CHAPTER II

Background

Manipur, an erstwhile ancient kingdom in South-East Asia, now the easternmost state of India lies between 23°51' N to 25°41' N latitude and from 93°2' 'E' longitude to 94°47' 'E' longitude.1 Strategically located in the extreme north-eastern corner of India bounded on the north by the state of Nagaland, on the north-east, east and south by Myanmar (Burma), on the south-west by Mizoram, on the west and north-west by the state of Assam. The state has a total geographical area of 22,327 square kilometres which comprises about 0.7 per cent of the total geographical area of the Indian Union.

1.HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

Prehistory and Proto-history of Manipur—An Overview:

Prehistory is the study of man and his culture before the so-called recorded history. Knowledge of Man’s origin is based mainly on the material remains of his skeletons supplemented by the remnants of his activities. As most of the remnants has been obliterated by time, weather and natural decay, only small bits and pieces have been put together to give us some idea of what went on in the dis-
tant past. Prehistory attempts to know all about man’s total activity
during that period of his developmental history when man had not
evolved writing. The source materials for the reconstruction of pre-
history are the material culture objects like stone, bone tools and
weapons, potteries, plants, floral and faunal remains. Though ar-
chaeological research in Manipur is still not fully developed, studies
undertaken so far suggests the evidence of Old Stone Age, New Stone
Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age cultures in Manipur which enables the
historian and the archaeologist to reconstruct the early past of the
land. Attempts were made as early as 1932 by Wahengbam Yumjao
Singh to look at Manipur’s past by conducting excavations. However,
a systematic study of the reconstruction of prehistoric Manipur
has been carried out by O. K. Singh for the last many years. His study
has established beyond doubt that Manipur passed through various
phases of prehistoric culture viz, Paleolithic Culture, Hoabinhian Cul-
ture and Neolithic Culture. On the basis of examination of the ma-
terial remains O. K. Singh suggest a chronological sequence of the
Stone Ages Culture of Manipur as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Approximate Age</th>
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<tr>
<td>Neolithic</td>
<td>Phunam Ware</td>
<td>First Millennium B. C.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tripod Ware</td>
<td>1450 B. C.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Corded Ware</td>
<td>4,460 ± 120 Years B. P.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hoabinhian</td>
<td>Late Hoabinhian</td>
<td>Later Mid-Holocene</td>
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<td>Early Haabinhian</td>
<td>Early Late Pleistocene</td>
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<td>Palaeolithic</td>
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<td>Early Palaeolithic</td>
<td>Late Pleistocene</td>
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The foregoing observations have clearly show that Manipur passed through the stages of prehistoric phase in her course of historical development. Unlike the prehistoric phase of Manipur history, the reconstruction of proto-history is still problematic as most of the informations available so far remain sketchy, intertwined with myths and legends connected with pre-Hindu and Hindu beliefs and practices. Personalities involved are often identified having connection with divine elements which almost resulted in the confusion of myth with history. It may be relevant to quote the words of a well-known historian of Manipur history on the problem, "... the reconstruction of history encounters the vexing problem of separating the myths from facts and locating the historical in the myriad of legends, traditions, folklores and narratives." The probable reasons of creating the myths were to connect their patrons with the divinities of the heaven to facilitate political, social, religious and cultural subjugation of the subject people to the ruling dynasty and to ensure the safety and the continuity of the rulers which is reflected both in the pre and post-Hindu historical accounts of Manipur.

The ancient Meiteis left behind in their literary accounts a rich legacy of the creation of the universe and man being created from the body of the Almighty. Leithak Leikharol, an archaic text gives a fair account of the cosmic evolution as visualised by the Meiteis.

Information regarding the proto-history of Manipur is still very sketchy. Though some information can be culled from some of the
chronological and genealogical accounts which only contain the names of the rulers who ruled in different periods in ancient times. Kangbarol gives an account of eight rulers succeeding one another and connected by blood relationship. Shakok Lamlen another text referred to four rulers who ruled in four ‘Chak’ of history. In the legendary or proto-historical periods the reckoning of age is divided into four Chaks viz, Hayichak, Hayachak, Langba Chak and Khunung Chak which some scholars described as the phonetic corruption of the Sanskrit term ‘Yug’. The corresponding periods of the first two Chak were 20,88,000 and 17,20,000 years respectively. The practice of time reckoning of the ancient Meiteis are more or less identical with that of the Hindus dividing the age into the four ‘Yugs’ known as Satya, Treta, Dwapur and Kali. We cannot say with certainty how this similarity arises and calls for further investigation.

With the accession of Kangba, a fair amount of information is available for the reconstruction of early Manipur history. Though difficult to establish their chronology Kangba’s reign is followed by nine rulers. Since their chronology is difficult to establish historians more or less have identified them as proto-historical rulers of Manipur. Numit Kappa (Shooting the Sun) gives us an interesting account of a peasant rebellion led by Khwai Nongjembam Piba against the joint autocratic rule of Nongdamhan and Taohuireng, the third ruler of the period. In the rebellion Khwai Nongjembam Piba emerged

is a correct translation?
victorious and the king fled the country. After hectic parleys with the help of neighbouring chiefs peace restored at last and Nongdamhan continued to rule the country. After having made a detailed and critical study of *Numit Kappa* N. Pramodini Devi observes that the society prevalent during the period was patriarchal and its social structure was slave owning peasant society. However it is questionable whether social stratification had really taken place in Manipur during the period, though there are certain evidences of economic activities taken up by the people like cultivation, fishing, rearing of cattles, hens and cocks etc. But it would be erroneous to conclude that these economic activities resulted in social stratification or class conflicts among the ruler and the ruled. As suggested by the text the polity was gradually evolving towards chiefdom and a rudimentary form of administrative machinery was established with the chief at the head of administration assisted by officials such as nobles including *Ningthou Pongba Tara* (ten regional chieftains), local chiefs and hill chiefs. The rule of Nongdamhan was followed by Kaksuba, Tonkonba, Pitingkoi, Lambicha, Sopaiba, Puthiba and joint rule of Kuptreng and Sentreng. Though paddy cultivation had been in practice in Manipur since the reign of Kangba, a wild paddy known as Thangyi Morshi was discovered during the reign of Tonkonba. The practice of burial of the dead was also introduced by this king. The use of plough for agricultural purposes was introduced during the time of Puthiba.
Kangbarol and Ningthourol Sheireng described Puthiba as the inventor of the plough.¹¹

II) HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY:

Human civilisations have been influenced to a great extent by natural factors. The terrain, soil and climate have throughout human history imposed conditions and limitations on human settlement and development. In any study on social formations, it is necessary to keep this aspect in view. The reconstruction of the landscape of any historical period is a difficult task because it requires the use of many disciplines, hence one can only attempt a general description of the region.

Manipur hemmed on all sides by mountain ranges is an isolated hilly tract on the eastern frontier of India. Geologically, the state of Manipur belongs to the Alpine system of young folded mountains which came into existence as a result of the Tertiary foldings of the sedimentary strata formed in the shallow Tethys Sea, some 40 to 90 million years ago. The present-day landscape of the state bears an indelible impression of the organic movements which took place at the time of first and second Himalayan upheavals.¹²

Geographical Factor in the Economy:

The state of Manipur is almost rectangular in shape with a fertile alluvial plain in the centre surrounded by hill ranges on all sides. It is bounded by Naga hills (present day state of Nagaland) on the north, Assam on the west, Lushai hills (present state of Mizoram)
on the south-west, Myanmar (Burma) on the east and south-east. Physically, Manipur can be divided into three regions viz, i) the Manipur Hills, ii) the Manipur Valley, and iii) the Barak Basin. The Manipur hills consist of a series of parallel ranges extending between the Naga hills in the north and Mizo and Chin hills in the south. These hills trending north-east to south-west, slanted towards south and dominate the regional landscape. The hills of Manipur broadly fall into two groups – the Manipur eastern hills and the Manipur western hills. The eastern hills forming a compact and continuous chain along the present Indo-Myanmar border for about 200 kms. The Manipur western hills spread over the entire western part comprising of parallel ridges and valleys running north to south for about 180 kms. On the other hand the valley extends right upto the foot of these hill ranges with an inclination from north to south.

The drainage system of the state may be broadly divided into three river systems. Of these the most important being River Manipur and its tributaries viz, Imphal, Iril, Thoubal, Nambul, Nambol, Khuga and Sekmai with Loktak and other associated lakes forms the central part of the region. Discharging maximum quantity of water during the monsoon season, they frequently inundate the land along their banks. River Barak and its tributaries – Irang, Maku, Tuivai, Jiri and their associated streams drains the northern and western hill areas of the entire region. They flow in deep cut gorges, sides of which are clothed with thick forests. The eastern slopes of the Manipur eastern hills are washed by a number of small streams of the Chindwin system. River Akonglok and its tributaries Chamu, Chingai, and river Yu
and its tributaries, Maklung, Tuyangbi, Taret Lok, Lokchao, Lalinlok, and Tuiyang flowing in sub-parallel pattern through their steeply cut valley, join finally the Chindwin (Ningthee) river in Kabaw valley in Myanmar.\textsuperscript{14} Besides these rivers there are a number of large and small lakes in the Manipur valley including swamps and marshes along the lake sides and in the inter-riverine tracts. The swamps and marshy areas provided fields for cultivation of paddy like Taothabi, Morshi Thangyi and Morshi Laiphou etc. and various types of vegetables and other aquatic plants.

Soil being one of the primary factors of physical environment influencing agriculture, cropping pattern in a particular region develops on soils of varying degrees of natural fertility. It is not surprising that the variety and distribution of soils have been a major factor in economic development within the historical period, as they have been in guiding human settlement in the pre-historic times.\textsuperscript{15} The natural soils of Manipur are broadly divided into a) valley soils, and b) mountain or hill soils.\textsuperscript{17} The valley soils are mainly composed of sands, clays, and silts etc. of fluvio-lacustrine origin and terrigenous red soil in the foot hills. Alluvial soils are found at the both sides of river banks in the valley areas. Clayey soil predominates the valley and is highly fertile. Due to the gradual and regular silting of soils from the surrounding hills, the soil covers in the valley remains thick and rich in organic content. While writing in the early part of the nineteenth century Captain Pemberton observed that “the fertility of the soil is so great that crops generally proved most abundant”.\textsuperscript{17} Sharing an almost identical opinion McCulloch, a few years
later writes with astonishment that “Not a particle of manure is placed on the ground and yet year after year good crops are raised from the same spots.”\textsuperscript{18} The rich soil and plentiful rainfall derived from the monsoons combined together continue to give rich crops. However, the soil cover of the mountains and hills are very thin as compared with that of the valley. Although sandy soils, reddish loam laterites are also visible, red soils predominates the hilly areas. Though the presence of organic carbons in the soils made it possible for paddy cultivation and plantation of crops being practised in the hill areas, yet the heavy rainfall, prevalence of steep slopes, widespread practice of Jhum cultivation renders less productivity and less rewarding and more labour intensive in comparison with the valley. However, it may be observed that the soil of Manipur, and Imphal valley in particular, which also serves as the base of the kingdom was exceedingly rich and well adapted to all kinds of agricultural activities.

Climate as a Factor:

Climate is of prime consideration in human geography through its influence on the physical and biological environment. Cropping pattern evolved in a traditional peasant agriculture is the expression of climatic pattern to a great extent.

The projection of the land mass of Southern Asia southwards into Indian ocean combined with the barriers of Himalayas produces a special climatic type – the monsoonal with a heavy rainy period
from May to September which determines the success or failure of crops. Comparatively speaking, Manipur enjoyed a far more peculiarly temperate climate with equality of temperature throughout which is very pleasing and enjoyable. This peculiarity may in great measure be attributed to the early setting in and long continuance of the rains, the forest vegetation and high altitude by which Manipur is surrounded.

In general, the climate of Manipur falls under the influence of sub-tropical monsoon as it is just near the Tropic of Cancer. But the state has tropical to temperate climate depending upon elevation. Her climate is characterised by relative coolness, high humidity, heavy summer rainfall and moist winter. The occasional rains of the pre-monsoonal season from North-Westers are favorable for the cultivation of summer rice (Anganphou). The South-west monsoon breaks in by last week of May. This period characterised mostly by cloudy weather, heavy rainfall, high temperature and weak variable surface wind is the most important period for agricultural activities since winter rice is grown during this period. The south-west monsoon begins retreating by October. The winter season which begins from December to February is characterised by occasional rainfall during the end and beginning of December and January, cool weather with low temperature and frequent morning fog is very useful for winter crop. In general, the summer and winter seasons are quite distinct in respect of temperature condition thereby facilitating the cultivation of a variety of crops during these two seasons of the year. Nature had thus provided Manipur with ideal natural conditions for growing
a variety of tropical and sub-tropical crops. This enabled the region
to be self sufficient in food production. Scarcity of food due to natu-
ral causes hardly occurred. Of the food crops grown rice was the
most important, the cultivation of which constituted the primary oc-
cupation of a large majority of the inhabitants.

III. ETHNIC COMPOSITION:

Manipur being one of India's gateway to South-East Asia had
throughout the centuries attracted immigrants from the east and the
west. The Mongoloid elements predominated in the valley as well as
in the hills with some non-Mongoloid elements who speak Tibeto-
Burman languages. Manipur's population consisted of three major
ethnic groups, the Meiteis of the valley, the Nagas and Kukis of the
surrounding hills.

The origin of the Meiteis is still a matter of controversy as
their is no accepted theory in this regard. Some scholars of tradi-
tional school strongly supported by the royalty claimed of Aryan ori-
gin through Babhruvahana, son of the great Pandava prince of the
epic Mahabharata. But this claim of Hindu origin has not been fully
authenticated on the examination of linguistic and ethnological
grounds. Linguistically, the Manipuri language falls into Kuki-Chin
family of the Tibeto Burman languages. Ethnologically, the Manipuris
are distinctively Mongoloid with the oblique characteristics of the
group such as scantiness of hair, broad cheekbone and oblique eye,
flat nose, long and straight black hair etc. Pemberton in his report observed that the Manipuris being the descendents of a Tartar Colony which migrated from the north-west borders of China. But Pemberton's view has no historical basis as there is no reference of such large scale immigration taking place in the Cheitharol Kumbaba and other historical accounts of Manipur. Brian Hougton Hodgson traces the origin of the Meiteis to the combined appellations of the Siamese 'Tai' and Kochin Chinese 'Moy'.

Inspite of such contention of Mongoloid origin of the Meiteis it is an undeniable fact that there are some traces of Aryan elements also. R. Brown said, "Although the general facial characteristics of the Manipuri are of the Mongolian type, there is a great diversity of features amongst them, some of them sharing a regularity approaching the Arian (Aryan) type. Among both men and women the stature is very varied, differing about as much as is found among Europeans. Captain Dun had written that there can be "... no reasonable doubt that a great Aryan wave of very pure blood passed through Manipur into Burma in prehistoric times... I see traces of this in the finely cut features seen now and then among the Manipuris. Sharing the above view Abdul Ali observes that the Meiteis are a fine race of men descended from an Indo-Chinese, with some admixture of Aryan invaders that had passed along the Gangetic and Brahmaputra valleys in pre-historic days. Though the Meiteis are neither Aryan nor Indo-Aryan there is a historical truth that the Meitei community had absorbed the Aryan elements in its fold as many Aryan colonisers,
adventurers and immigrants came to Manipur or passed through this land in course of their colonisation of or trade with South West China and South East Asia as Manipur was one of the route of trade and migration in the past and it continues to be so even in the present century. Local accounts viz, ‘Nongchup Haram” and “Nongpok Haram” which is a record of immigration of people from the west and east clearly supports the above contentions. The term Meitek which denotes the entire Manipuri population of the Valley was applied only to the people belonging to the Ningthouja clan in early days and others were called by the name of their own clan as the valley was inhabited by seven clans quite independent of each another in its own well defined region. Each principality was headed by a Chief, aided and advised by a council of nobles.

Another important section of the population of Manipur valley though minuscule in numbers, in comparison with the Meiteis are the Manipuri Muslims, locally known as the Meitei Pangals. They are called Pangals, a corrupted term of Bengal as they originated from Bengal. Regarding the beginning of Muslim settlement in Manipur, locally available accounts viz Nongsamei Puya, Khagemba Lalpha, Pangal Thorakpa, Ningthourol Lambuba etc., and supplemented by the royal chronicle provides detailed information. It has been stated elsewhere that Muslim settlement in Manipur started since 1606 A.D. when king Khagemba defeated the Kachari-Muslim invaders who accompanied Sanongba (king’s brother) and captured many of them as prisoners. These Muslim captives were made to settle in the val-
ley by giving Meitei women as their wives. The royal chronicle recorded that in 1606 A. D. Khagembia defeated his brother Sanongba's invasion and captured 30 elephants, 1000 Muslims, 1000 muskets.\textsuperscript{28} Since then many Muslim immigrants came to Manipur and settled here permanently.

A few words may be said about a group of people who inhabit in some parts of the valley known as the Bishnupriyas. Usually, they are more dark skinned than the Meiteis. Their settlement being spread in the valley areas of Ningthoukhong, Nachou, Ngaikhong, Wangjing, Helrok and Khangabok etc. Regarding the origin and early settlement of the Bishnupriyas in Manipur there are different opinion among the scholars and of late the matter has become a highly controversial issue involving a lot of politics. They are quite different from the Meiteis from ethnological and etymological angels. Their language is Sanskritic having strong affinity with Assamese and Bengali with certain admixture of Manipuri vocabulary. Eminent anthropologist B. K. Roy Burman is of the opinion that Bishnupriyas are the descendents of the war prisoners who were captured by Khagembia in the early part of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{29} One Manipuri scholar, late Moirangthem Chandra Singh, Pandit Achouba (Head Pandit) of Manipur opines that Bishnupriyas are the westerners who were brought as war captives after capturing near Khuga and made them settled at Manipur. They are called Mayang Kalisha.\textsuperscript{30} Making an analysis of the culture, ethnic structure and fine arts of the Bishnupriyas leads one to conclude that they are people of low caste Bengali origin.\textsuperscript{31} They (Bishnupriyas) speak a language which is dif-
ferent from that of true Manipuri and is, in fact closely allied to vulgar Manipuri.\textsuperscript{32} In fact, the Mayang Kalisha or Bishnupriyas originally lived in Rangmati in Goalpara District or Chittagong Hill Tracts where there is a great influence of both the Indo–Aryan languages viz, Assamese and Bengali. Though there was a short historical contact with Manipur they could not be completely absorbed into the larger Manipuri society like the Shans, Burmese, Kacharis, Tripuris, Brahmins and other immigrants of Hindu Indian origin.

There is another important class of people/community known as the Lois. The term "Loi" means those who were subdued or who pay tribute to a sovereign.\textsuperscript{33} The Loi population consisted of people who paid tribute.\textsuperscript{34} During the historical times the Lois were socially and politically subordinate people paying tribute to the Meitei rulers.\textsuperscript{35} According to T. C. Hodson the Lois, a title applied to the inhabitants of number of villages which are some distance from Imphal, and have for long been in subjection to the Meiteis, are of various origin. With the rise of Hinduism to the status of king's religion it started having the connotation of outcasting for the Meitei Hindus. They were excluded from the Pana system of the Meiteis and formed the lowest strata in the hierarchy of the Meitei society.\textsuperscript{36} The Loi population consisted of those who were vanquished by the Meiteis, and who paid tributes to the Meitei rulers, soldier or people taken captive in the war, the people who were expelled from the Meitei society for violating not only the social customs and traditions, committing crimes against the king but also for disobeying the orders of
the king and were ordered to live in the Loi villages for the rest of their lives and those people who took up the occupation of the Lois by living in the Loi villages in order to earn their livelihood.

Regarding the different groups of Lois one author writes that Lois were divided into three groups namely, Lois by birth, Lois by punishment and Lois by purchase. The last one was not, in true sense of the term Lois.\textsuperscript{37} According to R. K. Sanahal, Lois are of three classes, namely the vanquished, the war captives and the Meiteised Nagas.\textsuperscript{38}

The hill areas of Manipur is the home to a large number of tribal communities who are again sub-divided into a number of sub-tribes. Generally the tribes of Manipur are classified into two groups viz, the Naga and Kuki sections. The Kabuis, Tangkhuls, Marings, Mao, the Marams who are considered as the oldest tribes of Manipur belongs to the Naga tribe. Koms, Thadous, Gangtes, Paites and Hmars etc. who migrated into Manipur during the 13\textsuperscript{th} century from the neighbouring Lushai and Chin Hills are identified as belonging to the Kuki tribes. The Nagas primarily inhabited in the contiguous hill villages of Tamenglong, Mao and Ukhrul in the western, northern and north eastern parts of Manipur, whereas the Kuki-Chin group in the southern and south-eastern parts of Manipur. Now a days, the Kuki-Chin tribes are found scattered in wide areas of Manipur, but in early days there settlements were in the southern parts where at present occupied by the Lushais, Koirengs, Chiras, Marings and other small tribes are found in the hills bordering the valley.\textsuperscript{39}
However, the territorial and racial division among the tribes of Manipur are becoming a matter of confusion and controversy. Absence of authentic documentary and material evidences to prove their traditional and original habitat (belongings) renders it difficult to classify one tribe as Kuki who claimed as Naga and vice-versa. It is only because of the migratory habit of the tribes stretching in the Indo-Burmese and Chin-Tibeto-Burman borders. The strong habit of migration is to some extent, less among the Nagas, but more among the Kukis.  

By nature and character the hill peoples are simple, fearless, delightful and patriotic. As mentioned in the royal chronicle, they played an important part in the polity of Manipur in its crucial stages. They rendered invaluable service to safeguard Manipur when it was invaded by the neighbouring countries in the past.

At the dawn of the eighteenth century the Meitei kingdom constituted a compact political entity encompassing the largest geographical area since its foundation. Nature had endowed her with ideal conditions for a prosperous agricultural economy. The Manipur River and some of its tributaries provided the principal means of communication but also served to link up various parts of the kingdom. Surrounded by mountain ranges and unfavourable terrain, Manipur, inspite of frequent threats from Burmese, Kacharis and Tripuris etc. Manipur continued to remain isolated and unexplored from the rest of India. However, migration of people from the east and west was a continuous
process though limited in number. Though there are some Aryan and non-Aryan elements absorbed in the Manipuri society, the population of the valley in the eighteenth century underwent a process of sanskritisation as a result of their conversion into Hinduism. However, a large number of people still retained their animistic faiths and beliefs.

IV) PAKHANGBA AND FOUNDATION OF THE NINGTHOUJA DYNASTY:

The joint rule of Kupreng and Sentreng was followed by Machi Sana Leinung Khomba, Cheklei Loukhaiba, Thareisuba, Cheklei Yaimaba and Sana Ngangchungshu. Not much information is available about their rule. After Sana Ngangchungshu’s rule a big flood occurred and inundated the whole of Imphal valley and people took shelter in the hills which resulted in a political vacuum in the Manipur valley. And by the beginning of the first century A.D. Manipur remained a territory without having any centralised form of authority. The area being ruled by seven different clans/tribes who controlled the valley among themselves were Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Khaba–Ngaiba, Moirang, Mangang and Sarang–Leishangthem (Chengleii), the powerful among them got more territory under their control than the others. Most of these clans always engaged in feuds and wars with one another for control of territory. Such conflicts hampered the growth and development of a centralised authority who could control and appropriate resources for welfare of the people. The disorder and chaos continued
till the advent of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33–154 A.D. ?) in the political scene of Manipur. With the help of the Angom, Mangang, Luwang and Chakpas Pakhangba defeated the Khabas, a claimant to the throne and established his kingdom at Kangla, the ancient capital of the Meiteis. After having succeeded in establishing his rule and control over Kangla, Pakhangba took upon himself the responsibility of consolidating the other clans under his hegemony thereby laying the foundation of Meitei state and Ningthouja dynasty. Pakhangba being a meritorious and far-sighted king led the foundation of the Meitei social and political structure, cultural and religious life. An administrative set up consisting of ten regional chieftains (Ningthou Pongba Tara) and sixty-four peoples' representatives (Phamdous) along with some officials were appointed to carry out administrative functions of the state by Pakhangba. Kanglei Shanglen Puba Puya (MS) gives a list of five departments established by the king viz, i) Laipham Shanglen, ii) Kuchu Shanglen, iii) Khaba Shanglen, iv) Naharup Shanglen and v) Pacha Loishang.

Of the above departments Pacha Loishang specifically deals with matters relating to women's affairs and was presided over by Laisna, wife of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. The functions of the government were divided into i) the Monarch, ii) the court consisting of the nobles and iii) the popular Assembly of the subjects. The process of integration of the different clans had started during the reign of this king. The occupant of the throne at Kangla began to enjoy his political supremacy
over the other clans and at the same time they also gradually accepted the Ningthouja hegemony. At the same time the other clans were allowed to enjoy certain amount of autonomy. Thus by the middle of the first century A.D. Manipur was gradually moving towards the establishment of an organised and centralised confederacy which ultimately led to the foundation of Meitei state.

The eventful reign of Pakhangba was succeeded by his son Khuyoi Tompok (154–264 A.D.) whose reign is noted for the introduction of drums and other technological developments. Drums were used for making royal announcements at public places, during war times, on festive occasions, and other social and religious events. Development in metallurgy was also recorded, the king explored some sites where precious metals could be found. The important sites were Kakching for iron, gold at Kongba Meirembi, and copper at Sibong. He got explored and discovered brime well sites at Sikhong, Ningel and Waikhong. Besides this there are also reports of innovations in weaving, dyeing and embroidery being introduced during the reign of Khuyoi Tompok. For administrative convenience the king divided his kingdom into four divisions viz, Khurai, Wangkhei, Khwai and Yaiskul and each division supervised by a noble. Taooting Mang (264–364 A.D.) succeeded Khuyoi Tompok and the most notable event of his reign was dredging of rivers which facilitated the improvement and expansion of agricultural activities by clearing marshy lands. He was described as the ‘maker of Manipur’. Khui Ningomba (364–379 A.D.) continued
the works taken up by his late father and cleared large forest areas for human settlement. Pengshiba (379–394 A.D.?), Khui Ningomba’s son had a reign of 15 years and credited to have diverted the course of Manipur river to avoid inundation of population and crops.\\(^47\\) Kaokhangba’s (394–411 A.D.?) reign was of little significance from historical point of view. Naokhamba (411–428 A.D.?) was a period of expansion of the kingdom which was felt by other tribes.\\(^48\\) In order to control floods he constructed a big and small bunds at Yaorel Khunpilok in the upper reaches of Imphal river. As the king was a deeply religious person he was referred to have worshipped all the gods and goddesses of the Meitei pantheon.\\(^49\\) The reign of Naokhamba was followed by Naophangba (428–518 A.D.?). The king is known for the construction of a seven-storyed palace building.\\(^50\\) *Kangla Houba*, a treatise on construction of the royal palace was written by a scholar named Ashangbam Laiba.\\(^51\\) A religious leader/preacher from Bengal is referred to have visited Manipur during his reign.\\(^52\\) Sameirang (518–568 A. D.) succeeded his father Naophangba. His reign marked a new beginning of consolidation and extension of the Ningthouja political power at the cost of other clan principalities. R. K. Jhalajit Singh observes thus, “From the time of Sameirang, the Ningthoujas embarked on the policy of conquering and absorbing the principalities one by one. This was an arduous long struggle which took nearly nine centuries. But it was worth trying, Manipur would simply be doomed had it remained divided into small principalities”.\\(^53\\) Ura Konthouba (568–658 A. D.), son of Sameirang is referred to have issued bell metal coins in his name which according
to Gangmumei Kabui is an indication of the beginning of monetisation of the barter economy of the country. But we do not get substantive evidence of the large scale circulation of coins. The development of a well organised military organisation could be found during Ura Konthouba's time can be put beyond doubt as the existence of cavalry force is well established by his military campaigns against the Shelloi-Langmais a small principality with their base at Nongmaijing hills at Imphal east.

Though the informations provided by the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* remains sketchy, a fairly reliable account of the Manipur history such as *Ningthourol Lambuba* and other literary accounts are available from the reigns of Naotthingkhong (663–763 A. D.) onwards. *Naotthingkhong Phambal Kaba* (coronation of Naotthingkhong ) and *Chingkheirembi Khonglup* are the other reliable account of the exploits of this king. He completely defeated and subjugated the Mangang clan who were once a powerful tribe living in the Lojijing hills to the west of Imphal valley. After the defeat of the Mangangs, they were absorbed to the Ningthouja clan and the Mangangs forever lost their independent identity. Naotthingkhong also subdued some other tribal villages. Another interesting feature of Naotthingkhong’s reign was the establishment of Manipur’s relation with Pong state of Burma. It is the first instance of Manipur having come into contact with a foreign country. Though historians do not agree on the chronology of the visit of Samlungpha, the Shan prince who came to Manipur, the establishment of some rela-
tionship with a neighbouring country may be regarded as an important event in the history of Manipur. Except for the Khuman and Luwang clans the other clan principalities accepted Ningthouja hegemony though they still retained their autonomy. Regarding the nature of the state and society of Naethingkhong's reign it is observed that "the tribal or lineage base of the Meitei society was moving towards strati-
fication though one cannot clearly establish the formation of classes, the Meitei society was moving towards feudal structure" 55 Khongtekcha's (763-773 A. D.) reign is an important epoch in the history of religious development in Manipur particularly Hinduism as suggested by the Phayeng coper plate supposed to have been issued by the this king as claimed by W. Yumjao Singh, the pioneer archaeologist of Manipur. 56 It is referred in the chronicles that Khongtekcha defeated and captured an invasion led by Oinu Sengbaramcha of Moirang along with 63 nobles. References are also made about Manipur's growing contact with the west particularly Surma valley of Assam. Khongtekcha's reign was followed by Kairencha and Yaraba both of whose reign was of little significance. Ayangba (821-910 A. D.) who succeeded Yaraba had a reign of eighty nine years. Several skirmishes were reported be-
tween the Ningthouja and Khumans. The Khumans were defeated in the conflict. Ayangba was succeeded by four other rulers, the third being Yanglou Keiphaba, a king known for his bravery in hunting and catching tigers and introduced em broidery on women's Phanek Phiban. Irengba, the fourth ruler of the Ningthouja after Ayangba invaded and
defeated Moirang country, he also defeated the invasion of the Pangal (Bengal) led by one Kala Raja on the Khuga river.

The study of Manipur history became far more reliable from the later part of 11th century A.D. with the accession of the King Loiyumba in 1074 A.D. and whose reign continued up to 1122 A.D. Besides the chronicles, *Loiyumba Shilyen*, an archaic text which deals with the edicts of the king gives a fair account of the administration and other activities of the state. The introduction of Lallup system (feudal service about which we shall discuss in detail in another chapter), consolidation of the Manipur Kingdom, administratirve reforms, distribution of economic occupation, maintenance of abodes of deities and establishment of new Loishangs (state departments) etc. are some of the important accomplishments achieved during the reign of Loiyumba. He is described as one of the principal architect of Manipur. According to R. K. Jhalajit, the reign of Loiyumba marked the end of the ancient history of Manipur and beginning of the medieval period. However, Gangmumei Kabui rejects the observations made by Jhalajit on the ground that it neither fits into the scheme of periodisation of Indian history nor into the European or Asian history.57

Loiyumba conducted a series of military expeditions into hill tribal villages which not only helped in the establishment of Ningthouja hegemony over them but also in the consolidation of the Meitei kingdom. Some of the tribal villages situated near the valley were made tributary to the Meitei rulers. His military reforms provided the backbone of Manipur administration for a number of centuries. The admin-
istration of the country was systematised by creating six divisions (Lups) viz, Luplenlup, Thouchalup, Kongchalup, Lupkhuba Lup, Chingcha Lup and Khaichalup. In 1110 A. D. by a royal edict which later on konwn as Loiyumba Shilyen according to which the king distributed economic occupation of the people. According to this edict each family of the kingdom was given a Yumnak (surname) and assigned a particular occupation. Lallup system (feudal service) was introduced making it compulsory for every able bodied male members of the country between the age 17 to 60 to work for the state for ten out of every forty days. Considering the backward nature of the state of economy, the introduction of Lallup system brought about considerable changes in developmental activities of the state. This account has projected a well organised society and economy of Manipur. Handicraft and industry was growing and supplemented the agrarian economy. Another notable deveolpmement was the emregence of the artisan class who were basically peasants also started rendering Lallup service to the king. The successful operation of the edict clearly indicates the ever increasing powers and functions of the monarchical system. Since the reign of Loiyumba onwards the Meitei state has been playing an active role in regulating social, economic and religious life of the people. The edict also prescribes manners and etiquette to be observed by every sections of the people. Assessing the importance of Loiyumba Shilyen on the evolution of Meitei polity some scholars observed it as the first written constitution of Manipur.
Loiyumba's reign came to an end in 1122 A. D. with his passing away. R. K. Jhalajit describes Loiyumba as one of the makers of Manipur. The socio-economic reforms and administrative innovations introduced during the reign of this king remained in practice for a number of centuries. The Thabal Chongba Dance is reported to have been introduced in Manipur since the reign of Loiyumba. Loiyumba's reform measures laid the foundation of the emerging feudal order in Meitei society which continued till the British conquest of Manipur in 1891 A. D. L. Basanti Devi neither tracing the historical development of feudal system nor attempting a critical analysis of the characters of feudalism observes that the reign of Loiyumba marked the 'emergence of feudal state in Manipur' whose view is also shared by G. Kabui.

Loiyumba was succeeded by his son Loitongba (1122–1150 A. D.) who had ruled the country for about 28 years. Except for a revolt against the Meiteis by the Selloi Langmai tribes which was ultimately subdued, his reign was of little political significance. 'Kang', the traditional indoor game of the Meiteis was introduced during Loitongba's reign. The peaceful reign of Loitongba was succeeded one after another by Atom Yoiremba (1150–1163 A. D.), Iwanthaba (1163–1195 A. D.), and Thawanthaba (1195–1231 A. D.). Iwanthaba's reign was marked by frequent conflict between the Meiteis (Ningthouja) and Khumans. He was also known as the first Meitei king who usurped the throne by expelling his brother Atom Yoiremba. During Thawanthaba's rule Khumans, the principal rival of the Ningthoujas were completely
defeated and subdued, they also accepted subordinate status under the Meitei suzerainty. Frequent raids were conducted in many tribal villages particularly the Tangkhul villages and forced them to pay tributes to the Meitei king. Thawanthaba was able to penetrate many tribal villages surrounding Manipur valley. The king was able to keep his kingdom more unified. Chingthanglanthaba (1231–1242 A. D.) besides defeating some Loi and tribal villages also defeated the Kabaw, a Shan group from the Chindwin river basin and extracted tribute of salt from them. Thingbain-Shelhongba (1242–1247 A. D.) who succeeded Thawanthaba had a very short reign of five years. The Khumans who were completely subdued and had accepted Meitei suzerainty again made a vain attempt to re-establish their political authority during the reign of Puranthaba (1247–1263 A. D.). In an attempt to regain their supremacy invaded the territory of the Shelloi Langmai. The Shelloi Langmais in turn sought the help of Meitei King to drive away Khumans. The Meitei king completely defeated the Khuman forces at Poirei. This was the last battle marking the Meitei conquest of Khuman principalty. Since then the Khumans were completely absorbed into Meitei kingdom. Taking advantage of the weakened position of the Khuman principality, the Shan dwellers of Kabaw valley in Chindwin basin of Upper Burma invaded the erstwhile Khuman territory during the reign of Meitei king Khumomba (1263–1278 A. D.). The king himself leading from the front defeated the Shans on the bank of Ikop lake and several Shan soldiers were captured as war prisoners. The king also defeated and subdued a number of tribal villages. Minor skirmishes
between the Meiteis and Moirang principality are reported during Moiramba's (1278–1302 A. D.) rule in which the Meiteis emerged victorious. Thangbi Lanthaba, son of Moiramba ascended the throne in 1302 A. D. The king conquered the Maring tribe in the eastern hills of Manipur. Conflict between Meitei and Moirang continued in which the former getting upper hand over the later. The continued conflict between the Ningthououjas and Moirang may be taken as an indication of the growing Meitei military power and authority. Thangbi Lanthaba was succeeded by Kongyamba (1324–1335 A. D.) whose reign was marked by invasion of the kingdom by a group of people from the west referred to as Thongnang Mayang in the chronicles who according to G. Kabui, were a group of Bengalee refugees who were driven out of Bengal by the Muslims and who came to Manipur for settlement. Some leaders of the invading force along with 200 soldiers were taken as prisoners. Kongyamba was succeeded one after another by four rulers of little significance.

With the beginning of fifteenth century, history of Manipur witnessed the increasing power of the Meitei kingdom in terms of expansion of territory and consolidation of Ningthouja political authority. The reign of Punshiba (1404–1432 A. D.) not only saw the conquest of a number of tribal villages but also witnessed the extension of the kingdom into interior tribal areas of the surrounding hills. The military expeditions carried out by the king in the interior hilly and tribal areas were aimed at the consolidation of the Ningthouja rule in the Kingdom of Manipur. Ningthoukhomba, son of Punshiba ascended the throne in 1432 A. D. who was known as the conqueror of Tamu. Except for
the Moirang territory his father had already accomplished consolidation of the Kingdom covering most part of Manipur valley, north-western, north and north-eastern hills. To facilitate the expansion of territorial limits of the kingdom Ningthoukhomba by following an aggressive policy made attempts to conquer the neighbouring areas. He followed a policy to provoke both the Shan principality of Tamu and Moirang principality into a quarrel both of whom had been into conflict with the successive Meitei kings for quite some time. Having succeeded in creating distrust and enmity between them, Ningthoukhomba carried out a series of raids to Tamu between A.D. 1432 and 1443. The king next drew his attention towards the Moirang territory. Ningthoukhomba along with his nobles invaded and overran the whole territory of Moirang principality. In the form of tribute the Moirangs presented “Leishang” to the Meitei king. Here it may be mentioned that it was the first significant defeat of Moirang, though not totally crushed in the hands of the Meiteis. Control over the territory of Moirang strengthened economy of the Meitei state. The growing feudal structure of the kingdom during the reign of Ningthoukhomba was evident as indicated by the ranks of nobles who accompanied the king and participated in several military expeditions including the invasion of Moirang. In 1443 A.D., Ningthoukhomba led another military expedition to the village of Akla inhabited by the Kabaw Shans in the eastern frontier. In this expedition the elephant of the Akla chief and many warriors were captured as war booties. Afterwards the king turned towards the south-east and invaded the the Tarao village of Louchingphei.
One of the most memorable events of the reign of Ningthoukhomba was the raid of the kingdom by the Tangkhul tribes of Tuisem village while the king was far away from the capital leading military expeditions at Akla and Tarao Louchingphei. The Meitei queen Linthoingambbi dressed in the guise of man not onlyward off the invaders but also arrested Henpuringba, chief of the Tuisem Tangkhul. It is no wonder that since the time of Yabirok, Nongda Lairen Pakhangba’s mother, Meitei women had played a decisive role in socio-economic and political affairs of the land and whenever a serious crisis/threat befall the the kingdom. Since the time of Laisna, (wife of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba) successive Meitei queens have been presiding over the Pacha Shanglen, a court dealing with cases relating to women like adultery and bigamous affairs, meted out punishments thereby assisting the affairs of the state in enforcing accepted norms of behaviour and morality. Ningthoukhomba’s rule attracted immigrants from the east and west. Some Kabaw Shans (perhaps war captives) were allowed to marry Manipuri women and were ultimately absorbed in Meitei society. Without exaggeration it ay be observed that during Ningthoukhomba’s rule, despite the autonomy of Moirang, the Meitei state was completely formed and the Ningthouja Kingdom had more or less became a feudal state.

With the accession of Kyamba (Thangwai Ningthouba) at the throne in 1467 A.D., history of Manipur opens a new chapter. Accounts given by Cheitharol Kumbaba and supplemented by other
chronicles gives a far more reliable information in reconstructing history of the kingdom. The growing power and strength of the Meitei state was reflected in the military aggrandisement and policy of territorial expansionism adopted by this great king. Having already accomplished the consolidation of the kingdom by his able predecessors, Kyamba shouldered upon himself the responsibility of expanding the territorial limits of his kingdom far beyond the mountainous regions. Having acknowledged the increasing power of Kyamba and his country, in 1470 A.D., the king of the Shan kingdom of Pong proposed to the Meitei ruler to participate in a joint military expedition in the trans Chindwin basin which was the home of several Shan principalities. As Kyamba was already looking for opportunities to expand his kingdom, he readily agreed to the proposal of joint military expedition. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* records that the joint forces of Manipur and Pong invaded and conquered Kyang, a Shan principality in the Kabaw valley. The chronicle further mentions that the victory over Kyang was celebrated by renaming Thangwai Ningthouba as Kyamba, the conquerer of Kyang. The most notable outcome of the joint military expedition was the conclusion of a treaty of friendship between the two country which fixed the boundary between Manipur and Pong. The major portions of fertile Kabaw valley which was known for its agricultural and forest products was annexed to Manipur. Here it may be mentioned that the bilateral treaty concluded between Manipur and Pong was the first of its kind entered into between Manipur and another foreign country which was well recorded in the royal chronicle of
M manipur and *Pong Meitei Lamyen Lairik*. About the treaty G. Kabui observes thus, "This was the first international recognition of the kingdom of the Meiteis by a power in upper Burma. The kingdom of Manipur was a full fledged sovereign country with internal and external independence in the true sense of the term." Another notable development during the reign of Kyamba was the invasion of Manipur in 1504 by the Mayangs (Thongnang) from the west. The identity of the invaders is still not clearly established, however the invaders were defeated and repulsed by the Manipuri forces. Not only known for military exploits Kyamba was also an efficient ruler. He added two new revenue districts or circles viz, Naharup and Ahallup Pana in addition to the existing six Panas already established by Loiyumba in 1110 A.D. The introduction of the keeping of the royal chronicle known as *Cheitharol Kumbaba* from the year 1467 A.D. was perhaps the greatest contribution of Kyamba to the cultural heritage of Manipur. Cheiraoba, the festival marking the end of the year was also introduced by the king.

The successful rule of Kyamba attracted hordes of immigrants from the east and west to Manipur who in course of time adopted Manipur as their homeland and the liberal policy of the king allowed the foreign elements to be absorbed in Meitei society. The Shans or Pongs or Kabaws came here and became the subjects of the rulers of Manipur in Kabaw valley. The Muslim expansion in eastern India forced many Brahmins to flee their homeland. Many of these displaced Brahmins migrated to Manipur and settled here permanently. Many of them were employed by the king to look after the Hindu temples and to act
as astrologers. The Lairikyengbams were another non-Brahmin migrants who were employed as royal scribes. The Brahmins and Lairikyengbams married Manipuri women. They adopted Manipuri (Meiteilôn) as their mother tongue. In the later periods there are evidences of Manipuri Brahmins accompanying the Meitei kings and taking part in military expeditions. The arrival of Brahmins and other groups of people into Manipur and their subsequent absorption into Manipuri society may be regarded as an indication of the beginning of a pluralistic pattern of society in Manipur.

Another notable feature of Kyamba’s reign was the beginning of Vishnu worship in Manipur thereby laying the foundation of Hinduism in Manipur which saw its zenith during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kyamba is reported to have constructed a Vishnu temple at Lamangdong where an image of Lord Vishnu was installed and worshipped by the Brahmins. The place where Vishnu temple was constructed came to be known as Bishnupur. Though worshipping of Vishnu was started, perhaps under royal patronage, evidences available so far does not suggest the king being converted into Hinduism. Kyamba remained a follower of the traditional Meitei religion. After a reign of forty years he died in 1508 A.D. at the age of sixty-four. Kyamba was one of the greatest rulers of Manipur. Except for Moirang principality which enjoyed a fair amount of autonomy within Manipur kingdom, the territorial limits of Kyamba’s kingdom extended up to Kabui country in the west, to the eastern part of the Chindwin river in the east, covering the whole of Manipur valley had made Manipur a power to be
reckoned with by the Shan states in upper Burma. Doubtless to say Kyamba was a great conqueror, a wise statesman, an able administrator who made significant contribution to culture and civilisation of Manipur.

The first half of the sixteenth century was a period of internal instability and stagnation in Manipur. Though Kyamba was followed by six rulers between 1508 and 1562 A.D., most of them were incapable of governing the country. As there was no serious internal or external threats the kingdom was fortunate enough to survive. Among them Kabomba (1523–1542 A.D.) for the first time made contact with the Ahom kingdom of Assam. A trade route to upper Assam was opened in 1536 A.D. E. A. Gait mentions the exchange of envoys and presents between the Manipuri and Ahom king. References are also made about the Ahom king Suhungmung (1497–1539 A.D.) entering into matrimonial alliance with the king of Manipur.

The second half of the sixteenth century Manipur had seen a more vigorous and powerful kingdom under Mungyamba (1562–1597 A.D.). He was a great conqueror whose reign was marked by a number of military expeditions. The king consolidated his position in the western, southern and south-eastern hill areas of the kingdom by conducting a series of raids and military expeditions and compelled many recalcitrant tribal chiefs to pay annual tributes to him. The king, in 1565 A.D. invaded Mungkhong Mungyang in the eastern fringe of Kabaw valley and captured five chiefs of the area. In 1578 A.D. Khamran
was fixed as the boundary between Manipur and Shan states. In 1571, Samshok was conquered and in 1572 Kabaw Shans were defeated. Again in 1582 Mungyamba raided Samshok and in 1597 A.D., he conquered Kyang and Shan Yathek in Kabaw valley. Mungyamba’s consolidation over Kabaw valley reiterated Manipur’s control over the area since the reign of Kyamba in 1470 A.D. Conquest over Kabaw valley enriched the kingdom having established control over a large fertile tract which was suitable for agricultural products. Besides conducting military expeditions within and beyond the kingdom, notable administrative and developmental works were taken up by the king. In order to mitigate the rampant illness of population caused by malarial fever, Mungyamba established a new state department of medicine known as *Ametpa Loishang*. New roads were constructed and existing ones were improved upon. To store foodgrains, particularly paddy, he constructed/established several state granaries known as *Kei*. The state would distribute the foodgrains to the needy people during famine caused by natural calamities or lean seasons. The immigration of Brahmmins into Manipur continued.

The successful reign of Mungyamba was followed by his son Khagemba (1597–1652 A.D.) who was the most illustrious ruler of medieval Manipur whose long reign was a remarkable epoch in the history of the kingdom. He inherited a stable and powerful state from his father and was further expanded by him, greater in size and strength. During his long reign of fifty-five years, Khagemba not only strength-
ened the internal political control over the hill tribes by carrying out frequent military expeditions and raids over the recalcitrant tribal villages of the kingdom as well as his rule in the Kabaw valley and checked the Muslim invasion from the west. Khagemba's campaigns in Kabaw valley was directed against tributary states. The Kyang state was invaded in 1602 A.D. and 177 prisoners were captured. He again invaded Kyang subsequently in 1614 and 1647 A.D.68 Khagemba's repeated forays into Kabaw valley led into conflict with the Burmese kingdom under the Tongoo dynasty who were trying to establish their hold over the Shan states in upper Burma in 1648 and 1651 A.D. On both the occasions the Burmese forces were defeated. The Tripuri kings who had already established military and commercial contacts with Manipur invaded the kingdom in the south in 1603 and 1634. But the Tripuris always faced defeat in Manipuri hands. In the invasion of 1634 the Tripuri forces were defeated with two hundred prisoners captured by Manipuri forces.

Of all the external aggressions into Manipur which had a lasting impact on the kingdom was the joint Kachari-Muslim invasion of 1606 A.D. Though the invasion was an outcome of an unhappy incident at the royal palace of Manipur due to a scuffle between the two brothers of Khagemba viz, Chingsomba and Sanongba. Sanongba felt slighted and fled to Cachar with some nobles. He approached the Kachari king to invade Manipur and installed him on the throne. Having obliged the request of Sanongba, the Kachari king sent a big force and invaded Manipur and proceeded upto Khurai, the northern division of the capi-
tal city. The counter attack of the Manipuri forces compelled the Kachari forces to retreat. Again in 1606 the Kachari king deputed a big force along with Sanongba and some Muslim mercenaries to invade Manipur. However, the invading forces were defeated. Sanongba and a large number of the invaders including their leaders were arrested and imprisoned among whom many of them were Muslims. The impact of the invasion on Manipur was quite profound. The king allowed the settlement of those Muslim war captives into Manipur and they constituted a useful community in the kingdom rendering valuable service in agriculture and technological innovations.

The reign of Khagemba brought all round development in Manipur. The king was the spirit behind all social and cultural innovations, economic and technological changes, political, administrative reforms and religious and literary developments in the kingdom. Gangmumei Kabui observes that there was no part of the Meitei life and society which was not touched by this great king. The king was a patron of literature, religion, sports and games. Khagemba was really a great nation builder to whom the Meitei nation owed a lot.

The pluralistic pattern of society which had seen its emergence during Kyamba's reign was further strengthened by Khagemba. Large scale immigration was permitted when he settled the Muslim and Kachari war captives in Manipur after the Kachari invasion of 1606 A.D. Not only they married local women, the liberal policy of the king allowed the Muslims to follow their religion and particular way of life. There are
also references of immigration of Shans of Kabaw valley to Manipur valley and their ultimate absorption into the Meitei social system. The Brahmins continued to migrate into Manipur. They were given local surnames according to the gods or deities they worshipped or maintained.

A more vigorous and powerful feudal polity emerged in Manipur during the rule of this great king. In 1608 A. D. the title of king (Ningthou) was changed to Lainingthou (Godly king), thereby according a divine status to the monarch. Prostration as a symbol of showing respect and court etiquette was introduced. Nobility who formed the backbone of state administration was strengthened. The king showed courtesy and respect to the chiefs of hill tribes. On the other hand the hill tribes and nobles extended their help to the king as demonstrated during the Kachari Muslim invasion of 1604 and 1606. Lallup system was made more effective. Pana system was further strengthened. Not only in administration, but also military, games and sports etc., were brought within the ambit of Pana system. For the administration of the capital city, four officials were appointed and made in charge of four different quarters. To meet the ever expanding functions of the state many new departments were established. To name a few, establishment of department of Muslims, department of police, department of oil crushing, quarter guard of the army, department of musicians etc. Village chiefs were entrusted to administer justice. New state granaries were established in different parts of the state in addition to
existing ones. Peasants who contributed twelve pots of paddy per hectare to the granaries were exempted from attending Lallup service.

The reign of Khagemba was a period of great economic development in Manipur. Besides the expansion of agricultural activity in the valley, Manipur’s control over Kabaw Valley contributed to a large extent the natural resources of the kingdom. The state acted as facilitator in expansion of agricultural activities by taking up the work of draining away water from marshy areas to river streams. Dredging of rivers and streams were carried out at regular intervals and new canals were dug out. Replacing the age old broadcasting system new methods of agriculture like transplantation of paddy was introduced by the Muslim captives and was put into wide practice and enhanced production. Economic activity was greatly increased with the establishment of ten markets in and around the valley in 1614 A. D. The opening of markets may be regarded as indication of the surplus in production. It appears that Manipur’s economy had crossed the subsistence economy. Bell metal currency had been introduced in the kingdom facilitating trading activities. The royal chronicle records the existence of a class of artisans like blacksmiths, brass making and weapon making. So far we do not have adequate information about the economic role played by these groups in the economy of the kingdom.

Though Khagemba followed a liberal social and religious policy, the king was an astute follower of traditional Meitei religion. Some historians remarked that the reign of Khagemba was the heyday of
traditional Meitei religion. Temple of *Nongshaba* (Sun God) was constructed in 1633 A. D. The rites and rituals of *Laiharaoba* was also performed. Though Hinduism had not taken firm root in the kingdom a notable feature of religious syncretism or dual worship of traditional Meitei Gods and Hindu God was noticed in festive occasions, the statue of Vishnu was installed during the royal boat race. Many books possessing great literary, historical, religious and philosophical merit were written during the reign of Khagemba. The royal chronicle refers to improvement made upon the Meitei script by the king. Indeed it was a period of literary efflorescence. Taking into account the all round development achieved by the country during his time the reign of Khagemba may be described as an epochal event in the history of Manipur.

The good works accomplished by Khagemba was continued by his son Khunjaoba (1652–1666 A. D.). Improvement work of the capital was taken up. The king excavated the moat in front of the royal gate made of brick which was constructed by his father. Dredging of Nambul river and other drainages in and around the capital were taken up. There was more contact between Manipur and Assam in terms of trade and migration. As Khunjaoba died issueless he was succeeded by Paikhomba, son of his brother prince Tonaba in 1666 A. D. The Burmese made an unsuccessful attempt to invade Manipur in 1692 across the Chindwin river. In 1696, the Tripuris made an incursion into the south-western frontier but the intruding forces were defeated and sixteen prisioners were captured. Existing roads and waterways of the
state were improved. State control over forest and natural resources were fully established. Recurrence of tiger menace in the valley was reported. The tiger menace may be suggested as a sign of expanding economic activity of the increased population. The reclamation of forest areas and swamps for agricultural purposes disturbed the natural habitat of wild animals. The four Panas (administrative division) were given greater administrative responsibility. For administrartive convenience new office buildings for these Panas were constructed. There are also records of long distance trade between Manipur and neighbouring Kingdoms like Assam, Tripura and Burma, the main items of trade being elephants and horses. Immigrants including Brahmin settlers from Gujarat, Vanarasi, Brindavan and Prayag came to Manipur. The king continued to follow a liberal social policy which was reflected in the matrimonial alliance with the neighbouring kingdoms. In short Paikhomba’s reign was a successful one. Paikhomba died in November 1697 at the age of fifty-three after a reign of thirty two years.

The foregoing paras outlined so far, though in nutshell is a modest account of the evolution of the Meitei (Manipur) kingdom during the last one and half millennium. In her long journey towards the formation of a nation state she had enjoyed fortune and glory and experienced sorrow and vicissitudes of history. The kingdom had to face numerous challenges within and without in her attempt to establish a distinct and independent political entity. The absorption and integration of the seven clans into a single ethnoses viz, the Meiteis
(Ningthoujas) itself was a cumbersome process. Successive Meitei kings’ attempt to bring the various tribes who inhabit the hill areas of the country into the fold of the kingdom were often met with stiff resistance. It is no wonder that numerous incidents of tribal chiefs rising standard of rebellion against the Meitei hegemony are found gable in the pages of Cheitharol Kumbaba and Ningthourol Lambuba. As the power and glory of the kingdom increased over the centuries she had to face a number of threats and challenges on the other front. The Kabaws, Shans, Ava, from the east and the Tripuris, Kacharis etc., in the west could not remain silent as mere spectators watching the power, prosperity and glory of Manipur. Attempts were made on many occasions to subdue and decimate the nascent kingdom. The martial tradition, their undefatigable energy and labour coupled with the land-locked, hill–girted and inaccessible terrain gifted with rich natural resources enabled Manipur to establish and maintain a sovereign kingdom and withstood challenges from the external forces.

The kingdom of Manipur founded by Nongda Lairen Pakhangba in the first century A. D. and laid a solid foundation in the first half of the seventeenth century by Khagemba reached its zenith of glory in early eighteenth century during Garibniwaz’s (Pamheiba, 1709–1748 A. D.) time, the greatest and the most controversial ruler which Manipur ever had in her history. The eighteenth century also witnessed the beginning of the process of her decline which continued till the next century. Hence the study proposes to examine in detail, the factors/
processes that contributed into the making of Manipur a great regional power to be reckoned with in the region and her eventual decline during the period under study.
Notes and References:

5. Ibid, p. 128.
11. Ibid.


18. W. McCulloch, Account of the Valley of Manipur.


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32. G. A. Grierson, op. cit., p. 20.
34. McCulloch, op. cit. p. 2.
40. B. K. Roy Burman, op. cit. p. 103.
42. Cheitharol Kumbaba, pp. 1–2.
45. N. Amuyaima (ed.), Tutenglon.
47. O. Bhogeshwore Singh, op. cit. pp. 221-222.
52. Shakok Lamlen (MS).
54. G. Kabui, op. cit., p. 106.
55. Ibid, p. 111.
60. R. K. Sanahal, Manipur Itihas (Imphal, 1947) p. 32.
64. G. Kabui, op. cit., p. 137.
65. Ibid., p. 196.
66. E. A. Gait, History of Assam, p. 94.
68. Chietharol Kumbaba, op. cit., p. 35, 41.
69. G. Kabui, op. cit., p. 216.
70. Ibid.
71. Cheitharol Kumbaba, op. cit., p. 34.
72. G. Kabui, op. cit., p. 222.