanese were defeated in the Battle of Imphal, many Meiteis and Kukis retreated along with the INA and the Japanese to Burma. Many Manipuris retreated along with the Indian National Army to Burma. The members of different political parties of Manipur were also blacklisted by the Government for helping the Japanese and the Indian National Army. Mention may be made of the 17 members of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha who were blacklisted by the Government as traitors for fighting alongside the Japanese and the Indian National Army against the British and the Allies. Many of the Kukis who supported the Japanese and the Indian National Army suffered and died in their retreat towards Burma. In addition to that, many of them were also arrested by the British and were sent to INA jail in Calcutta. After India got independent on 15th August 1945, the Government of India gave pension to about 148 Kukis in recognition of their sacrifice towards India's freedom from the British rule.

As a result of the Battle of Imphal, the Meitei society which was filled with socio-religious evils became liberalised from interaction with people from different parts of the world. Prior to the Battle, the people of Manipur had to pay several taxes in the name of religion. For instance, chandan senkhai (tax for wearing Tilak), napet senkhai (tax for cutting hair), luhul senkhai (tax for wearing sacred thread) and other such odd taxes. The King and the Brahmins even introduced an oppressive system called mangba-sengba (purity and pollution). To perform the sengthokpa (purification rite), the Brahmins demanded money from the people. If a person who was declared as a Mangba did not undergo the sengthokpa rite, that person was not allowed to participate in any social gathering or perform any religious rituals. As such, many of the Hindu Meiteis were forced to bury their dead. However, this socio-religious evil practices died when the Battle ended because Maharaja Bodhachandra, who succeeded Maharaja Churachand Singh refused to be influenced by the Hindu orthodoxy and the Brahmins. Interaction with the American, British, Pathans, Africans, Japanese and Chinese made the people of Manipur realize that the world was a much bigger place than they once thought of. As a result of this interaction, the people of Manipur

became more liberal and there was relaxation even in religious orthodoxy. Replacing Bengali films, which was then popular with the Meiteis before the Battle of Imphal, with Hindi and English films from 1944 onwards because of the Hindi and Urdu speaking soldiers that were pouring into Manipur helped the people to realize the importance of radios and other platforms which would enhance their knowledge about the happenings around the world; it also made them realize that the world was made up of different religions, politics and races. After the Battle of Imphal, the people also began to pay attention to modern education and scientific way of life. It was during the Second World War that the people of Manipur were introduced to the world beyond Manipur.

### Education

The Battle of Imphal adversely affected the educational sector in Manipur. Many schools were shut down with the invasion of Manipur by the Japanese and the Indian National Army in 1944. However, when the Battle ended, there was much progress in the educational sector in Manipur. Many schools were given grants by the State of Manipur, the Assam Government and the Government of India. Schools that were closed during the war period began to be reopened. The Administrative reports of Manipur from 1943-44, 1944-45 and 1945-46 showed that much effort was given towards promoting education in the State. There was an increase in the number of schools in the valley as well as in the hills of Manipur.

Stj. R. K. Bhaskor Singh and Stj. W. Yumjao Singh took up the charge of the Educational Department for the first 7 months and the following 5 months respectively in 1943-44. In the valley, there were 89 Primary Schools and there were as many as 4,755 students out of which 4,583 were boys and 172 were girls. Out of the 89 schools, 3 of them were Upper Primary Schools, 73 were Lower Primary Schools for boys, 2 Girls Schools, 10 Madrasas and 1 Tol. In 1944-45, the in-charge for education was taken over by Stj. Yumjao Singh till 2nd March 1945, after which the in-charge was taken by Stj. M. Radhamohan. Stj. L. Thangoi Singh was appointed as the Deputy Inspector of the schools in the same year. In 1945-46 Stj. M. Radhamohan continued to take charge of the Educational

Department and Stj. L. Thangoi Singh also continued as Deputy Inspector of the schools in 1945-46. During this year, the number of Primary Schools rose to 91 which comprises 3 Upper Primary Schools, 70 Boys Lower Primary Schools, 5 Girls Lower Primary Schools, 3 Tols and 10 Madrasas.

In 1944, education in the hills was seriously affected by the entry of the Japanese. As a result, there was no statistical report from Ukhrul Sub-division. Before Ukhrul was overrun by the Japanese, it had 1 Middle English School, 1 Upper Primary School, 4 Lower Primary School and 15 Village Schools. In Tamenglong Sub-division, 1 Middle School just started functioning. There was also 1 Primary School, 2 Lower Primary Schools and 17 Village Schools. In the Sadar Sub-division, there were 18 Primary Schools. The Chinga Hill Upper Primary School was defunct and the proposal to open Upper Primary Schools at Tadubi (near Mao) and Churachandpur had to be postponed because of the war situation. The American Baptist Mission established 1 Middle English School and many Primary Schools at Kangpokpi. During the war, Mr. Brook, the missionary escaped to Imphal with the British troops but after the Imphal- Kohima Road was re-opened, he re-established himself and resumed his works. The Headquarter of the North-East India General mission at Churachandpur suffered badly when the Japanese fought along the Tiddim Road. The missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Rostad, however, had already left Manipur right after the bombing of Imphal in 1942. The Mission had established a number of schools in the Southwestern Hills of the State. By 1944-45, most of the schools in the hills were reopened. In 1945-46, the number of schools in Ukhrul Sub- division rose to 30 which comprised 1 Middle English School, 2 Upper Primary Schools, 5 Lower Primary Schools and 22 Village schools. The Sadar Sub- division had 21 Primary Schools which included 1 Upper Primary School, 14 Lower Primary Schools and 6 Village schools and in the Tamenglong Sub- division, there was a total of 16 schools which comprised 1 Upper Primary School, 2 Lower Primary Schools and 12 Village schools. It may be pointed out that education in Primary Schools was provided for free but the Upper Primary students had to pay a minimal tuition fee. This trend continued in 1944-45 and

1945-46 but it was not compulsory to the people to attend the schools.

D.M (Dhanamanjuri) College was the only college that existed during the colonial period in Manipur. Maharani Ngangbam Chanu Dhanamanjuri donated Rs. 10,000 for the establishment of the college and in recognition to her service, the college was named after her as Dhanamanjuri College (D.M College). Class began in arts subject in 1946 in Johnstone English School with K. Gouro as its first principal. It was affiliated to the Calcutta University since its inception and later affiliated to the Gauhati University, Gauhati in 1949.

### Medical Condition

There were acute health problems almost everywhere in the region. Cholera, Smallpox and other diseases were brought into Manipur by the refugees who came from Burma in 1942 and continued pouring into Manipur till June 1944. In the Valley, due to the coming of the war in Manipur, the Tuberculosis (T. B.) Hospital in Imphal was closed since 1944. It was re-opened on 14th June 1946 after two years. The dispensaries in Moirang and Bishenpur were also closed since April and May 1944 respectively but it was re-opened in 1945. 46 major and 716 minor operations were performed in 1943-44. However, in 1944-45, the number of both major and minor operations rose to 79 and 958 respectively and by 1945-46, the 105 major and 1,765 minor operations were performed. Cholera and Smallpox broke out in 1943-44 and 36 Cases of Cholera and 10 cases of smallpox were registered out of which 14 persons died of Cholera and 1 person died of smallpox. Cholera was still prevalent in 1944-45. 118 Cholera and 105 Smallpox cases were registered in the year and the number of death from Cholera and Smallpox were 59 and 29 respectively but by 1945-46, no case of Smallpox was reported though there still was 36 cases of Cholera out of which 14 persons died of it.

In the hills, the dispensaries in Ukhrul was closed from March 1944; Saivom from April 1944; Mao from March, Kangpokpi and Churachandpur from March 1944; and Sugnu from April 1944. They all remained closed till the end of the year. 4 major and 270 minor operations were performed in 1943-44.

There was an epidemic of Smallpox and 38 persons died out of 87 cases that was registered in 1943-44. In 1944-45, the dispensaries at Ukhrul, Mao, Kangpokpi and Sugnu were re-opened. The dispensary in Churachandpur was opened at Khuga Village and it was taken over by the Assam Relief Measure Works on 1st May 1945. No major operation was reported but 297 minor operations were performed in 1944-45. 9 cases of Cholera and 14 cases of Smallpox were reported and the number of death caused by them was 7 each. In 1945-46, there was one case of Cerebro Spinal Meningitis in Khuga valley in Churachandpur and 11 cases in Tamenglong areas with 7 deaths. 8 Cases of Cholera and 6 cases of Smallpox were still reported in the hill areas in which 4 persons died of cholera and 2 died of Smallpox respectively.

Apart from the officially documented cases that were registered in the hospitals and dispensaries, about 200 people died of Cholera, dysentery and fever in the village of Hundung, situated in Ukhrul between July and September 1944. About 100 people also died in Mantripukhri village from diseases soon after the Battle of Imphal. In Sonpram area, dysentery and JapanLaina (Japanese diseases) broke out after the war that killed lots of people as there was no medical facility. Khongjaron village particularly suffered from Small-pox and many people died from it. The people of Leisang and Bolpa villages also suffered from many diseases including dysentery. There was a complete breakdown in the medical situation during the Battle of Imphal in the remote areas of Manipur. It was only after 1944 that the medical condition of Manipur began to improve in these areas.

### **Economy**

When Manipur was still in chaos, the British soldiers were still pouring into the valley to recapture Burma from the Japanese. Over 40,000 houses were requisitioned for the British armies by the second half of 1944. Tour Diary, 1944-45 showed that almost all the villages in Manipur had no food to eat or house to shelter themselves after the Battle of Imphal because most of the food were rationed by the British to supply the armies that were fighting the Japanese and the Indian National Army. Also, following the policy of food denial, the British

destroyed and burnt the food available in the villages after the villagers were evacuated hurriedly. Many villages were destroyed in the Battle as a result the villagers had to survive in the jungle. The Japanese and the Indian National Army also sent out a number of food foraging parties from their occupied villages during the Battle. The situation became worst after the Battle because certain villages were not allowed to cultivate even after the Battle by the British forces in Imphal in one hand and on the other hand, many villages could not even cultivate because the Japanese and the Indian National Army took away all the cattle and livestock. Even the clothing and agricultural tools and implements were taken away by the Japanese and the Indian National Army. Therefore, they had to depend on Government ration in the form of Assam Relief Measure for survival until the next harvest. The suffering of the people of Manipur knew no end. The villages that were far away from the relief depots suffered to such an extent that even if they were given rice, before they could reach their villages, the rice would be all eaten up.

We may take a look at some of the accounts of the people to understand the plight of the people of Manipur. The people of Mantripukhri and Chingmeirong abandoned their village and escaped to Machiang (Nagaching) until the Japanese were driven back from the soil of Imphal. Gongthonrei Pamei stated that "During this period, the people in Imphal had no food to eat because the British had collected most of the food items from the area to feed the armies who were fighting the Japanese." In Koirengai area, the people would dig up scraps of bombs and other materials from the Second World War and sell them to the Meiteis. Whoever found a bomb(s) was considered lucky because bombs were sold for a higher price. Usually, hill people would buy them to extract the gunpowder to make bullets or used it to catch fish. A grave famine-like situation broke out in Sonpram and the surrounding villages after the war because the presence of the Japanese in the area rendered it impossible for the villagers to cultivate their fields in 1944. During this period, the villagers had to rely on yam (*Dioscorea*) as a substitute for rice and wait for the next harvest. There was also the outbreak of Peiriam which made the situation worse. As a result of the lack of food, many students from the region gave up their studies because

their parents thought that getting education meant escaping agricultural work which was the most important occupation at that moment.

### Trade and commerce after the Battle

There was a decline in trade and commerce from 1944 to 1948. During this period, Manipur faced an acute shortage of essential commodities like cloth, yarn, kerosene oil and school textbooks. The Government also imposed higher cycle tax from Rs. 1.50 to Rs. 3 in 1945-46 and in the same year tricycle tax was fixed at Rs. 5. However, cycle tax was reduced to Rs. 2 in 1946. In 1946-47, the lorries plying on the Imphal-Dimapur road were taxed up to Rs. 160 per annum. Almost all the section of the people were to pay income tax. Therefore, the process of land alienation increased and the number of sale rose from 27,562 in 1945-46 to 38,543 in 1946-47. The new rich began to invest in land rather than taking up business as there was too much tax to pay. The native traders and contractors wanted to occupy the vacant shops of the foreign traders (Marwaris and other non-native traders) who fled Manipur during the war. However, the Government of India asked the Political Agent in July 1946 to allow the non-Manipuri traders to re-enter Manipur to trade. On 14th August 1946, the Governor of Assam further ordered the Political Agent of Manipur to allow them to come to the British Reserve area. To protect the interest of the native traders, the Durbar decided that the Marwaris should not trade in Paddy and paddy products. The Marwaris were also not allowed to trade on the State's portion of the Mao-Maram road. Despite this, the foreign traders once again flourished in Manipur because they partnered with the wholesale traders in Guwahati and other areas while native traders lack capital and business contacts outside Manipur. Having said that, the Battle of Imphal prepared for the growth of a class of businessmen and contractors. However, the rich natives did not invest in the business sector but instead began to make huge investments particularly in the Saving Certificates. To facilitate the new rich class of Manipur, the state set up the Bank of Manipur in 1947. Many beginnings among the local businessmen of the region can be traced back to the wartime period.

The Battle of Imphal was seen as a meaningless war

by the people of Manipur because they had nothing to do with it.

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