CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

Manipur, at present a State of Indian Union, was a monarchical state, which had been able to occupy a place in the historical mainstream of South East Asia. The ancient Manipuri scriptures provide the fact that the date back to 33 A.D. human habitation on this celestial land is spread all over the hills and the valley. Starting from the seven small principalities in the valley notable yeks are that of Mangang or Ningthouja, Khuman, Luwang and Moirang. These small principalities fought themselves against each other for their supremacy. Thus the history of Manipur experienced the unification of these principalities under the supremacy of Ningthouja clan or yek. And this yek occupied the central position and recommitment in power and administration. But on several occasions they also withstood defeat at the hands of other clans. The extension of the territories of Manipur reached upto Burma and Assam by struggling for existence against powerful neighbouring states.

Manipur lies between 23°5' North and 25°41' East and 94°47' East longitudes and latitudes. Nagaland bound it on the north on the south by Mizoram and Burma, on the east by Burma and on the west by Assam. The present geographical area of Manipur is 22,356 square kilometres.

The area and boundaries of ancient Manipur were varied from time to time depending upon the ability of its rulers.

2. Sir Rennel, 1769.
The limit of Manipur at one time extends to Dikhu (Lohit) the river of Assam on the North, Khendacaen (Chindwin or Ningthi) of Myanmar on the east, the Chin hills and adjoining western regions of Myanmar on the south and Chandrapur at Sylhet border on the West, \(^2\)(Sir Revel 1769).

(Manipur, predominantly a mountaineous state has in the middle an oval shaped valley area of 1765 square kilometres. The central part of this plain is thickly populated and has been the nucleus of all political and economic activities of the state since time immemorial.) Like other parts of India, particularly, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Northern India, Central India and North-Eastern India in general, archaeological studies undertaken in some regions of Manipur over the last sixty-five years and help us to deal with the evolution of human culture since early stone Age in different topographical and ecological settings. From the important discoveries of Stone Age culture of Manipur have suggested that Manipur is a place where different trends of culture and routes of migration must have crossed from the neighbouring countries like Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries. From the various archaeological exploration and excavations done in the recent past proved that Manipur also covered in the map of World Stone Age Culture. \(^3\) From the legendary theories there is a belief that the first human settlement took place on the hills of Koubru peak, which lies on the north west of Manipur valley. This theory is now supported by the archaeological findings found from Khangkhui cave in Ukhrul district and Tharon cave in Tamenglong district. The cultural relics so far discovered from the prehistoric sites of Manipur are palaeolithic tools, Haobinhian tools, and Neolithic and chalcolithic tools. \(^4\)

---

3. O.K. Singh -- "Archaeology in Manipur"

4. Ibid.
Antiquities of protohistoric and historical period are also unearthed from various excavated sites of Manipur and some are from stray collection. The antiquities are mainly palaeographical and epigraphical records, inscribed on stone slabs, copper plates and iron plates etc., and coins of belmetal, copper, gold and silver and architectural remains.

It appears that in the prehistoric time primitive tribes of Mongoloid stock originally inhabited Manipur. Time brought division among the tribes. By virtue of the feasibility and viability of the valley the plain settlers who come down from the caves or the hills of the same stock became more progressive, economically and politically. They introduced their own system of polity and economy, while the hill tribes inhabited in the surrounding mountain ranges. Thus the monarchial period in Manipur started from 33 A.D. and lasted till 19th Century A.D. with seventy-six Meitei Kings. The first Meitei King was Nongda Laien Pakhangba who ascended the throne on 33 A.D. and Laisana was consorted his queen for the first time since this period the Meitei kingdom in special and the other principalities in the valley were just like an oasis in the deserts of tribes.

**Methodology:**

Recently, the study in the field of numismatics and epigraphy has come into the picture (Bahadur and Gunindro, 1978, 80, 84 and 86). However, they concentrated only on one line in their respective fields. The study brought by them is far from satisfactory. Under such circumstances the propose work try to bring about a complete history of Epigraphy of Manipur. Thus the area of study is selected so as to fill in the gaps of the early works.
It is also tried to portray a clear picture of the epigraphical study of Manipur beginning from the origin of the Manipuri archaic script. The first common and conventional script of the Meitei was introduced in the year 1615 as furnished by documentary evidences. This script is grouped under Brahmi-kharosthi family. The epoch making invention took place during the reign of the Meitei King Khagema (1597-1652 A.D.). The coins of this king indicate a very clear picture about Meitei scripture. One of the examples is the word Khai Ngamba alias Khagema was inscribed in archaic Meitei script in some of his coins.

This study is entirely depended on the field study at various sites where the stone inscriptions are found. Photographs and facsimiles have been taken from the archaeological sites and from the collections of the State museum as well as private museums of Manipur. Then a thorough palaeographic study had also done which reflects the various developments in the evolution of Manipuri script.

5. Cheitharol Kumbaba, Khelchandra & Ibungohal, P.36.