CHAPTER - II

LAND AND PEOPLE
CHAPTER – II

LAND AND PEOPLE

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

The state of Manipur is a place of antiquarian interest. Isolated from the neighboring kingdoms by an encircling zone of mountains. She is bounded on the north by Nagaland, and on the West by the North Cachar hills and Cachar district of Assam on the East by Myanmar (Burma) and on the South by Mizoram. She is regarded as the easternmost outpost of Indian culture and tradition. And because of her location at the gateway between South-East Asia and India, she played a significant role in the development of human culture of this region from prehistoric times.¹ Due to her charming physical features, its peculiar tradition and history of Manipur is regarded as the paradise of East of India. At the same time she was also regarded as ‘the Jewels of India’ by late Jawaharlal Nehru², the then Prime Minister of India, Lord Irwin described her as ‘Switzerland of India’³, Sir Geoffery Evans and Anthony Brett James as, ‘a Flower on the lofty height⁴, and its

location is identified with places within the jurisdiction of Tugma, Triglyptor, Mareura, and Krrhadia as per the sources of Gerini cites Ptolemy’s probable knowledge of Manipur.\textsuperscript{5} Again, Alfred Lyall rightly describe it as ‘an oasis of comparative civilisation amidst the barbarians.’\textsuperscript{6} Manipur has extended her bosom from East longitude $93.03^\circ$ to $94.78^\circ$ and North Latitude $23.83^\circ$ to $25.68^\circ$; covers and areas of 22,327 sq km; at an average elevation of 2,500 feet above Sea level having a rainfall approximately 1528 mm. per year. At present temperature per year is about maximum is $39^\circ$C and minimum is $0^\circ$C. The census records of 1991 shows the population of Manipur state as 18,26,714 (Males 9,13,511 and Females 8,95,203).

Manipur is divided into plains and hills. There are twenty-nine different hill tribes recognised by the constitution of India and still some more minor tribes are also inhabited in this area.\textsuperscript{7} This geographical division is a determinant factor in the socio-political, historical development of the land.

In early period Manipur was known by different names like ‘Poirei’,\textsuperscript{8} Wangam,\textsuperscript{9} Hanna Shemba Konna Loiba\textsuperscript{10} ‘Tillikoktom’\textsuperscript{11}, ‘Kangleipak’\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Geoffery Evans, Sir and Anthony Brett James} \textsuperscript{5} : \textit{The Imphal, Macmillan & Co.Ltd., London, 1965, P. I.}
  \item \textbf{Gerini, G.E.R.} \textsuperscript{6} : \textit{Reserchs into ptolengy’s Geography, second edition, 1968, P.P. 30, 33.}
  \item \textbf{Directorate of Economics and statistics, Govt. of Manipur} : \textit{191, P.P. 16, 18.}
  \item \textbf{Ghogoshore, O.} \textsuperscript{8} : \textit{Ningthourul Lambuba, 1967, Imphal, P. 46.}
  \item \textbf{Ibid.} \textsuperscript{9} : \textit{P. 89.}
  \item \textbf{Chandrasekhar, Kh.} \textsuperscript{10} : \textit{Sakok Lamlen Ahanba, Imphal, 1990, P.P. 1,2.}
  \item \textbf{Ibid,} \textsuperscript{11} : \textit{P.P. 1,2.}
  \item \textbf{Ibobi, N.} \textsuperscript{12} : \textit{The Manipur Administration (1709-1907) A.D. Imphal, P. 18.}
\end{itemize}
‘Sana Pungmayon’\textsuperscript{13} ‘Sana Leipak’\textsuperscript{14} etc. Still it is not clear when the name ‘Manipur’ was known in this area. But it is quite certain that the name Manipur was not known before 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Any type of historical evidence did not indicate about such name as Manipur. In the early period Manipur was known by different names. It is mentioned that these names were referred to both historical and literary works\textsuperscript{15}. According to the literary sources in ancient she was known as ‘Poirei Meitei Leipak’ or ‘Kangleipak’ etc\textsuperscript{16}. To Burmese she was known as Kathe or Ponnas,’Hsiao po-io-mein’ to the Chinese\textsuperscript{17}, ‘Cassay’ to the shans\textsuperscript{18}, ‘Monglai’ to the Cocharies and the Bangali\textsuperscript{19}, and ‘Mekhle’ to the Assamese as well as to the British\textsuperscript{20}.

Since the establishment of a systematic administration the people of Manipur had enjoyed the administrative system of feudal society. Then for the first time she came into contact with British East India Company in the year 1762. However Manipur enjoyed the political status of an independent kingdom for quite long time. But her political status of independent country was lost in 1891 just after occupation by British. Thus she was under British paramountcy from 1891 to 1947. From 1947 to October 1949 for a very short period of three years Manipur enjoyed the political status of independent country and then Manipur again merged into Indian on 15\textsuperscript{th} October 1949.

\begin{itemize}
\item[13.] M.S. : Pakhangba Tuthek Lairong.
\item[14.] Khelchandra Singh, N : Ariba Manipuri Sahitya Itihas, Imphal P. 2.
\item[19.] Chandramani, L. (Dr.) : Op. cit, P. 5.
\item[20.] Khelchandra, n. and Ibungohal, L. : Cheitharol Kumbaba, 1989, Imphal, P. 123.
\end{itemize}
Since then Manipur became an political unit of Indian Union. Then after crossing so many political hindrances Manipur was able to get the status of full fledged state only in the year 1972.

The geological and tectonic history of Manipur can be understood as a part of the geological evolution of North East India. The oldest rocks found in eastern Manipur belongs to cretaceous group, caused by seltstones and quartzite are available near Ukhrul and Hundung areas.  

Many rivers of different sizes runs in the valley and hill areas of Manipur. Among them ‘Barak’ is the longest and largest river which flows from north to the south western directions and finally entered into Cachar and the Surma valleys of Bangladesh. The next big river is ‘Imphal river, or ‘Manipur river’ which flows in the centre of valley area and entered into Burma and falls into Chindwin river. The Irl, the Thoubal, the Nambul etc. are the important rivers of Manipur. The ‘Loktak Lake’ is the biggest lake of Manipur and it has got its important in the cultural history of Manipur. The important lakes are Ikop, Pumlen, Waihou etc. The important mountain peaks are the ‘Mt. Essau’ or ‘Tenipu’(9824 ft.), ‘Mirohi’ peak in the east and the ‘Koubru’ peak in the West. These lakes, rivers, streams and mountain peaks are interwoven in the life, culture and tradition of the people of this place and they contributed a lot in the formation of an ecological environment of the civilization of this place.


There was a trade relationship between Manipur and other neighbouring areas including Burma and it was maintained through land routes which passes through hills and mountains. The trade between Manipur and Yunnan Province of China was recorded in the chronicle of Manipur in circa 1630; and it is said that the art of manufacturing of gun powder was acquired from China. This trade continued as late as 1813 A.D. Thus it is apparent that Manipur was in contact with Indian, Tai and Chinese traders in the early centuries of Christian era. It is also recorded that through the trade relationship China was able to acquire the knowledge of silk rearing culture and use of tea from Manipur. In an article written by Sir James Watt said that the art of silk worm rearing culture was spread to China from Manipur.24 From this it is quite clear that there was a regular trade system in ancient period. Another significant aspect is that Manipur had enjoyed the experiences of different culture of different period. This is quite evidence by the archaeological findings which was discovered from the various parts of Manipur. There are various caves in Manipur like Khangkhui (Ukhrul), Songbu (Chandel), Tharon (Tamenglong), and the open air at Machi (Chandel), Nonpok Keithelmanbi (Senapati), Mongjam (Imphal), Wangoo (Bishnupur) etc. These caves are divided into two archaeological sites i.e. 'STONE AGE SITE' and 'METAL AGE SITE'. The Khangkhui, Songbu and Tharon etc. are belong to the 'Stone Age Site' and Machi, Nongpok Keithel Manbi, Mongjam, Wangoo etc. belongs to 'Metal Age Site'.

former can be studied under three cultural groups i.e. Palaeolithic, Haobinhian and Neolithic. The copper, bronze and Iron Age relics are found in the later sites.25

It is a well aware fact that Pre-history is a branch of history which deals with history of the race or people of the period which is beyond the memory of human mind and also before the development of writing. Proto-history is the transitional period between pre-history and history, and it is the period of human history based on myths and legends. Like any other group of peoples, Manipur also enjoyed the information about the record of the pre-history and proto-historical period. About the pre-historic period we have got the information from the palaeolithic evidences. According to the myth and the legendary account of Manipur, the human evolution was developed through certain stages. The people of Manipur also accepted the ‘Sun’ they called it locally ‘Yoimayai Lairen Taodanba Korou Apanba’ as the supreme creator of Universe and human beings. It is said that the produced of seven colours, known as ‘Atiya kuru Sidaba’ which is regarded as the genesis of all living things and then produced ‘Laipungthou Mapan’ i.e. nine planets. With the help of these creations, the Supreme beings formed a place known as ‘Kangla Laipham’ which was believed to be the ‘Khoidou’ i.e. the navel of the nerve centre point of ‘Leimaren Shidabi’, the symbol of preserver. Through them the evolution of human being was made. Thus Manipur has enjoyed the advantage of both myth and the

legendary account of the evolution of the people.

It is mentioned that the legendary king Kangba and his queen Tari borned nine sons in the Ko-Hagno chak. Their nine sons were viz, 1) Kongkoi, 2) Teima, 3) Yangma, 4) Tesrote, 5) Urelkhuba, 6) Urenhanba, 7) Erem, 8) Khabi, and 9) Langba. Later stages, these nine sons adapted as ethnic clans which were settle towards different land on earth, and had emerged with their own distinctive different communities, identity and races independently. According to manuscript amongst nine sons, 1. the kongkoi and his Offsprings extended and their settlement towards the South East Asian region (Pong/Thailand/etc.), 2. Teima and his descendant rose in Meitei races now existing in Manipur, 3. Yangma also made to be Aryian races (Hindus), 4. Tessrote also made to be Takhel (Tripuries), 5. Urelhanba known as Moirang, 6. Urelkhuba were known as Pathans / Muslims, 7. Erem were neither Malesh/English and nor Muslims but other races of western people of Europe, 8. Khabi had born two sons, one was Chairen and another known as Far-East people, China and Japan , 9. Langba born Eranggo his descendant known as English speaking people of the world. In this respect, the Meitei believed that the whole races of the earth were, being all brotherhood of the same genesis of human evolution.26

Since the dawn of history, the Meiteis developed a monarchical form of government. Nongda Laien Pakhangba became the first king of Manipur in its history in 33 A.D. The Meiteis were the so called ‘Seven Salais’ or ‘clan’, viz, Ningthouja, Luwang, Khuman, Moirang, Angom, Khaba Nanga and Changlei and literally, the people of the Ningthouja clan was founded

26. Ibid : Chakporol Ahuiba
by king Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. The consolidation of the principalities of Meitei was resumed by king Kiyamba (1467-1508 A.D.). Moreover, the whole unification of the people even if king Khangemba took again the work was completed during the reign king Garibaniwaz (1709-1748 A.D.). And there were ‘Nongpok Haram’ and ‘Nognchup Harams’ such as, Bamons or Brahmins, Kshetrimayum, Lairikyengbam, Pangan or Muslims etc., and the Meitei clan adopted Nognpok Harams and Nongchup Haram such as, Ahoms, Tripuries, Cachari, Bengali, Mayang Kalisha, Bishnupriya, Akoksha, kabow or Shan, Awa or Burmese, khagi or kachin, karen, Lushai or Mizos and Tiddim chin or kuki. The above composition constitutes the races, tribes and clans who are internationally recognised as ‘Tai Lai’. All the races or people mentioned above bore some of cultures which were quite different from each other. Moreover, those different cultures were mixed up here in this land so it shape and form were absorbed into the unique culture of Meiteis.

THE PEOPLE

The earliest settlers were the ancient Meiteis of the valley area, the Naga and Kukichins of the surrounding hills. Except the Muslims the people are predominantly Mongoloid stocks with some non-Mongoloid stocks, who speak Tibeto Burman Languages. The Manipuri language which is still included in Sino-Tibetan language; but as sub family of Tibeto Burman family and more sub as kuki chin groups. Whereas the Manipuri language is keeping to the most developed language among the kuki chin family.

Historically, these groups of people grew independently with varying degrees of cultural development and civilization, of whom the Meitei are the most dominant and advanced nationality.  

The Meiteis line particularly in the valleys and her brotherhood hills peoples, now called Nagas and Kukis encircling the mountains. Their interaction were prevails in Assam, west Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, East Pakistan, Burma/Myanmar, and China. There are a class of people in Manipur known as “Loi” i.e, the backward or scheduled caste who constitute the degraded section of the society. They are divided into a number of sections, viz, Phayeng, Kameng, Andro, Sugnu, Chakpa etc. The Haris or Yaithibis are regarded as even more unclean than the above named group. According to one theory, they are the descendants of Moirang tribe which settled in the south and were subdued section rather than a pure Meiteis. In ancient times, persons of bad character who were condemned by the kings were deported to the different loi village. There is another class of “Loi” by purchase which means a person who becomes a Loi by his voluntary will.

There are important documents for the historical study of the immigrants. The Manipuri Muslims or Meitei Pangal settle in Manipur since

---

28. Gangumei observed: “Historically, the group of people grew independently with varying degrees of cultural development civilization, of whom the Meitei are the most dominant and advanced nationality”


the seventeenth century. They adopted Meitei language as their mother tongue and now form an integral part in the society of Manipur. Many Indian communities who migrated to Manipur at the end of the nineteenth century were the Behari oil crushers the Bengalis and during the colonial period, came the Marawaris, Nepalis, and after India’s independence the Punjabis both Hindus and Sikhs, Tamils and others. Thus, Manipur with her pluralistic social fabric presents a picture of homogeneity and heterogeneity with the multiracial, multi religious and multi-lingual base of culture and civilization. The history of Manipur is the unending process of evolution of such a culture and society.\textsuperscript{31}

**ORIGIN OF MANIPURI PEOPLES**

In the pre-historic times, the erstwhile kingdom of Manipur was inhabited by several tribes; each of them occupying definite territorial areas as well as independent of the other. The majority of the tribe comprising historically expected ‘seven clans’ viz, Ningthouja, Luwang, Khuman, Moirang, Angom, Khaba-Nganba, and Chenglei and the hill-tribes.\textsuperscript{32} The seven clans again underwent an age long struggle amongst themselves till the Meiteis finally established supremacy over the rest and some people from surrounding hill tribes were also absorbed among the meiteis. They were merged into the ‘Sageis’ of the seven clans. The clan or lineage is known as ‘Salai’ which literally means the Ancestor-God of the lineage (Sa-Sagei= Lineage and Lai = God- anecstor).\textsuperscript{33} Owing to the influx of the

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Gangmumei Kabui : History of Manipur, pre-colonial period, vol. - I Delhi, 1991, P. 24.}

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Khelchandra, N. Ibunghol, L : Cheitharol Kumbaba, 1989, Imphal, P. 4.}

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Gangmumei Kabui : Op. cit : P. 69.}
process of assimilation of each salai was affected, the Meitei people whether the indigenous or the newcomers were collectively known to the outside world as the ‘Meitei’s finally. Ancient chronicles indicate that the seven major principalities were descended from a supreme-being, ‘Taibang Mapu Shidaba’, who is a formless divinity having myriad manifestations (the divine ancestor).

It is also mentioned that the Meiteis’ is the only inhabitant races of people in the pre-historical period of this region of Manipur. The valley of Manipur like a delta surrounding by the peak of mountains, and hills and plains had indispensable relationship since the beginning of human settlers. Epistemologically, the term Meitei is constituted to both hills and valley (Hill mens and valley mens). For instance, the people who inhabitant in the hills as well as the valley inhabitant peoples were called Meitei or Chingmee/Tammee.34 In short, the different clan tribes were migrated from various hill tracts into the valley in different historical phase and synthesised to consolidate as a Meitei nation state in earliest times. Here quote a folk rhythm - “Awang Koubru Asoppa, Leiyam Khunda Ahanba Sanarik Mapan Thariba Nongthrei Maoo Lingliba”, this oral tradition clearly indicate the first human spices evolute in the hills.35

Dr. Horam opines that, “the Meitei possess in common with the hill people, specially the Nagas’.36 Henceforth, the Meiteis has very closed to Nagas and Kukis. Hundung is a Tangkhul village. The Chief of this village and the king of Manipur were brothers. This relationship was maintained

---

34. M.S. : Thirel Laiyat.
35. Ibid : Thirel Laiyat.
36. Horam, Dr. : Forwarding T.C. Hodson “The Meitheis”.
till very recently, i.e., till the abolition of the princely states. There used to be an exchange of gifts and the Hundung Chief being the elder brother of the Meitei king was consulted often on several matters and shown due respect. Thus it can be highlighted that the “Mera Hou - Chongba” a state traditional festival which performed since Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. Though the Meiteis has how finally left the stage of relatively primitive culture, there can be tittle doubt that he was once a close relation of the Nagas.\textsuperscript{37}

Such as Meitei, the Kabui has clan system for instance, Kamei (Ningthouja), Golmei (Khuman), Gangmei (Luwang), Longmei (Angom), and the Meitei supreme almighty god “Ating kok shidaba” as called “Tinggaira kong”. The Chothe tribe has seven clans, as Heeyang (Ningthouja); Thao (Luwang)’ Marin (Khuman); Yuroong (Angom)’ Pairung (Kha -nganba); Lukung (Moirang); and Makan (Saran Leishangthem). Thus the Manipuri ethnic tribes of Tangkhul, Kabui, chothe, Kom, Anal, Thangal and various sub tribe is were close genetic (blood) relationship to the Meiteis.

The Kukis formerly known as Khongsai. The Thadou is the major clan among the kuki tribes of Manipur. It is, not only the big clan but the Thadou languages is included in the kuki chin family. Meitei languages is also the supreme status of kuki-Chin family.

Historical records of the early Konna Chak relate also of the many immigrants who settle in Manipur. It was on account of repeated invasions and conquests that so many foreigners came to be absorbed in the population

\textsuperscript{37.} "Meitie Khunthoklal", published by, Meitei Choukhat Lupel, Imphal, 1996, P.P. 38,39
of Manipur. When Tippera (a small neighbouring country to the south west) was conquered, a group of captives settled and were employed to divert the course of Imphal River to Taken Kong (Tripuris canal). Many Brahmins fleeing from the Mahomedan conquerors of western India, settle in Manipur and their children marrying non Meitei wives. Conquered lower-caste Hindus from Assam also settled and were employed as labourers, as well as some captive Mohammedans. The outer villages were known as loi or tribute-paying villages.\textsuperscript{38}

Later came the visit of the Chinese Pong king “Peyangu”, and his followers, when the khagi flower was brought, and many other gifts in recognition of friendship. Some Chinese settled then and introduced brickmaking, carpentary, etc. They adopted the Meitei religion (though they had become Buddhists) and were absorbed into the Meitei people. Like wise, coming to more recent dates, on account of many attacks and counter-attacks between the Meiteis and their traditional enemies, the Burmese, a large group of Burmese remained in Imphal after Manipur had been in the hands of the Burmese king for several years.

The recorded history of Manipur began from the second quarter of the first century of Christian era when Nongda Laien ‘Pakhangba’ (the first consolidate king of Meities) ascended to the throne of ‘Kangla’, the historic capital of Manipur. The ethnic name, Meitei, B.H. Hodgson in the nineteenth century thought, was a, “combined appelate of Siamese ‘Tai’

\textsuperscript{38} Louise Lightfoot : Dance - Rituals of Manipur, India, Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs, New Delhi, P.52.
and Kochin Chinese ‘Moy’ (Moy + Tai = Moytai) and that the Meiteis belong to the Moi section of the great Tai race”. “T.C. Hodson suggested that it was derived from the blending of two words; ‘Mei - man or people and ‘Tei’ meaning separate : Meitei = separate people”. 39

Another theory observes, ‘Meitei’ is derived from the creation of man by God in his image : Mei=image Tei = modelled after God’s image - Meitei. And the mythical history observed that the name of Meitei derived from the Sun (Taibang Mapu) supreme god, Mei means fire; Tei means Men = Fire Men sons of God. 40

Moreover, it is well known and fact that the word Meitei was broadly used during the period of the establishment of the Ningthouja dynasty by king Pakhangba, to mean this clan or dynasty. Meculloch describes, ‘the Meiteis were the descendants of the hill tribes who came from different directions. He came to this conclusion on the basis of cultural and language affinity between the tribals and Meiteis. He also relied on the tale that the Meities are the offshoots of the hill tribes. 41 R.B. Pemberton also writes, ‘the Meities are the descendants of Tartar Colony in China who immigrated to Manipur during the conflicts for supremacy between the Chinese and the Tartars in the 13th and 14th centuries’. 42

There are other theories too about the origin of the Meiteis but so far there has not been a universal theory acceptable to all. Gangmumei Kabui

39.  Quated in T.C. Hodson, P.10
40.  M.S. Meihoubarol Pukok
41.  Mcelloch : An account of the Valley of Manipur,
42.  Pemberton, R.B.:   Estern Frontier of India, Delhi, 1979, P.36
observes, ‘the origin of the Meitei is not of Aryan, there is an Aryan element in the Meitei society’.

He also describes that there is a relationship between the Meitei, Mon-khmer and Tai for historical reason: conquest and socio-cultural contacts which produced influence on the language and the culture of the Meities.

The above statement is reasonable and true that Manipuris have absorbed by these foreign elements and completely integrated them in their social structure and ultimately the Meitei as a distinct ethnic, linguistic, cultural as well and social entity was formed in Manipur valley.

Those who came from the east were purely Mongolians consisting of Chinese, Burmese, Shans which got assimilated into Meitei society was known as the ‘Nongpok-Haram’; people coming from the east. The rest consisting mostly of Indian race who entered into this land from the western direction are known as ‘Nongchup-Haram’ or western stream. They were merged into the ‘lineage’ of the seven clans (salais) of the Meiteis. Owing to the influx of assimilation of these different groups of people at different stages of evolution in Meitei society, primitive or pre-literate, intermediate or literate and modern have been expected. Nevertheless, in the old scripts there is no mention of Meitei clan itself ever having migrated from elsewhere into Manipur and nor have the Meitei ever looked towards Burma, the Himalayas, India or China as sacred places.