CHAPTER - EIGHT
The Early Meitei Society and Economy
From the earliest period covering the neolithic social order of food gathering economy to archaic agricultural and ultimately to a peasantised and highly stratified society of the 17th century, the ancient Meitei had built up a very stable social organisation in the formation of which ethnic, economic, religious and cultural factors had made their distinctive contributions. However, the cohesive and well organised social structure was created by the unifying social policy of the Ningthouja rulers who had the longest dynastic rule in Manipur.

The Meitei society which was perfected in the 17th century was a society based on kinship especially the salai (clan), lineage and families. The clan system is the foundation of the Meitei social formation.¹ A clan is a group of individuals who believe themselves to be a common descendants of a real or mythical ancestors.² It is constituted of all the relatives of either the mother's or father's lineage and all the offspring of one ancestor in a lineage. There are some characteristics of a clan.³

1. It is an exogenous group. The members of a clan do not marry any member of their clan.

¹ 'Meitei' originally covered the people belonging to the Ningthouja clan who became the ruling dynasty in Manipur in the historical times.

² Vidya Bhushan, An Introduction to Sociology, p.205.

³ Ibid.
II. The members of a clan believe in one common ancestor real or mythical.

III. It is an unilateral group. It consists of all the families either on the mother’s side or the father’s side.

In Meitei society, there are seven clans or Salais, namely Ningthouja or (Mangang), Luwang, Angom, Khuman, Moirang, Khaba Nganba and Sarang-Leishangthem. With regard to the origin of these salais different views are put forward by different scholars based on the diverse accounts given in the ancient literary text. There are myths and legends which give the account of the origination of Salai or Clan.

According to Khagamba Yumlep, Khagamba Yumbi, Yumda Yumkhailon, Meihoubarol Salai Pukok, the various clans originated from the immortal body of the Supreme God, Salai-len Sidaba when He created the first human being in His own image by ejaculating from different organs of His body and were named under the nature of their emergence: the one who ejaculated in red tint from the heart of Him called Nganba (shiny), the another from the tongue with elongated medium called Sarang Leishangthem, the person from the top height of the brain coming out highly was called Luwang, the one who emerged from the right arm was called Khuman, the another from the throat was Angomba or Angom and the one who
ejaculated from the eye in mixed colour was Moirang.

But Atombapu Sharma in his books, "Pakhangba" and "Manipur Itihas" mentions the division of the Almighty's dead body as cow to the seven salais.\footnote{Atombapu Sharma, Pakhangba, 1957, Imphal, p.2, Manipur Itihas.} The body of the Lord in the form of a seemingly dead cow floated down the Imphal river from Marongkhong to Purumching.\footnote{Ukak Latha (MS).} The persons were named as per the share they got from the body of the dead cow as their group name. The group of Kuptreng who got the white portion of neck was then called Angom Salai, Sentreng's group who got the beautiful eye was called Ninghouja, Paming's group who received the brain was called Luwang, Leishangtao got the front legs and his group was called Khuman, Konsourel's group who got the spotted part of the tail came to be known as Moirang and Ashang and Tumaba also got the face and heart and they were called Chenglel, Khaba and Nganba respectively.

The genealogy of clans shows that they originated from three sons of the Supreme God Atingkok - Ashiba, Atiya and Konjin Tuthokpa.

As regards the progenitors of the Angom and Ninghouja clans, according to the genealogy, the Atingkok Guru's son was Konjin Tuthokpa, whose son Leishanglten Ashangba was born
of Leikak Leiyarel, Leishanglen Ahangba's son was Leitonglen Mongba, his son was Leitonglen Lindang Shangba whose son was Konsouren. Konsouren had two sons, Sentreng and Kuptreng. The descendants of Sentreng formed the Ningthouja clan and that of Kuptreng became the Angom.

Atiya, another son of Atingkok Guru was the father of Humlen and Nongdamlen Akhuba. Nongdamlen Akhuba's son was Pongthang. Pongthang's son was Ponghan whose son was Long-jumba. Heirongang Thonganglen was the son of Longjumba and the later had two sons, Paming and Arong whose descendants were Luwang and Khuman respectively.

Another son of Atingkok Guru was Ashiba. Ashiba was the father of Yucheng and Yukourel. Yukourel's son Sana Khing-Khinglangba had two sons, Hebu Kangchikpa and Ngangcheng Leitakpa. Their sons were Nganghunthok and Ngangningshing. Their descendants formed the Moirang clan.

While Ashiba was known as Shanthong whose son was Khum Khum; his son was king Kangba Kanglen whose son was Tharong. He had two sons Lamlakshang Haoiba and Nungouyum-thangba. The latter's descendants came to be known as Leishangthem.

On the contrary, Sakok Lamlen mentions that there was no Salai in the Meitei society before the reign of Nongda
Lairen Pakhangba. Another version mentions that Pakhangba had seven sons of his seven wives at different hours of time of the day and named the sons as per time of their birth.

Relating the theory of the birth of seven salais by the seven goddesses and calling them with different names thereof, according to S.K. Chatterjee the seven salais were born of the seven Apearas, goddess dancers and they are converted into Hindu Gotras after the Meitei conversion into Hinduism. The seven geiros, Sandilya, Kasyapa, Madhuglya, Naimisy, Aitereya and Bharadhawaja referring to the version of the Meitei texts regarding the evolution of the seven salais from different parts of the body of the Guru as Ningthouja from the left eye. Angom from the left and right nose-stri- lls, Moirang from the mouth, Chenglei and Khaba - Nganba from the right and left ears. There is an assimilating account of the Hindu caste system that the different castes were made to originate from the different organs of the Lord Brahma like mouth, hand, heart and foot etc. from the Rigvedic version. This is a reflection of process of Sanskritisation of Manipur in the 18th century onwards.

6 Sakok Samlen edited by S. Moirangamba & Kh. Kumar, Imphal, 1985, p.3.


Apart from the above accounts there were several distinct tribes in Manipur, which were later on grouped together into seven salais. These salais did not come into existence simultaneously but emerged in different ages and in different areas. Only the four salais namely, Angom, Moirang, Khaba - Nganba and Chengleib were in existence and flourished in different principalities years before the beginning of the Christian era, the remaining three namely, Khuman, Luwang and Ningthouja emerged around the beginning of the first century A.D. However, there is evidence of the existence of a group still known as Ningthouja Ariba before the era of king Pakhangba. A Sagei of this group Kanghujam Salai founded by king Pakhangba became a noble in the court of king Pakhangba with the title of Pukhan Selunba.

In Meitei society, there were another groups of people who were entitled as 'Loi'. Socially they were peripheral group and were prohibited to marry with other groups. But, the Loi people were not a different group from the ethnic point of view from the Meiteis. Sekmai, Fayeng, Andro,

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9 S.N. Farratt, Religion of Manipur, 1980, Calcutta, p. 3.


11 Kanghujamlon (MS).
Chairel, some villages of Kakching and Chandrakhong were important places for the settlement of Loi people. T.C. Hodson gives the origin of the Loi people of different areas. The Sekmai villagers have moved there from the south. Fayeng people preserve a tradition that they once occupied the site of the Kangla from where they were driven out by Pakhangba. Andro Loi claims the same origin. The villagers of Chairel situated on the Imphal river, not far from Shugnu, declare that they once occupied the slopes of Nongmaiching. The Lois in the south-east of the valley at Kakching who live by iron-smelting were once under the rule of the Heirock chief whose dominion stretched from Kakching to the Imphal river. Even though these Loi people coming from different directions and were settled at different areas, most of the Loi people were expelled by the king from the common society for violating certain norms of social customs and usage. Rather than this, those captives who were captured at the time of war and aggression were also included into the Loi section.

Besides, the Loi people, there were another section of people known as Kei in the early Meitei society. They were the servants of king and their services were to serve the royal family or the king. The Keis were not found.

earlier than the reign of king Naophangba (428-51 A.D.).

Other ethnic groups who lived in Manipur during the historical times were the various hill tribes, the Muslim immigrants known as Meitei Pangal.

STRUCTURE OF MEITEI SOCIETY: MEITEI KINSHIP

In every society, kinship has been the basis of social organisation, asserting its influence in the economy, political life, religious and even in warfare. It is a relationship that is close and enduring enough to sustain a sense of common origin and commitment. Kinship is a social organisation.

There are two types of kinship in the society. They are:

i) Affinal kinship i.e. the bond of marriage, ii) Consanguineous kinship i.e. the bond of blood relationship. Both systems of kinship were found in Meitei society like, Iyanupa (son-in-law), Ishenupa (brother-in-law), Immonupi (daughter-in-law) and son, daughter, brother, sister, uncle, nephew, etc.


In Meitei society, the smallest unit was a 'Phunga' or a fire place where a kitchen was installed for a husband and a wife at the first instant of their separation, from the parent by marriage. A number of Phungas were developed into a Yum or household when there were issues. Such a Yum or household was under the control of the father. Thus, the Meitei society was a patriarchal form and if the father expired the mother supervised the household. Many a number of households (yum) having different yumnaks (surname of the family) made up different groups. Yumnaks were the sub-groups of seven yeks. Such groups were called Cagai or Sakhai which meant the kin group of some blood line. 'Yek' was another term which existed in Meitei social structure. There were seven yeks as the seven salais or clan, i.e. Ningthouja, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Khaba-Nganba, Chenglei and Sarang-Leishangthem. The kin group falling within the prohibited degree of relationship for the purpose of marriage was known as Yek. From this point of view, one might regard yek system as a marriage system. But in fact, yek indicates blood relationship. Actually yek system is a social organisation which exists within the different salai (clan).

**SOCIAL STRATIFICATION**

Everywhere society is divided into classes or strata
which for a hierarchy of prestige and power; as such hierarchical division is known as social stratification. According to Raymond W. Murray, "Social stratification" is a horizontal division of society into higher and lower social units."16 Again according to Cisbert, "Social stratification is the division of society into permanent groups or categories linked with each other by the relationship of superiority and subordination."17 This social stratification may have originated from the conquest of one group by another. The conquering group set himself as an upper class dominating the conquered class, which became lower class.

The social stratification was made on the basis of different caste or class position, but not on the basis of sex, age and kinship.18 There were four main types of social stratification, slavery, estate, caste and social class, and status.19 In the early time there were four

16 Quoted in Vidya Roshan, op.cit., p. 282.
17 Ibid.
divisions of classes in the Meitei society: i) king or chief, ii) noble (feudal lord), iii) common people iv) slaves.

Social stratification existed before the time of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. Sovereign powers or privileged groups always looked down upon their subordinate chiefs and their subjects or unprivileged groups. As an evidence of it, the story of Kwai Nungchangbam piba, a servant of Numit Sana Khomdon, the chief of the Kangla was so severely engaged in the duties in the royal household that he could not look after his family. He revolted against Numit Sana Khomdon and his brother Teohuireng Ahanba. This was a revolt against the oppressive rule of feudal chief by the common people. This episode also showed the existence of system of slavery in the primitive Meitei society. Another reference is that of the Ningthou Pongba Tara (the ten noblemen or ten regional chieftains) and priest and priestess who tried to call Numit Sana Khomdon from his hiding place. There was a sort of feudal social order in ancient Meitei society.

MARRIAGE SYSTEM

Marriage is a socio-religious institution. It is the socially approved custom whereby two or more persons

established a family. Many marriage systems and rules existed in Meitei society. The Meiteis are generally exogamous but endogamy was found in the early times. Khaba Shokchromba alias Leirenhan, the father-in-law of Panthoibi married a woman Nanotongcha of his own clan (Khaba clan). 21 Actually, this endogamous system is prohibited in Meitei society but this practices is prevalent among the members of other hill tribes. 22 Politically, the introduction or the practice of endogamy can broaden and strengthen the power of the clans. But polygamy was also very popular. There was no polyandry among the Meiteis. The Meitei society was essentially patriarchal though importance given to mother in clan genealogy might be a pointer to the matrilineal system in very distant past; but evidences are lacking to establish this hypothesis. W.I. Singh's attempt to describe the mother of king Nongda Lairen Pakhangba as a polyandrous woman is due to the error in the translation of the Meitei term "Nurol Pirol Yamb" which means a lady with many ancestors and ancestresses and not a polyandrous woman. 23


22 T.C. Hodson, p. 75.

From the very earliest times, the polygamy system was found in Meitei society. According to tradition Pakhanbangba had seven wives who gave birth to seven sons (progenitors of seven salais). Many factors led to the emergence of polygamy. For example, a victorious king or chief forcibly took the wife of the vanquished rulers, they made matrimonial alliances between the chiefs. During the time of Ura Konthouba, there were matrimonial alliances with Selloolangmai, Khuman and Moirang. And his son Naethingkhong married Pitangla of Selloolangmai, the Khuman princess Keirunghanbi and Manulchaobi, a princess from Moirang principality. Again, king Thawanthaba of the Ningthouja and Aton Punshiba of Khuman had a mutual exchanges of their daughters as their respective views.

Many forms of marriage prevailed in ancient Meitei society, i) Chenba (Elopement), ii) Luhongba (Marriage by engagement), iii) Keinya Katpa (Simple form of marriage ceremony in which the parents offer and accept the bride. No social ceremony was necessary) and iv) Nambo Thaba (Marriage by servitude of the boy. Nambo means luggage and Thaba means keeping). The process of marriage were: i) Nupihaiba (engagement), ii) Yathang-thanaba (negotiation of the marriage), iii) waroipot Puba (the final settlement for the marriage), iv) Heijing Kharai Puba or Heijingpot Puba (formal announcement of the marriage). It was a second presentation made to the bride's family on an auspicious day by the groom's family.
In Meitei society certain proscriptive marriage rules prevailed. If anybody breaking the rules was expelled from the common society to Haochongpal and Samupal, a loi area. The important rules were Yek thoknaba or Putinnaba forbidding intermarriage, inter alia, among the members of the same clan, Shairuk-tinnaba, is equally a proscriptive patrilineal marriage rule. But this rule operates in the inter clan context i.e. the relationship of certain patritimeally consanguineal kin members yet belonging to two or more different clans. In this Shairuk-tinnaba rule was again divided into two i.e. Shairuk Achouba and Shairuk Macha. The purpose and aim of these two were different. The Shairuk Achouba was applied to the royal family and the prohibition was for ever. The Shairuk Macha was to the common people. Pentinnaba was another rule of marriage, which was a kin relationship between descendants, belonging to two or more exogamous clan, Mungnaba is another proscriptive marriage rule. Men and women belonging to the same clan could not marry. Mungnaba was a taboo against marriage. The rule was divided into three categories - 1) Manem-matung-inba, 2) Mingouna-Yaba & 3) Ningol-Macha-Mashel-Lounaba Yadaba. The first and second types of relation were the forms of cross-cousin marriage. The first one was the form of matri-

lateral crosscousin marriage and the last one was the form of maternal parallel cross-cousin marriage. The system of cross-cousin marriage was very common amongst the royal family of Ningthouja and Angom clan and was considered as an ideal. Thus, the restriction rule of Mungnaba or Namungnaba of marriage was in force only for five generations.  

In ancient Meitei society, child marriage was not known. Widow remarriage was allowed but the widow could not marry her deceased husband's brother. No ceremony was performed for widow remarriage. Divorce was found in Meitei society. In the case of marrying off a wife of a man by a person, the expenses of the man on account of his marriage of the said wife had to be paid by the man. If a man divorced his wife without any fault on her part she might take away his entire property. There was the custom of marriage by servitude and matriloclal residence known as Yaonginba in which the bridegroom stayed in the house of the parents of the bride for specific period.

Historical evidences are lacking to clearly indicate the divorce system in ancient Manipur. However, the elaborate yek system which was described earlier indicates a

25 Penlon (MS).

26 T.C. Hodson, p. 77.
fully developed marriage system. If traditions are to be believed divorce also existed in early period. According to traditions and customs which existed in the 18th century, excluding the Hindu customs showed that divorce could be effected on various grounds both by the husband and wife. According to McCulloch, divorce could be effected by mutual consent and both the parties decided to separate. There was an instance of a Luwang chief divorcing his wife for an alleged infection of a contagious disease namely, leprosy. A woman could be divorced if she was barren but in most cases the husband married another wife in case of barrenness of his first wife. A wife could be punished by divorce or fined for being unfaithful to her husband. A Meitei king killed his wife who was a Khuman princess on the allegation of unfaithfulness. A Khuman chief also killed his wife, a Meitei princess on the same ground.

**SUCCESSION AND INHERITANCE**

Succession to kingship was generally by the law of primogeniture. As stated in the chapter on polity, disputes over succession to the throne were decided by trial by ordeal as in the case of Naophangba and Naophanghanba. There were instances of elder brother giving way to the younger brother in becoming a king like the case of Sameirang, a younger brother becoming a king despite his elder brother Thamanglang,
who surrendered his right of kingship. So, in the ancient period the law of primogeniture was more or less followed but in the 18th century succession by brothers alternately was practiced by the sons of Garibniwas.

Headship of the clan or Pibaship of the Salai was decided by hereditary principles. The head of the clan was passed on by the law of primogeniture. Some hereditary offices were held by succession from father to son.

Inheritance or right to property was enjoyed by male children of the parents. But shares of the father's property were not equally distributed among the sons. Women did not have the right to property.

**POSITION OF WOMEN**

The chronicles and several literary texts give many interesting accounts of the role played for women in the political, economic, religious, and cultural life of the Meiteis. Mention may be made of the great role played by Yabirok in making her son Nongda Laien Pakhangba a king of the Kangla. It was a rare achievement of a woman of a lowly family in gaining the political support of the powerful clan chieftains, even to the extent of marrying them at different times. Therefore, the clan genealogies eulogise Yabirok as the mother of king Pakhangba. Laisna,
queen of Pakhangba was actively associated in the social and cultural life of the Kangla along with her husband. The queen of king Uраконтхаuba took an extra ordinary political step of withholding the funeral ceremony of her husband and summoning her son Naotiknkhong from Luwang country to ascend the throne of Ningthouja principality. The heroic exploit of queen Linthoingambi in quelling the Tangkhul rebellions in the absence of her husband king Ningthoukhomba was a classic example of a queen's participation in the political and military life of the kingdom.

It is believed that since the time of Nongda Laien Pakhangba Facha Loishang was established as a court of women presided over by the queen to try cases involving women; even the king and princes, noble and high offices were punished by the women court.

But it was in the field of economy that the Meitei women from the legendary period to the present times and throughout the ancient period took a great role. Manipur's economy was dependent on agriculture both settled and shifting cultivation, handicrafts and cottage industries specially weaving, dyeing and basketry. There was also a vigorous trade and commerce by barter system. Women as an agricultural worker, weaver or dyer and trader controlled the economic life of the kingdom. Since menfolk had to
render the lallup service during war time and peace time, womenfolk had to look after the production activities.

Though the Meitei society was patriarchal, women were given active role in religious ceremonies and rituals. The king was to be assisted by the queen in coronation and other ritual ceremonies like, Mentongba. Women as a whole, either old or young may be married or unmarried, participated in the great festivals both secular and religious, like, Yaoshang, Hiyangtanaba, Laiharaoba and inter panna sports and games like mukna, kangjei, horse-hockey, boat race, which were occasions for demonstration of the physical and martial fitness of the menfolk of each panna. Among the religious priests the maibi (she shaman) was a very important performer of religious rites and rituals. Religious dances, devination, singing and prophesizing were done by the maibis.

In art and culture, the Meitei women demonstrated their excellence. Dance and music were part and parcel of the Meitei life since very early times. Women performed beautiful dances during the Laiharaoba festival. They were also fully conversant in singing. There were very proficient dancers and ballad singers who were honoured by the king. The Meitei women's love for beauty and eagerness for expressing their hope, emotion, love and frustration were bequeted in innumerable songs.
Despite these attainments, the Meitei women were denied the right to property, which was a great indicator of the status of women in a given society. The Meitei women had through the centuries carved out a place for themselves in the society wherefrom they could not be dislodged. The period, under present study was a period of transformation of Meitei society from a tribal stage to a peasant society, from a simple primitive society to a stratified feudal order. In this process of social transformation of the Meiteis, women had played a great role of which any nation could be proud.

**ECONOMY: ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

It has been stated that the form of a society was influenced by the mode of production or economic system practised by the particular social group. The growth of Meitei social system was influenced by their economic system. The archaeological finds of pre-historic caves at Khangkhui, Tharon and Napachik, which were recently explored indicate the use of neolithic and bone tools. These evidences point to the economy of the hunters and food gatherers. Neolithic culture which is proved by the excavation at Napachik points to the prevalence of agriculture which again implies a settled life and economy in Manipur valley.
Introduction of agriculture and adoption of agricultural technology have drawn the attention of both the archaeologists and historians in order to understand the economy of a community. The chronicles of Manipur and the Meitei literary texts record the traditions of the discovery of the paddy, invention of agriculture, practice of shifting agriculture, development of bronze and iron technology for making of daos, axes and hoes for agricultural purposes. Tradition and myths recorded in innumerable literary texts have clearly shown that the ancient Meiteis were shifting cultivators. They carried out the shifting cultivation on the hill slopes or dry land forest areas. The northern and eastern parts of Imphal valley which were a thickly forested dry land provided the ecological environment for the development of this type of agriculture. The agricultural implements adopted were axes and daos for cutting tree and clearance of jungles and small iron hoe for digging up the soil. Even before the introduction of the iron hoes there were neolithic celts which might have been used in this primitive agricultural system. The first literary reference to paddy cultivation in the plains by the use of hoe is made in the Meitei texts like Soubol Lairembi Loutarol (cultivation work of Soubol Lairembi), Ningthou Manuthiba and Soubol Yairel Chanu. But there is no mention of use of plough animal or plough in the pre-
Pakhangba literatures. Perhaps agriculture was further improved during the time of Poireiton, a contemporary of Nongda Laien Pakhangba as there are references to the use of iron and introduction of domesticated animals like, the cattle. The chronicles refer to several irrigation works by dredging the rivers and making drainages to drain out the water from the low lying marshy areas of central Imphal valley. Naethingkhong Phambal Kaba refers to the system of shifting cultivation practised by the Selloi Langmai tribe of the Nongmaiching hill and adoption of wet rice cultivation by the plain dwelling Meiteis/Loiyamba Shinyen specially its supplements and Mashil refer to the rates of revenue imposed on agricultural fields by the state on the peasants. This implies definitely the prevalence of wet rice cultivation in the valley of Manipur. There is no definite mention of the use of iron plough pulled by bullock in earlier works. However, there are myths that tigers were yoked by serpents and beak of stork used as plough by gods. Because of the development of metallurgy, specially iron and existence of regular trade between Manipur and surrounding countries of Burma and India, it can be well presumed that the plough must have been used during or before Naethingkhong's time i.e. the 8th century A.D. But it must be clearly stated that agriculture in Manipur was greatly improved during Khagemba's time and the Muslim
peasant immigrants from Bengal introduced improved agricultural technology including transplantation of paddy seedlings. Nengshamei Puya refers to the contribution made by Muslim peasants to agriculture but it also mentions the wet rice cultivation and use of plough drawn by bullocks. Therefore, the use of plough pulled by cattle was the general agricultural practice in Manipur valley. Contact with the outside countries made the introduction of improved varieties of paddy possible in Manipur valley. The surplus from the paddy production could be collected as revenues by the state and the surplus production was made possible by wet rice cultivation in the kingdom.

With regard to the use of implements for harvesting paddy, Poireiton Khunthok refers to the use of mortar, pestles, winnows, flat baskets, long baskets, etc. They must have been used in the subsequent centuries also.

TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT: POTTERY

The level of technological development is an indicator of development of civilization of a country. From the earliest times to the 17th century, there was a slow but steady development of technology in Manipur as clearly proved by the archaeological evidences and historical works. As already discussed in the above paragraph the prehistoric man
in Manipur used both stone and bone tools. But the development of pottery which was coterminus with technological development was found to have flourished in very early times. The earliest discovered evidences of pottery are that of Napachik excavation, Tripod potteries, cobbled wares and related potteries are discovered at Napachik which is supposed to have flourished in south Manipur valley in the second millennium B.C. Other archaeological sites at Sekta, Irebam, Meitram and Phunan prove the antiquity of pottery in Manipur. The Napachik potteries, it has been suggested by the explorer, have affinities with the potteries of ancient north China. According to literary sources of all the communities of Manipur valley, the Chakpas were the earliest known pottery makers in Manipur. They were dispersed in different places.27 The Chakpa villages are Andro, Phayeng, Chairel, etc. which still produce good potteries which could be used for cooking, preserving and storing utensils. Among them there was a clan known as Chakpa Leisha Unbam who were specialised in pottery making. Potteries were also made by the Tangkhul and Paomei tribesmen from the very early times.28 Potteries were widely used throughout the centuries in the kingdom. Metal

27 Chakpa Khunthok Khunda (MS).

28 Kshetri Kumar, Manipurda Chaphu (Pottery), 1984.
vessels were, of course, introduced during the reign of king Khagamba with the coming of Indian immigrants.\textsuperscript{29}

Metallurgy appears to be not so developed in ancient Manipur. There are historical references to iron, copper, bronze, silver, gold and tin. According to popular traditions Khuyoi Tampok was regarded as a technological innovator. During his reign iron was found at Kakching, gold at Kongba Meirombi and copper at Shibong. Use of gong which was made of bell metal indicates two probable conclusions; one was that bronze metallurgy was developed within Manipur itself; second was that it was brought to Manipur by way of trade from upper Burma and Thailand. Use of iron in agricultural technology, military weaponry (swords and daos) and technological tools was clearly proved by the development of blacksmithy in the kingdom. Poireiton Khunthokpa refers to the use of iron implements for the first time in the history of Manipur. Naotingkhong Phambal Kaba mentions iron weapons and metals like, tin, silver and gold. The metal products were important items of imports into Manipur. Gun, gun making and use of gun powder came late to Manipur in 17th and 18th centuries especially during the reign of king Khagamba.

\textsuperscript{29} Pangal Thosokpa.
HANDICRAFTS: WEAVING

Manipur was a land of handicrafts. Though metal technology was not highly developed, in the fields of handicraft, Manipur could claim a proud heritage. It was in the field of weaving and related art like dyeing, printing and embroidery that Manipur excelled among all her neighbours. Queen Laisna, wife of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba was believed to have innovated several designs of cloths based on the pattern of Python, like Phanek phibal, Samchin and border of the shawls. These designs are called Namthangkhulak, Khamenchatpa and Ningkham which were used by the royal family and nobility. Silk industry was developed in Manipur from very early times. The mulbery silk worms known as Leimatil (queen's worm) was discovered by the queen of Khuyoi Tompok Nongmainu Ahongbi. There was a village known as Leimaram which was a corruption of Leimalam which specialized in silk worm rearing.

Handloom industry was highly developed in ancient Manipur. Handicrafts including weaving and dyeing had greatly developed in 11th and 12th centuries. It appears that every family was engaged in this trade. It compelled king Loiyamba to issue his famous decree known as Loiyamba Shinyen to distribute the weavers' families to produce particular types of cloths. This decree divided the weavers
and dyers into two categories. Thirty (30) families were assigned to weave different designs of cloths. It is very revealing that in the 12th century Manipuri weavers developed such a rich variety of weaving designs which were patented with the state. There were as many as 32 designs of cloths. Some of these designs were based on the cloths of the tribes like, Tarao and Purum. The dyers were assigned to produce different colours based on the colours of the flowers. Eight (8) families were assigned to dye in respective colours. The numbers of families of weavers were greater than of the dyers. Loiyamba Shinyen has projected a well-organised economy of Manipur. The agrarian economy was supplemented by the growing handicrafts and handloom industry. It was so much that the state had to regulate the organisation of these industries. The people who were peasants had now became artisans.

Thus, weaving technology was an indigenous one; spinning, weaving and dyeing were fairly developed in Manipur. Later on, the handloom industry was further developed with the introduction of handloom with fly shuttle. However, both loomloom and handloom continued side by side in the kingdom.

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY

In Manipur, there were three types of traditional
housing technology; one house structure constructed on flat ground by the Naga tribes; the stilt-house of the Kuki Chin tribe and mud house on raised foundation of the Meiteis. Manipur was the land of wood, bamboo and thatch and these were the materials with which houses were constructed in Manipur. The chronicles record the construction of several storied royal houses at the Kangla. There were elaborate rules and norms to be followed in the construction of the royal house and temples at the Kangla. The treatise on the subject is known as Kangla houba written by one philosopher scholar Ashangbam Laiba. The traditional housing architecture made of wood and bamboo and thatch did not survive long. Again the use of brick or stone in house construction was very rare. It is said that the brick making was learnt from the Chinese. The earliest surviving brick structure in Manipur is the Vishnu temple at Bishnupur (1474 A.D.) which was constructed by the artisans from the Bengal or lower Burma. There were references in the chronicles to the construction of temples in the 17th century onward. These structures used brick and mortar. The ancient Meiteis had developed the art of house construction in a very elaborate ways which were related to performance of rites and rituals. we may mention

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the tribal house technology in the hill areas which were unique in their own ways. The houses in northern Tangkhul country were roofed with pieces of pineplanks due to the availability of pine trees and absence of thatching grass. The Kuki tribes of south west Manipur in the Barak and Irang basin used the leaves of cane and other creepers. The Meiteis of Imphal valley used high quality thatches which lasted even 30 years.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Manipur was one of the trade and migration routes between India and South East Asia. It is recorded in Greek, Latin and Chinese sources that there was trade between north east India and Roman world, and between China and Roman empire. These trade intercourse was maintained through land routes across the mountain ranges between eastern India and upper Burma, two of which were through Manipur hills. A French historian suggests that the route must have been by the Burma road. 31 Manipur chronicles record the trade between Manipur and Yunnan province of China in 1630 A.D. as the Chinese merchants visited the kingdom of Manipur and art of making gun powder was imparted to the artisans

or Manipur. This caravan trade between Manipur and Yunnan continued annually till 1813.\textsuperscript{32} Trade with Burma especially the Shan states continued throughout the long history of Manipur. In ancient times, the Periplus of Erythrean Sea records that tezpat (Malabathrum) was sold by a tribe called Besatae; it was brought to south India and transported to Rome.\textsuperscript{33} Manipur also produced tezpat in large quantity. So, Manipur must have also exported tezpat to south India and then to the western world. It is clear that Manipur was in constant trade contact with Chinese, Burmese, Shan/Tai and with north east India and eastern India. The trade contact, cultural contact and migration into Manipur resulted in the introduction of new technology which was adopted by the people of Manipur. It has been suggested in the earlier paragraph that the bellmetal gongs and other implements were from upper Burma and Thailand. Iron technology as stated above was developed and centered around Kakching. A cultur hero named Khamlangba is said to have gone to Tripura in search of tools and materials for making of iron in Manipur. The hill tribes used iron implements like dao, hoe and spear which were imported

\textsuperscript{32} Pemberton, op.cit., p. 54.

from neighbouring countries. For example, the hoe which was most important agricultural implement used at a very early age by the Meiteis was perhaps brought from upper Burma.

Manipur also developed internal trade. The agricultural production grew and surplus were either given as rent to the land lords and revenues to the state; and the rest were marketed. The forests from the surrounding hills provided enough timber which were used for domestic consumption, housing and other crafts based on forest products especially boat making. The state could not establish complete monopoly on the extraction of the forest which were plenty. The cottage industries, like, weaving, pottery, iron implements, bamboo products like, basketry which were initially produced for home consumption were supplied to the royal family and nobility. But it was needed by common people. Therefore, there grew up a necessity to facilitate the sale and purchase of goods and commodity. There were references in the chronicles to the existence of nine markets in Moirang. Moirang was an important centre both for internal and external trade, it was a trade centre between eastern India and Kabaw valley. During the time of Khagemba, nine important markets were established. The markets were Kha Keithel, Awang Keithel, Moirang Keithel, Khuman Keithel, Chairel Keithel, Andro Keithel, and Sana Keithel at the
capital. Sana Keithel or the royal market became the biggest market. Details are not available about the trade and commerce during the period. But the reference which has been made about the external trade in the above paragraph clearly shows a healthy internal trade and commerce. Long distance trade between Manipur and her neighbours was possible due to a vibrant agricultural economy.

**COINAGE AND CURRENCY SYSTEM**

In the early stage, the medium of exchange was goods and commodities as trade was carried through the barter system. Therefore in ancient Manipur the coinage system did not develop in the early period. The claim made by certain historians that king Pakhangba introduced the coinage system and that he issued the coins of several denomination is not collaborated by any historical evidence. T.C. Hodson's stray reference to the so-called coin of Pakhangba was perhaps a symbolic representation of Pakhangba rather than a coin. W. Yumjao Singh discovered a few coins with Sanskrit legends using Samvat Era, eluding the use of Sanskrit engraved coins by kings of Manipur. P. Gunindro has rightly stated that these coins were not issued by kings of Manipur but they were relics of Manipur's external trade.
Large number of coins mostly belonging to 18th and 19th centuries have been discovered in Manipur. There are few coins belonging to 17th and pre 17th centuries. Normally, the coins of Manipur popularly known as sel were made of bell metal though in the 18th century gold and silver coins were also issued. The coins collected have the legend of a letter which was an abbreviation of the name of the issuing king. Basing on this practice a coin having the legend of ancient Meitei letter 'wu' has been discovered which is interpreted to have been issued by king Lrakonthouba in 8th century A.D. There are no coins so far discovered prior to this king's reign. But during Khagemba's time a large number of coins were issued as proved by a number of recently discovered bell metal coins bearing his name. The coins were usually minted at the royal mint. There was no much of monetization of the economy. The currency in circulation was very much limited. Of course, the kings minted coins to perpetuate his name and to some extent facilitate trade.' But the medium of exchange was not the bell metal currency as the trade was a barter trade.