

CHAPTER XVII

MANIPUR

723. The State of Assam, with the boundaries which have been suggested in the preceding Chapter, will not include the existing State of Manipur. This is because we recommend that Manipur should for the present continue to be centrally-administered. We shall explain briefly our reasons for making this recommendation.

724. Manipur is a Part C State, situated on India's eastern border, with a population of about 0.6 million. A unit such as this cannot be considered administratively viable. Consistently, therefore, with the principles discussed in Part II and Chapter I of this part of the report, the merger of Manipur in the adjoining State should be the natural course, the more so when the other Part C State with a comparable population in this region, namely, Tripura, is proposed to be merged in Assam. There are, however, some features peculiar to this unit, which render it desirable that its separate existence should be maintained for the time being.

725. We may first state the main arguments which have been advanced in favour of the continued existence of this unit. Manipur, it is claimed, is a border State; and, as in the case of the North-East Frontier Agency, which is a neighbouring area, security considerations are, or must be, paramount. Manipur, it has also been claimed, has been independent for centuries and its connection with the neighbouring States—and indeed with India itself—is very recent. There is, even today, no railway which links the State with the rest of India. The State is now receiving substantial financial aid from the Centre. Its economic development will be retarded if it is merged either in Assam or in West Bengal or in the hill districts.

726. The racial and linguistic composition of the State is somewhat peculiar. The Meitais or Manipuris, constituting about 65 per cent. of the population of the State, are the major linguistic group and are to be found mostly in the valley. There has been some settlement by Mizos from the south, by Hmars, Nagas and other tribes and even some immigration from Assam and from Bengal. But the linguistic and cultural individuality of the valley, it is claimed, has remained largely unaffected.

727. Manipuris have accordingly developed a special social and cultural life of their own. This consciousness of a distinct linguistic and cultural individuality accounts for the opposition within the State to suggestions that Manipur should become part of Assam or of a Purbachal State created round Cachar or of a hill state extending from the Mizo (Lushai Hills) district in the south to the North-East Frontier Agency in the north.

728. The validity of some of these arguments may be questioned; and some of them may be plausibly cited in favour of the separate existence of Tripura also. The essential difference, however, between Manipur and Tripura is that the Bengali-speaking people in the neighbouring district, namely, Cachar, already constitute seventy-seven per cent. of the population of the district; and the merger of Tripura in the State would, therefore, be natural to some extent. This important consideration does not apply to Manipur which has no particular linguistic affinity with Assam.

729. Another important consideration we have to bear in mind is that Assam has fairly difficult political and economic problems of its own to solve. Besides, apart from the autonomous hills districts, the administration of the State will have to look after another border unit, namely, Tripura. In these circumstances, it may not be desirable to impose on Assam the additional burden of administering the important border area of Manipur.

730. The only serious alternative to merger in Assam is to create a new State consisting of Manipur and the neighbouring areas like Lushai Hills, Tripura and Cachar. We have already referred to the opposition of the people to this proposal. But the proposal itself is impracticable owing to lack of communications, a variety of languages, difficulties regarding administrative and technical personnel and inadequacy of financial resources.

731. On a careful consideration of the implications of the various possible alternatives, we have come to the conclusion that Manipur should continue to be a centrally-administered territory for the time being.

732. While we make this recommendation, it is quite clear to us that Manipur cannot maintain its separate existence for long and that the ultimate solution should be its merger in the adjoining State of Assam. It is equally clear to us that, so long as it continues as a separate administrative unit, the administrative structure of

Manipur should conform to the pattern we have indicated in Chapter I of this part. We wish to repeat that, if a unit such as Manipur wishes to have representative government at the state level, it must be prepared to join a larger unit. It cannot insist on a separate existence, and demand, at the same time, substantial central aid not only for its economic development but also for the maintenance of expensive representative institutions and uneconomic administrative agencies.