CHAPTER SEVEN
Meitesi Polity
Polity may be defined as the form of an organised state. The form of the Meitei polity was monarchy. The term 'monarchy' has been used both in broad and narrow sense. Monarchy signifies a particular type of one person rule, characterised by legitimate blood descent, no matter how limited is the extent of the governing functions. The term may even cover regimes in which the monarch has no governing functions at all as in Great Britain and the Scandinavian kingdoms.¹ The form of the Meitei monarchy is being analysed within the meaning of a feudal state.

Different explanations have been given for the origin of monarchy in ancient Manipur. The origin of kingship seems to be influenced by the oriental and Hindu theory of origin of kingship. According to the Manipuri texts, the first divine king was Konchin Tuthokpa, while Kangba was the first human king. Konchin Tuthokpa according to myth was brought forth by Shiva Guru through respiration (interesting enough Guru itself is a Sanskrit word). So, this theory is perhaps related with the Hindus. A tradition current in Bengal narrates the tale of Ganesh outwitting his brother Kartikaya, competing in going around the universe for the succession

to the Guru. (Ganesh going around the mother Parvati while Kartikaya made a dash fly round the world on his peacock). 2 This story is similar with that of Sanamahi and Pakhangba of Phangkhong Koiba (going around the king's throne).

An understanding of clan organisation is necessary to trace out the origination of kingship. After their settlement in Manipur Valley, the proto-Meitei immigrants formed into groups and such ethnic and tribal groups were known as clans. These groups occupied different parts of the valley and had their own rulers. There was a chief or head which was commonly called 'Piba' of each clan or Selai. Piba was the chief of the clan. The positions of the chief or king and Piba were different. King or chief was the political head and the Piba was the social head who had to fulfil certain qualifications. A piba must be a first born son in a social wedlock; an widower could not be a piba. But these were not the essential qualifications for becoming a king or a chief.

The legendary origin of monarchy could be traced from the time of Kuptreng and Sentreng though there were much earlier references. When Tangja Langol Pakhangba

died, the courtiers selected Kuptreng, the elder brother as the administrator of the State while Sentreng the younger brother as the piba of his clan and the king of the state. After sometime, Sentreng had gone out of the principality for military conquest. During that period in the absence of Sentreng, the people suggested that Kuptreng ascend the throne by celebrating the coronation. Every arrangement was made and coronation ceremony was performed. At that very moment, Sentreng came back and with furious haste, he attempted to occupy the throne. Then, Kuptreng with a generous mind awarded the throne with the special costumes of the coronation to his younger brother. With this episode, the famous customary law for the coronation of the Meitei king was evolved and practised.3

Besides this legendary origin of monarchy, there also existed the popular selection theory of the origin of kingship and the theory of 'might is right'. Nongda Lairen Pakhangba was selected to be the chief of the valley of Manipur by the chiefs of four clans or salai and he was regarded as the leader of the four salais. Puleiromba was supported by the Khaba-Nganba clans as Khaba clan and Nganba clan were the descendents of Pureilemnsu, the younger

3 Ningthourol Seireng, p. 64.
sister of Puleiromba. But Nongda Lairen Pakhangba was not entitled as the king, instead he was styled as the chief of the seven clans (Kanglei Mayum Taretki Thoupupa). After that Khaba Shokchrongba, the Khaba chief who ruled in Kangle before Pakhangba Shokchrongba, the Khaba chief who ruled in Kangle before Pakhangba fought with Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. He defeated Pakhangba and deposed him. Pakhangba fled to Moirang.

There are some myths showing Nongda Lairen Pakhangba as the incarnation of Konjin Tuthokpa, the mythical god. He was described to be coming from the Sun god to the world underneath. He was given the title of Meitingu (Lord of the Meiteis). And he was also called as Ayuk Nungthil Laioiba Numidang Moiiba (i.e. god in the day-time and a human being in the night time). Thus, almost all the Meitei kings were assumed to be the incarnation of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba and the title of Meidingu was given to every Ningthouja king. But Nongda Lairen Pakhangba was the first historical monarch in the history of Manipur. He was a qualified leader even though there were some gaps in his period due to the Khaba's rebellion. But, he recovered his lost throne in due course. As he was the founder of Ningthouja principality he gathered all the scattered people

in a body under one rule in the valley.

The title Ningthem (king or chief) was widely used since the reign of Naokhamba (411-428)⁵, the sixth ruler from Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. Another phase was during the reign of Khagemba (1597-1625). The king was entitled as the Lainingthou⁶ (divine king). Again during the reign of Garibaniwaz (Pamheiba), the greatest king of Manipur with the coming of Vaisnavism, the king was entitled as "Maharaja".⁷

The king who was supreme in the kingdom was bound by many duties and customs. He must be a well trained, well equipped and physically fit person. But, for becoming a king there existed the system of nomination and selection in Meitei society. In the original theory of the Meitei monarchy and laws of succession on the throne, a king must be a son of the eldest queen.

But, according to the law of succession as enforced during the reign of Yoipathang Pathang Ahomba, Yuroinao Yaimaba and Kamu Atonba, the throne was given to the

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⁵ Ningthourol Seireng, p. 236.

⁶ Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 23.

youngest son. In the case of Yoimongba and Taotingmang, Yoimongba was probably defeated and killed by Taotingmang, instead of committing suicide as recorded in Pakhangba Laihui and other Puyas (texts). But the nomination of the king was generally done with the consent of nobles but the eldest son was mostly preferred and selected. Again, the people as well as the nobles supported only the cognate line of Pakhangba in the nomination of the king as in the case of Lairen Naophangba and Thangyi Naophang Ahanba. In this particular dispute the people referred the case to be settled by an ordeal by water, which was taken as the God's will in the succession.

In the case of forcible usurpation of the throne there was the instance of Sameirang (518-568 A.D.) and Thamanglang and their names were recorded in the Khoibu Stone Inscription. With a veil of understanding which was not related to any of the Meitei texts except one Yengkhom Sagei Puya (MS) recorded as under: Sameirang, the elder son of Lairen Naophangba was very naughty during his childhood and he went away from the capital. He went up to the Maring village of Khoibu and stayed there in the parental house of his wife Mapi. On the other hand, king Naophangba was succeeded by Thamanglang, the younger

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8 Pakhangba Laihui (MS).
son. When Sameirang got the news he descended from the Maring village and organised his army to rebel against Thamanglang of Mambirok of Langol hill. Sameirang defeated Thamanglang and usurped the throne. Thamanglang was carried away to the Khuman principality and then to elsewhere which nobody could trace him out in future. But Sameirang by virtue of his power and strength, was nominated as the Meitei king. If the king had no issue, he could be succeeded by any person according to the law of succession to the throne.

Selection and appointment of the Meitei king were made and continued throughout history of the Meitei monarchy as in the case of Nethingkhong (663-763 A.D.). In this particular case, it was found that there should be some quality and a good physique for the person concerned even though there was no such compulsion written or mentioned in the royal edict or public law.

NATURE OF MEITEI MONARCHY

The power of Meitei monarchy was derived from his origin as the leader of a horde of immigrants who became the chief or the king of the village or community. Sometimes, military conquest and the theory of popular selection were found to have been practised. The divine origin
of human race and even kingship is no doubt a universal superstition. So, the king was believed to be an incarnation of the Almighty to protect the weak and destroy the evil and tyrant.

The title Lainingthou (divine king) was first given to king Khagemba\(^9\) which was a claim for divine origin of Meitei king and an evidence of divine theory of kingship. Khagemba's reign was the most important period in the history of Manipur. He was influenced by the Hindu philosophy and perhaps by Shan and Burmese ideas. They were Kabaw Akracha, Lairikyengbam Jagat better known as Nongshemai Takhel Sankracharya and Konok Thengra and of local, Apoinanamacha, Yimnam Tomba, Khongangkhu Tetiba, Lamsoibi Phou and Khaideem Tomba. The Sanamahi cult was also quite popular during his time. His first beloved son who died at the age of 8 was believed to be the incarnation of god Sanamahi. So Khagemba, the father of the expired divine Sanamahi's incarnation was also assumed to be the God king or Lainingthou who was the part or parcel of the God. Thus, the theory of divinity of kingship which was essentially a medieval concept was introduced by king Khagemba in the 17th century.

\(^{9\text{ Ch. K., p. 28.}}\)
The concept of the divine incarnation of the king was also built into the political belief of the Meiteis. Starting from Nongda Lairen Pakhangba who was regarded as the incarnation of Konjin Tuthokpa, a divine king, all the Meitei kings were also assumed to be the incarnation of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, the founder of the Ningthouja dynasty. Besides this, the Meiteis also believed in the concept of rebirth as found in Thiren Layat and Matamgi Khonglei Takpa Puya in which King Khagemba sought the knowledge of the rebirth of man and salvation of soul for himself from the five scholars, philosophers of his court.

The five philosophers told him that he would be reborn for three times as a king.

OCCUPATION OF KANGLA, THE CENTRE OF MEITEI UNIVERSE

Kangla was the seat of the power of the Meitei monarchy. The appellation of Kangla has different meanings. According to W. Ibohol Singh, there are toponyms in South East Asian countries which have similarities with Kangla of Manipur valley (Kanla, Kalwa, Seva Kangla). Kangla is found to be a meaningful word with its connection. It is a compound word of two words 'Kang' and 'La'. The element Kang has the meaning of dry and La means a round-bamboo-

10 N. Ibochousta (Ed.) Thiren Layat, N. Minjao (Ed.) Matamgi Khonglei Takpa Puya.
made-lattice with upright shallow hem. Then the word Kangla denotes a spot enclosure of divine haunt and a royal palace from which the word Kangla meaning town or capital spot was derived. Kangla is believed by some to mean a dry land amidst the water logged Imphal valley.

At Kangla, there is a hole and many references are found in the royal chronicles of Manipur recording the ejection and emergence of smokes, sands, sparks from the hole from time to time. That is why the modern scholars confirm it as a volcano which was active in the unknown period and dormant up to 1868 A.D. in which year hot sands were blown out of the hole and a vigorous earthquake of the valley occurred which was known as 'Yuharaba Achouba' or the great earthquake.

Kangla was by nature a mound or a hillock surrounded by the marches and moor. In Meitei version, Kangla is entitled as Pingi Uaphonglek, Kurumching and Thengrumching. It was also assumed to be the navel of the earth or the centre of universe in the Meitei cosmic view as established during the reign of Laihen Naophangba (418-628 A.D.). Naophangba tried to build up a hall for his coronation. A scholar probably from Bengal came to Manipur to preach his cult and the king was brought under his whim. But a young scholar defeated this proto-Bengal missionary
who was recorded as 'Pangal' in Meitei text. Thus, according to the instruction of a scholar, named Laibe, the king constructed the hall of Kangla. From this time or according to the treatise of Laibe, the Meiteis got the idea and thought of diagrams of Pakhangba. Kangla is also supposed to be the centre of the divine Pakhangba whose diagrammatic representation (Pakhangba) is given in the opposite page.

But a renowned Sanskrit scholar Atombapu Sharma worked out the affinities of the Kangla diagram with Kundalin Maheshakti of Tantra Shastr and Yoga Shastr. The Meiteis established the philosophy of the storied spheres of the tri-world. Not only this, the Meitei also assumed that the Kangla was constructed on the navel of Leiren Taoroinai, a python-god and there were seven layers of different animals: i) a python, ii) a turtle, iii) a boar, iv) a cow, v) an elephant, vi) a fish and vii) a deity. So the place was called as Namthak Shaongpung (a mound of stories of animals). It is also assumed that there are several celestial spheres above the Kangla, they are, Awangkon, Ashikon, Lei yakon, Koroukon, Konlangbikon, Komunglangbikon and Tambakon. Again, Kangla was

11 Kangla Houba (MS).

12 Atombapu Sharma, Pakhangba, pp. 247-248.
surrounded by seven channels, namely, Khakhong, Laikhong, Marengkhong, Linlakhong, Phisukhong, Charoikhong and Yambikhong.\textsuperscript{13}

Naophangba constructed a building over the crater of the volcano and it was known as the Kangla Uttra. From his time onwards, the Ningthouja king's occupation of the Kangla was clear. But Nongda Lairen Pakhangba first came out from Selloi Longmai hill through Hanching and turned out the Khabas and the Chakpas,\textsuperscript{14} the previous rulers of the Kangla. But after sometime the Khabas, the Nganba and their ally the Khabas revolted and dethroned Nongda Lairen Pakhangba and seized Kangla. But Nongda Lairen Pakhangba recovered it about 10 years later. During the reign of Naophangba the Khabas and their allies were totally defeated and wiped out from the future political disturbances of the Ningthouja. Thus, Ningthouja dynasty was established at or about the surrounding area of Kangla which became a holy place of the Meiteis. Myths were created to make Kangla, the centre of the Meitei universe. This was both a seat of political power and religious place deeply associated with the cultural life of the Meiteis. Therefore, whoever occupied the Kangla was believed to be blessed by God and its occupants had got divine sanc-

\textsuperscript{13} Sakok Lamlen Ahanba Puya (MS).

\textsuperscript{14} Chakpa Khunthok Khunda (MS).
tion to administer the land. So, the people gave allegiance to him and became his subjects.

**EVOLUTION OF MEITEI KINGSHIP**

King is denoted by the word 'Ningthou' in Meitei vocabulary which is a compound word of Ning = back or behind, thou = drive or encourage. So, the Ningthou which denotes a king is a true political person appropriated to the political affairs of the state. Many titles were given to the kings according to his activities in the course of his life and administrative events among which the most popular are Tubi, Lairel, Lainingthou or Laiyingthou, Meitingngu, Maharaja, Raja, etc.

**CLAN CHIEFTAINSHIP**

The clan is a community of people who are grouped in accordance with the affinities of blood lineage and cultural affinities. Such groups were called Salai as found even to-day. The legends of the formation of Salais or clans point to their origination from the Supreme God. After the formation of their grouping they were occupying different parts of the valley and also speaking their own different languages. So, they needed a leader or chief for their protection to look after them etc. Therefore a qualified person though not actually
fulfilling the qualifications but more talented in military arts and with commanding personality was brought forward by the community as their chief. After him, the chiefs might have been selected by the community.

Under the leadership of the chief, each clan made a well organised form of administration. In course of time, the clans gave their support to each other to keep a firm political position of the country by making political and matrimonial alliances. However, despite their alliances, they too fought each other for the political supremacy.

**KINGSHIP DEPENDENT ON THE SUPPORT OF THE CLAN PEOPLE**

The people of Manipur are the composite agglomerate of different ethnic groups. They are grouped according to their cultural affinities or by the frequent touches and contacts. Such groups, whether they were descended from the same progenitor or not, had a notion of a common origin and were termed as salai or clan. Such main clans are: i) Laren, Leishang, ii) Khaba-Kganba, iii) Moirang, iv) Angom, v) Ningthouja, vi) Luwbang, vii) Khuman. Inspite of their separate progenitors as mentioned above, they established the common origin of the seven clans from the common Almighty. And the social head of a particular clan was called as Pibarel of the clan. In the ancient time,
their words were taken as the law and the divine command. They were taken as the patron of the salai/clan rather than a representative of the salai. So the Khaba-Nganba raised their protest against the Ninghouja for nominating Puleiromba instead of their chief, their matrilineal relative to act as their clan chief. 15

From the very beginning of the history of the Ninghouja, they appear to be a small as well as supportless group. Had it not been Nongda Nongkhalembi or Yabirok who acted for her son, there would be no political upliftment of Ninghouja dynasty. But other clans were made their relatives and allies before Ninghouja made their alliance with the other clans. Inspite of such relations and alliance, Kaoophangba was successful to establish a firm base of the Ninghouja in the central valley of Manipur by the matrimonial alliance of the Khuman and political support of the Luwang clan.

During the anarchical period of Manipur before Nongda Laien Hakhangba the chief of Koubri hills and the Seloi - Langmai, hills played important roles in the political history of Manipur. The chiefs of Seloi Langmai became the most powerful political leaders called as Lorael

Ariba Ahum (the three old Sorarels), i) Nongpok Achiba, ii) Sanamahi, iii) Atiya Sidaba and other Sorarels of Koubru hill which is mentioned in the Konthoujam Lairembi Nongerol (MS). The three well known Sorarels were: i) Angom Puleiromba, ii) Thangyi Sorarel, iii) Luwang Langmaiba. There were no powers at that time, to compete with them. Among the three, the most commanding figure was Angom Puleiromba.

Kongde Nongkhallambti who resided in the adjoining hill villages of the three Sorarels took help for her son. Thus with the support of the three Sorarels backing Pakhangba nobody was able to raise their standard for the Kangla. After sometime Thangyi Sorarel retired himself from the support of Pakhangba before his accession at Kangla. Srey, he was successful in the organisation of the Ningthouja kingdom. Thus Ningthouja's kingdom wholly depended on the clan supports. By the by, other clans were also absorbed by the Ningthouja kingdom. The main power of Ningthouja was constituted by the people of different clans. During the time of king Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.) the high post of administration of Manipur was given to the Ningthouja dynasty or family. Before him almost all the posts were held by the persons of

16 Last Layon (MS).
of various clan localities. When the Ningthouja king was weak, the chieftains of other principalities helped him as in the case of Kainou Irengba (984-1074 A.D.) who was supported by his father-in-law Khamlangpa, the Khuman chief and he was allowed to stay in the Khuman territory at the present Irengpam village where a bund was raised by him.

Nongda Lairon Pakhangba was the founder of Ningthouja dynasty. When he came out from his hide-out with his companions and arrived at Kurumching (Kangla), the three Corarels arranged and constructed his residential name.

After the establishment of the Ningthouja’s power in the valley they established overlordship over the other clans or principalities. The boundary of Ningthouja kingdom also extended or contracted from time to time according to the abilities of the kings.

The overlordship of the Ningthouja was highly developed during the time of king Naokhomba. His matrimonial alliance with the Khuman is probably a sound footing of the foundation of the Ningthouja principality in the earlier periods up to Naethingkhong. As Naethingkhong had along stay at Khuman principality he was well known among the Khuman and he could make the contact with

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17 N. Khelachandra, Phamlon, 1987, Imphal, p.3.
the far off chiefdom of Moirang and made the matrimonial relation with the Khuman and the Moirang principalities. The Angoma neglected the relations with the Ningthoujas after Khuyoi Tompok (154-216 A.D.) and violated the Meitei chiefdom by raising a revolt against the Meitei during the reign of Sameirang but were subdued by the Meitei.

FORMATION OF THE MEITEI POLITY

Chiefship during pre-Pakhangba period: The chiefship before the time of Pakhangba has been referred to in many accounts. Mention has been made of Awang Pakhang Yoi-renba or Sorarel (Konthoujam Lairambi, Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba) and their high status in the society. Most of the chiefs of Koubru hill and Selloi Langmai were given the title of Sorarel. It is also described that the chiefs of the different regions of Manipur were sent down from Koubru for smooth running of administration as Thangiing the Lord and Chief of Moirang was sent to create Moirang and to administer thereof, Wangbren to defend the southern border and administer thereof, Loiyalakpa, to the north western side etc. Thus, the nine Laibungthou or the Umanglai Mapen (the nine-sylvian deities) were located in different parts of Manipur and they became the chiefs of the respective places.

18 Wangbren Khunkhumlon (MS).
The chiefship of Koubru ranges was referred to when two brothers of Angom of Khangkhui became chiefs. There were many numbers of Sorarels of Koubru. The elder brother of Angou Puleiromba settled for sometime at Thangal in a range which was an offshoot of the Koubru and came down in search of his brother. Angou was establishing the chiefship somewhere near the central part of the valley when his brother arrived; he was also appointed the chief of some group of people but he went to the Selloi Langmai hill. When one Pakhangba (probably the Sentreng Pakhangba) killed Kainou Chingshomba, the other two notable chiefs came up. The two chiefs were the inhabitants of Selloi Langmai hill and they were brought under the terms of inter clan alliance with Puleiromba. The chiefs of Khaba and Nganba had close contact and had the same opinion in fighting with Angou who had driven them away from their abode of Kangla. But many Puleirombas are mentioned among the Angom - Angou Puleiromba, Purang Puleiromba, Chingwanglekki Puleiromba, Chingmit Puleiromba, Khamnong Iwai Puleiromba, Tupu Puleiromba, Thanghang Puleiromba, Kainou Chingsombas Puleiromba, etc. In among the

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three chieftains, the one who was given the title of Luwang Langmaiba was probably a Phunal chief.

As there was no absolute power in the country, the different groups were trying to extend their respective hegemony. The hill dwellers were more powerful than lowland people or valley people. The hill people were known as 'Lai' (god) probably the superior class and the plain people known as 'Saroi', 20 the interior group. Thus, almost all the powerful chiefs of Manipur were hill dwelling people until the period of king Urakonthouba (568-658 A.D.).

**Expansion of Meitei Kingdom**

The Meitei kingdom originally had a limited territory up to the reign of Khuyoi Tampok which had a boundary at Hanna ching Chingmei in the north, Iril and Kongba river in the east, Lamdaibung in the south and Iroisenba in the west. In the early times, there were no expansion of the territory of the kingdom. By the time of Urakonthouba, the northern boundary of Meitei kingdom was at Khumidok in north Imphal. Some lands were transferred by the Khuman chief whose daughter was the chief queen of Naethingkhong (663-763 A.D.). Thus, the Meitei kingdom was extended

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20 S. Moirangamba & Kh. Kumar, Sakok Lamlen, p.35.
After him his son Punshita subdued the hill villages of Tangkhul Monthou Koireng in Koubru hill village and Maring. He too defeated the Thanga Kambong. But he lost his life when he tried to expand his boundary against Moirang. So Ningthoukhomba, his son and successor (1435-1467 A.D.) crushed the Moirang principality and brought it under his rule in 1435 A.D. King Ningthoukhomba also extended upto the boundaries of Kabaw valley by defeating the hill villages.

Kyamba (1467-1508 A.D.), the diplomat king made his foreign alliance with the king of Mao-Shan Cheophha Khekhomba of Pong in upper Burma. With the help of the Pong king, Kyamba annexed the southern portion of the Samsook present Thangdut including the area of Loijiri on the north, the hill area under the name of Miyatong in the south.

King Lampaingamba (1512-1523 A.D.) tried to extend the boundary of Manipur by conquering the hill villages of Lamkang, Tusuk, Koireng in the south Samphu Narunching in Khoibu range in the east. He also invaded the Telong Lammepak of Kabaw valley and extended his overlordship to the conquered area.

King Chalamba (1545-1562 A.D.) also expanded the kingdom and he defeated the villages of Lanhang in 1558 A.D., Anan in 1559 A.D., Thingnong, Meinung and Narum 1560 A.D.
and Ithing in 1561 A.D. His son Mungyamba (1562-1597 A.D.) extended his kingdom up to Thanggang and Nongmei in Burma by defeating the native village chiefs.

King Khagemba strengthened the frontier of Manipur and consolidated the Ningthouja rule over the hills and drove away the foreign invaders from the west.

The policy of conquest and defence was not the only way for extension and expansion of the boundary of Manipur. The policy of integration and amalgamation was also adopted by the Meitei kings, like matrimonial alliance and the mutual helps among the kings.

CREATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY: NOBILITY AND OFFICIALDOM.

As the form of government was monarchy, naturally the king was the sovereign with absolute power. But in practice, the monarch's power was greatly limited by the ministers and traditional nobles who were selected from different parts of the kingdom to attend the royal court. Public opinion was an important factor that restrained the power of the king and the whole state. Some scholars had tried to show the federal and democratic nature of the monarchy in Manipur. But it is not an accurate description of the monarchy in this kingdom.

23 Nandalal Sharma, Meitrobak, Imphal, 1960, p. 16.
The functions of the monarchy were numerous as the king was the head of all the state transactions in general, they were administrative, social, financial, religious and private functions. All these functions were executed by the king himself or by his order by delegating powers to his officers like Ningthou Pongba Tara (the ten nobles who acted as a sort of advisor counsellors) and 64 (sixty four) Phamdous (Phamdous were the representatives of people selected from every administrative division). They assisted the king in the administration of the kingdom. The posts of the Ningthou Pongba Tara existed during pre-Pakhangba's period, as Numit Sana Khomdon was searched by the Ningthou Pongba Tara from his hiding place.\(^{24}\) They were composed of Pukhranba, Nongthonba, Hiyangloi Hanjaba, Chongkhanba Hanjaba, Imingloi Hanjaba, Imingloi Hanjaba, Khwailakpa, Yaiskullakpa, Neikhulakpa and Phamthakcha in the later period. Some exclusive functions of the king in the private life were still in the hands of the monarch; even some of them were checked by the elders of the royal family. There were close relations between the king and the officials.

In the civil administration, there were the executive, legislative and judicial functions. The executive function included internal affairs, normal duties of gover-

\(^{24}\) O. Bhogeshore, Numit Kappa, Imphal, 1977, p.6.
ning of the state and other functions entrusted to them by the nobles or representatives of the people. The judicial function was channelised by many courts from lowest to the highest, cited as Khundin (village court), Panaloishang (like district court), Kuchu and Pacha. Kuchu was the highest court while Pacha was a special court for the females. These two courts were established during the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba and Cheirap, the highest court was established during the reign of Khuyoi Tompok under the advice of Thongak Kurumba or Langol Kurumba or Mangang Punshiba by appointing Angou Panba, the social head of the Angom (piba) as the Langjei Phamba (sitting at the centre) or the chief justice. But the decision of the king was the final.

MILITARY ORGANISATION

The Meitei state was more or less based on military system. The military organisation was an important branch of any government. In the history of Manipur, military organisation was found since the time of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. Reference was made to an army with which Pakhangba occupied the Kangla. Even though the posts of the nobles were created in the later period, the idea of well trained and well organised army had existed since his reign. During the time of Khuyoi Tompok, son of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba,
the military organisation of the country was further developed and a new system of alerting the people by beating the war drums was introduced; he was the innovator of the drum.

The strength of the army was not fixed as it consisted of all the able men from 16 to 60 years of age under the lallup system which will be described in a later stage. Every male was obligated to act as a soldier. Compulsory military services was to be performed by the people.

Infantry was the only main wing of the military system of early time. No record was found of the use of vehicles. The weapons were dao, swords, shields, spikes, spears, logs, bows and arrows, knives, etc. The making of gun was started during the time of Khagamba. The mode of warfare was mass attack at one time and destruction of everything and reducing the enemy villages to ashes. If any battle was fought, the conquerors collected whatever they got and war booty and even the beautiful ladies for them.

There was no separate department of military administration and the king was the supreme commander. During the

25 Thanglon Thangchat (MS).
26 Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 24.
peace time, they were the civil servants, craftsmen, artisans, cultivator and workers of the state. The king could delegate his military power and empowered any person in the state from time to time, in emergencies and in the time of need.

Riverine navy was simultaneously developed. But the principalities of the Khuman and Moirang wholly depended on boat army. The surrounding hills in the Ningthouja kingdom and Moirang principalities provided enough timber for boat making. The dug-out canoes were used both for transportation on the river and lakes, and war machines. The cavalry or horse force was developed at an early period. Naotningkhong Phambai Kaba refers to horse riding soldiers used by king Uraokonhouba against the Salloi Langmais. Later on cavalry became a dreaded wing of the armed forces during military campaigns against Shans and Burmese. The famous sling type weapon known as the Arambai was the most effective weapon of the Meitei cavalry. Cavalry could be built up because of the abundance of ponies in Manipur valley. They were kept by many families including the nobles. Elephants came to be associated with the Manipur army, specially in the Burmese wars of the 18th century.

LALLUP SYSTEM

During the reign of Meitei king Loiyamba (1074–1112
A.D.) a new order of militia was introduced. With the development of the different villages Loiyamba established a regular available force to render service to the state at any time. So he and his nobles decided to order every subject to spare a few days in a month, "each male between 17 and 60 was supposed to render to the state ten days labour out of every forty." The lallup in another sense was organised with the objects of war. Lallup means war organisation, 'lal' means war and 'lup' means association in Meitei vocabulary. The lallup organisation was a military organisation, but in the piping times of peace it was made to play a part in the economic life of the country. Thus, the actual introduction of lallup system was during the reign of King Loiyamba which was supported by the royal chronicle.

Under the lallup system, the menfolk was to attend the capital. In the early stage of lallup organisation, the people were alerted for defence of the country. If anybody failed to respond to the assigned duty, he was punished. Sometimes, double infliction was meted out for

29 Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 4.
negligence of duty which was expressed by the Meitei ironical proverb, "Lallupshu Kaba Washashu Chaba" (attendance of lallup and receipt of rebuke).

T.C. Hodson observes the following on the Lallup system. The definition of Lallup was given to me by an experienced authority is the duty of appearing at the king's office (loisang) ten days, and doing the proper work of the grade to which the person belonged. For the following 30 days he remained at home. If a man did not come to his lallup, he forfeited one rupee and for this sum a substitute was hired. The following is the vernacular statement.

"Ninghouja Loisangda (amasung office-da) numit tarani kaduna lallupki thabak toururage numit kunthrani mayumda leijei. Lallup kadruduna mi aduna toklabadi lallup amada lupa amalouba hounei, asina mahut mi neknei. "Khundin is a branch of lallup and consists of the duty of seeing that the men liable to lallup, are regular in attendance and cover cases of illness where a substitute is provided." Lallup Kagadaba leiba adubu khundin kaoajei. Mi adugi karigumbada thabak leiba amadi ana ayek leiraduna lallup karoidaba leirabadi laijarabasung, mihut pirabasung, khundin numitta karakadaba lallup chingba, machahlena chingba kaduna khangnaba haonei."

"Chingjin-langan thao kai haibadi"

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There was special duty to be performed in the months of Asin or Bhadra. The absentee made a bargain for substituting a man who received the sum of four which extended for three months and according to which the substitute received six rupees. "Mayumda kumdana tha ani loisangda sarucargi numit khuding thabak tuye, mi aduna karo i hainga mi amada chinginlangpan haiba touge haiba asimad raupa mari wasa asi, Matamdi Langpantha Maratha."

The last regulation mentioned is the "Aka akum thingba". This referred to any special work. In cases where the men of any area found that the work imposed on them was beyond their powers it was possible to call in men from the whole area till the work was finished. "Lam amada thabak achaoba khun ama aniduna ngamaba thabak thoklabadi lam adugi mi makhai lalup kaduna thabak loidribi makhai touge lalupti lam amaramda mina (hum kotli) loi."

R. Brown writes, "the general system of Lallup is based on the assumption that it is the duty of every male between the ages of 17 and 60 to place his services at the disposal of the state, without remuneration for a certain number of days in each year. The system of lallup was first introduced, it is said, in the reign of Pakhangba, and it

has undergone little change since. The number of days thus placed nominally at the disposal of the state is ten days in every forty. The ten days service is so arranged that a man works his ten days and has his interval of thirty with regularity all year round. On an individual coming of age to perform Lallup, he is entitled to cultivate for his support one parsee of land, subject to the payment in kind of the tax to the raja. In the case of permanent illness or disability a man under sixty may be excused from labour, but notice must be given and the authorities satisfied of the true nature of the case. In the event of an individual wishing to escape his turn of duty, he must either provide a substitute or pay a certain sum, which goes to pay for a substitute if required, or rest of the Lallup may agree to do the extra duty receiving the money. In no case does the money paid for exemption go to government. A payment of twelve annas will, it is said, exempt a man for forty days. Over every Lallup or class or labour independent of number is an officer named the 'Lakpa' who is responsible for the performance of the prescribed duties. There is no lallup for woman." This lallup is often miscalled force labour. "Each individual liable for Lallup or force labour for the state is entitled to cultivate for his support one parsee of and, equivalent to about three English
acres, subject to the payment of the regular law in king.\textsuperscript{32}

From the above accounts it can be concluded that lallup was not merely a warfare organisation but also an public institution. There were no regular officers separately in the lallup service in the olden days. Lallup was feudal service to the state both for military and revenue purpose. B.C. Allen calls it corvee labour.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{REVENUE SYSTEM}

It has been assumed in the theories of state formation that only when a community produced surplus which could be given as revenues by the people, the institution of the state emerged. The Meitei state during the period of present study grew up gradually to become a consolidated and a well ordered feudal state in the 15th century. Historical evidences are not sufficient enough to reconstruct the history of revenue system in ancient Manipur. But the royal edict of king Loiyamba known as Loiyamba Shinyen with later modifications and another works known as the Mashiin and Loina Shinlon give some sketchy information about the revenue system. From the 15th to 17th century we have more or less dependable sources of information.

\textsuperscript{32} T.C. Hodson, p. 85.

\textsuperscript{33} B.C. Allen \textit{op.cit.}, p. 115.
The early Meitei state did not realise revenues as such from the subjects. But services were rendered by the people to the state under lallup system which has been discussed above. The lallup service is both military and productive activities. Basing on the lallup service the state gave quota of revenue to be rendered in terms of kind. Loiyamba Shinyen fixes the quantum of tributes to be paid to the state by different communities and villages. Generally, revenues were collected during the time of harvesting. Tributes were also an important source of revenue of the state. Many of the conquered communities had to pay tribute in forms of essential commodities like, cloths, cattle, baskets, forest products, herbs, agriculture products. The tributes were also divided into two forms, annual and occasional tributes.

The greatest source of revenue was the tax on land specially cultivable paddy fields. It is likely that when the people were shifting cultivators and were living under a subsistence economy, no tax was imposed on lands but when settled agriculture was introduced, the state imposed taxes in forms of certain quantum of paddy as taxes. Though the state or the monarch asserted its sole proprietorship or ownership over all the land in the kingdom, as T.C. Hodson writes, "The system (of land ownership) is of severalty, as is to be expected in the country where permanent settle-
ment is possible, but the number and importance of the
protests which have from time to time been made against the
unrestricted alienation of land by Manipuris to Muhammadans
and other persons of alien descent, the vigorous denuncia-
tion of the speculative tricksters, who took out leases for
the waste lands near outlying villages and charged exorbi-
tant rent for grazing or grass cutting and the strength of
the village system afford evidence that the real nature of
the tenure of non-arable land was communal and joint while
cultivated fields were held in severalty, a sure proof that
we have to deal with a state of affairs halfway between
absolute joint tenure and perfect severalty. 34

However, the king could allot the lands for settle-
ment of war captives and of the individual cultivation
From Nongda Laien Pakhangba to Mungyambe, rewards were
given to war heroes or scholars in form of land and cloth
(Laiphi phimu) but from the time of Khagembe (1597–1652)
land grants were abolished and he introduced a new system
of awarding cloth prizes under the name and style of the
designing of the land as pariphi equivalent to the prize
of one pari of land.

Lourungpurel was the head of the land revenue depart-
ment. He collected, with the help of revenue officers in

34 T.C. Hodson, p. 85.
form of taxes (12 pots of paddy per hectare). In other revenue matters, Keirungba and several Selungbas took the charge of collection of the forest products, tributes and made payment in the need thereof. Later on, there were appointed some Lambus or collector-cum-intermediary between the monarch and the general people, under the Selungba. The revenues of the country were received from different sources. It was collected into two ways, i.e. in cash and in kinds or as labour in lallup.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS: PANA SYSTEM

N. Ibobi Singh argued on the basis of an ancient manuscript called Khunthok Nipan Lamyenba that before 1074 A.D. the Ningthouja kingdom was divided into 32 divisions. Each division was divided into villages. However, the most popular form of administrative division was originally the Pana system. The administrative divisions were both territorial and functional. The two supplemented each other. It has been claimed that the pana system was personal and not territorial according to T.C. Hodson. The word Pana is recorded in chronicles during the 16th century. It has been suggested that the earlier name of pana was lup and

35 N. Ibobi Singh, Manipur Administration, 1976, Imphal, pp. 87-89.

36 T.C. Hodson, op. cit., p. 58.
in 1074 A.D. Loiyamba according to Cheitharol Kumbaba established six lups. Pana was Shan word which was perhaps used in Manipur after the conquest of Kabaw valley. Several scholars argued that panas or lups were first established during the reign of Pakhangba. Originally there were four lups, Ahallup, Nahalup, Khabam and Laipham. However, Cheitharol Kumbaba, records the introduction of six administrative divisions during the reign of Loiyamba, namely, i) Luplenlup, ii) Thouchalup, iii) Kongchalup, iv) Luchubalup, v) Chingchalup and vi) Khaichalup. Therefore, the four administrative divisions which were supposed to have been established by Pakhangba was a latter manipulation. In later years the panas were territorial divisions which became functional divisions of the people. The six panas were grouped into three bigger groups, Laipham pana and Khabam pana were known as Khunja; the Ahallup and Nahalup pana were collectively known as the Naija; the Potsangba and Hidakphalba were known as Pana khumei (inferior pana).

The lallup service was rendered through the panas. It appears that the panas were meant for military purposes but it was utilised for economic, cultural and social

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37 Cheitharol Kumbaba, p.4.
purposes later on. The armed forces were organised on the basis of pana. Other feudal services were rendered on the basis of pana, so also sports like, boat race, wrestling, hockey, horse hockey and race.

Every pana was divided into two departments, Sanglen and Sangkhuba. In each department, there were about 10 (ten) officers. For example, the officers of the Sanglen were Lakpa, Dewan, Hanjaba, Pakhanglakpa, Nahalakpa, Chingshuba Ahan, Chingshuba Naha and Keirungba. Officials of Sangkhuba were Lairen lakpa, Hanjaba, Hideng, Pakhang-lakpa, Nahalakpa, Chingshuba Ahan, Chingshuba Naha.

The capital which was the heartland of the Ning-thouja kingdom in which was located the Kangla was divided into four administrative divisions namely, Khurai, Wangkhei, Khwai and Yaiskul. The four lakpas were appointed from amongst the royal princes and great importance were given to them.