CHAPTER III

Economic Practice

Economic practice is considered to be the primary determinant of the social formation. But since every historical situation has its roots in the past, for a proper understanding of the economic practice as it existed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we have to first trace its roots in the early history of Manipur. We shall then trace the changes and continuities, if any, in its growth and the level of development it reached during the eighteenth century – the period with which we are essentially concerned here.

Main Features of the Economy of Ancient and Medieval Manipur:

Extensive information on important aspects of the ancient economy of Manipur is not available. But from archaeological and literary sources we are able to reconstruct a rough feature. The archaeological finds of prehistoric caves at Khangkhui, Tharon and Napachik indicates the use of neolithic and bone tools. The findings point to the existence of a hunting and food gathering economy. The excavation at Napachik site points to the prevalence of agriculture which again
implies a settled life and economy in Manipur valley. The introduction of agriculture and its accompanying technology have drawn the attention of both the archaeologistst and historians in order to understand the economy of a community. The Manipuri chronicles and Meitei literary texts record the accounts of the discovery of paddy, invention of agriculture, practice of shifting cultivation, development of bronze and iron technology for making of daos, axes and hoes for agricultural and allied purposes. Tradition and myths as recorded in a number of literary texts have clearly shown that the ancient Meiteis were shifting cultivators. Before developing the knowledge of wet rice agriculture, 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 provides the environment for the development of this type of agriculture. The agricultural implements adopted were axes and daos for felling down trees and clearance of jungles and small iron hoe for digging up the soil. There are evidence of neolithic celts suggesting the possibility of being used in the primitive agricultural system long before the introduction of iron hoes. References have already been made of the discovery of a variety of rice called Morshi Thangyai in the proto-historic period. However, the first literary reference to paddy cultivation in the plains is made in some texts. But there is no reference of employing plough animal or plough in the pre-Pakhangba literature. It is probable that agriculture was further improved during the time of Poireiton, a contemporary of Nongda Lairen
Pakhangba as references are made of 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.\(^4\) Naotthingkhong Phambal Kaba refers to the system of shifting cultivation being practised by the Shelloi Langmai tribe of Nongmaiching hill and adoption of wet rice cultivation by the valley dweller Metieis, Loiyumba Shilyen, (edicts of king Loiyumba, 1074–1122 A. D.) and Mashil (an archaic text) 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. There are myths which refers that tigers were yorded by serpents and back of stork used as plough by gods. Because of the development in knowledge of metallurgy specially iron and existence of regular trade between Manipur and neighbouring countries of Ava and India (especially Tripuris, Kacharis and Ahom states), there is a possibility that plough must have been used during Naotthingkhong’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 (1597–1652 A. D.) reign and the Muslim peasant immigrants from Bengal introduced improved agricultural technology including transplantation of paddy seedlings thereby putting an end to age old practice of broadcasting.\(^5\) Nongshamei Puya refers to the contribution made by Muslim peasants to agriculture but it also mentions
the practice of wet rice cultivation and use of plough drawn by bullocks. Contact with neighbouring countries made it possible the introduction of improved varieties of paddy in Manipur. The surplus from the paddy production could be collected by the state and the surplus production was made possible by wet rice cultivation in Manipur. The state acted as facilitating agent for agricultural activities by taking up the works like dredging of rivers and draining away water deposits from swampy areas and marshes. The royal chronicles refers to innumerable instances of state undertaking the works of creating bunds and dykes to check inundation.

The successful role played by the Meitei king, originally a tribal chief, in the organisation and continuation of wet rice cultivation stabilised and strengthened the institution of kingship. The king, by virtue of his position and as representative of the agricultural community the control over distribution of land was vested to him, who was theoretically the owner of all land, cultivated and waste along with all natural resources. Because of the scarcity of labour and wet rice cultivation being labour intensive, the possession of wet rice lands by peasants were subject to their rendereing periodic labour service to the state. In return, such a peasant, who was known as Lalloi was granted the use of one Pari (2.5 acre) of land subject to the payment of regular tax in kind. The homestead (Ingkhol) lands were free from tax. The rate of tax levied per pari is varied from two pots to twelve pots. Normally a Pari of land annually produces around 150 pots. Except for
certain cases the wet rice land known as *Lou* was considered the property of the state and theoretically was neither hereditary nor transferable.

We do not get much information about the nature of land tenurial system, land holding, different rates of revenue and rent, extent of cultivation in the valley, etc. However, colonial writers and officials connected with or posted in Manipur in the nineteenth century in the form of official reports, accounts and memoirs have provided useful information on the subject. As already stated the land areas of the valley are generally divided into two categories viz, *Ingkhol* (homestead land) and *Lou* (cultivable/agricultural land). These *Ingkhol* are distributed in a number of villages. The agricultural lands available in the valley and types of tenurial system are classified as – i) *Taonaro*, (Tounarou), ii) *Sarkari* (Raja’s own or Ningthouloou), iii) *Phumlo* (Phamlou), iv) *Sepoys* (Siphailou), v) *Manaro* (Manalou), vi) *Brahmins* (Lugun-lou), vii) *Royal family*, and viii) *Maharani* and *Temple* (Lairoou) etc. Of these *Lous* only *Tounarou*, *Raja’s own Lou* and *Phamloou* are taxed which varied from two to sixty basket per *Pari* and the remaining are tax free lands. About one fifth of the total cultivated area was covered under *Tounarou*. The rate of revenue per *pari* under *Tounarou* was fixed at six *Chengkoks* of rice (three maunds approximately) which was paid in kind and sometimes in cash and calculated on the price of rice at the time. *Tounarou* holding are of two types – i) holding through purchase and ii) holding through clearing of jungles on receiving permission. Those who possesed *Tounarou* through the later mode are
exempted from payment of tax for one year. Except in case of default in payment of tax, the king cannot evict the land holders without paying proper compensation. The land holders can either inherit or disposed off the lands falling under Tounarou category.

The Raja’s own lands (Sarkari) are cultivated either by the slaves or free man and the rate of rent was quite high as compared with other tenures. Each slave was given one Pari of land alongwith plough, cattle and implements and he had to pay sixty baskets of paddy as rent. In case of the land being let to free man, they were supposed to pay twenty-four baskets of paddy. However, the free man were not supplied cattle and other implements.8 Another category of land which were held by officers and nobles in lieu of their salary was Phamlou and these lands were cultivated either by the slaves of the official or free men. The rate of rent per Pari was twenty-four baskets of paddy and the officers in turn gave a revenue of two basket to the state.9 Failure in payment of revenue resulted in the confiscation of Phamlou and was given to others.

More than one third of the cultivable area falls under Siphai-lou (Sepoy’s land) category which were given to the sepoys and officers of the native army. The sepoys who were in the service of the state were not paid in cash and in lieu were given lands, the size of land holdings varied according to their ranks. A Major who headed a number companies got one Pari each calculated on the basis of number of companies under his supervision. A Poila got six Pari, a Subedar (subalten)
four pari, a Jamandar got three pari while a sepoy got one and a quarter of a pari etc. and was revenue free. In case a sepoy died in harness and left behind a male heir, his family was given half a pari and the remaining land reverted to the state. If the son joined army after attaining majority, he was given the same amount of land to which a sepoy was entitled. Sepoys who had surplus land could sublet it with the usual rent of twenty-four baskets per pari.

In certain instances the king also granted lands to his favourites and to individuals who performed/ rendered valuable services to the state. Such type of land grant was called Manalou and was granted only for the life time of the grantee. If his heirs desired to continue possession of these lands they had to pay revenue at the rate of twenty-four baskets of paddy per pari. Otherwise the land used to be reverted to the Raja. The Meitei kings also granted land to the Brahmins. Every Brahmin on taking the sacred thread (Lugun) are entitled to receive one pari of land from the Raja. When the Brahmin died his widow was allowed to possess half of it to maintain herself and the children, and the rest was reverted to the Raja. The land so received under this system cannot be disposed off or sold out to any other person. Brahmin lands are usually known as Lugun-lou. The practice of giving land to the Brahmins became widespread after the Meitei kings were converted into Hinduism in the eighteenth century. Another interesting feature of the land tenurial system in Manipur was assignment of lands to the Hindu temples and sylvan deities. The lands assigned under these categories
were revenue free and never reverts back to the king. For example, 'Govindaji,' an important deity of the royal family was assigned one hundred pari of land and these were cultivated by the Keis (slaves) of the temple who lived in the villages of Charangpat, Thinunggei, and Uyan. Lands belonging to members of the royal family including the Maharani and those lands whose ownership descended from father to son were exempted from payment of revenue but the size of each holding was fixed. Those who were in possession of more than the fixed ceiling were liable to pay revenue in the usual rate. Lands were also granted to individuals who rendered distinguished service in war and such land grant was known as Pangal-lou (land acquired through merit and strength). These land grants are inheritable and revenue free. The Meitei kings used to exact royalties for the sale of timber, bamboo and other forest products from Jiri and thus maintained their rights over them which formed part of the state revenue. Access to common lands such as forests, grazing grounds and fisheries were open to all subjects. To regulate the realisation of revenue two officers known as Phourungba and Lourungba were appointed by the king.

It has been stated elsewhere that the systematisation of Lallup system by king Loiyumba in the early part of the twelfth century A.D. had drawn the kingdom towards a more stable and organised polity. Literally, Lallup (Lal=war, Lup=organisation) means war organisaion. A rudimentary form of the evolution of this organisation had seen during the reign of Taethingmang (264–364 A.D.?), while he engaged the
labour service of his subjects in dredging the Imphal river. Lallup covered all state works both military and civil. Though originally started as a military service it was extended to non-military or economic activities of the state. Loiyumba's introduction of six administrative units called Lup strengthened the working system of the Lallup service. Though criticised by the colonial writers as forced labour, the development of Lallup system was the manifestation of the emergence of feudalism in the social, administrative and economic structure of the kingdom. Considering the backward nature of the kingdom characterised by absence of large-scale trade and commercial activities, absence of a monetised economy and reliance on barter system made the system of Lallup more meaningful and a necessity for development of the country. The Lakpa who supervised the Lallup service enjoyed revenue free land from the state as his salary. Most of the hill tribes did not attend Lallup and in lieu they pay annual tributes to Meitei kings failing which punitive actions were inflicted upon them.

From the preceding discussions it is clear that the Meitei kings exercised an overall control over the distribution of land. The king being addressed as “Leimaba” (owner of land) was regarded as owner of the land. Establishing control over such an important resource increased the power and authority of the successive Meitei rulers. It also enabled the state to keep a check on the growth of large-scale land holdings. At the peasant level, who had taken to wet rice cultivation the compulsory feudal service restrained the peasants initiative to en
large holdings of land. The nobility were granted large agricultural lands and were cultivated either by the slaves of the official or free men. The rent which the nobles got from their tenants (free men) was twenty-four baskets of pady per pari. These officers in return usually pays a revenue of two baskets of paddy per pari. However, if a noble fail to pay his share of revenue in time the phamlous were confiscated and given to others. To a certain extent it checked the growth of large-scale land holdings concentrated in a few hands. The nobility owing to its close links with the throne and having enjoyed the agricultural lands at the pleasure of the king could not emerge as independent and powerful landlords. Thus there was absence of landlordism in the kingdom.

Role of the State in Production Process:

In Manipur, the state played an important part in production activity acting as facilitating agent by way of organising and supervising dredging activities, constructing bunds to check inundation and clearing of drainages. However, role of the state in production process and organisation of production was not much apparent. But labour being the most crucial factor in production the Meitei state by the beginning of the twelfth century, had evolved a highly ingenious system of mobilisation of labour through the Lallup system about which references have already been made elsewhere. This system was made more systematic by successive Meitei kings and it transformed the whole nature of the economic activity by bringing it under direct state
control. The introduction of this feudal service and improvements made upon it over the years converted the loosely organised militia into a centralised militia pool with a regular gradation. An officer known as Lallup Chingba was appointed to oversee the functioning of this system. Reacting against the system being termed as 'forced labour' by some colonial writers, Johnstone observed, "The system was a good one, and when not carried to excess, pressed heavily on nobody. It was especially adapted to a poor state, sparsely populated. In such a state, under ordinary circumstances, where the amount of revenue is small, and the rate of wages often comparatively high, it is next door to impossible to carry out many much needed public works by payment. On the other hand, every man in India who lives by cultivation, has much spare time on his hands, and the Lallup system very profitably utilises this, and for the benefit of the community at large." He further commented, "Many of the great works of the former ages in other parts of India, . . . we have still to learn that the native system has much good in it, much to recommend it, and that it is in many cases the natural outgrowth of the requirements of the people."

In such state control over the mobilisation of labour for production not only enhanced the prestige and authority of the Meitei kings but also enabled the state to intervene directly in the production process. The vital control over labour meant that economic activity was shaped and dictated by the states interest and policies.
Organisation of Production in Agriculture:

The growth and development of Meitei state from a small chiefdom had its basis on the wet rice culture which sustained the Meitei state apparatus. Hence the success of wet rice cultivation was crucial to the economy. But wet rice economy not only required a large base of manpower to clear the swamps and marshes and level the soil but also a system of efficient water control to irrigate the fields. In this case, seasonal rainfall being abundant, the Meitei state was largely successful in providing the basic infrastructural facilities for extension of wet rice cultivation. Through its control over the supply of labour the state played a dominant role in land reclamation. It may be noted that in wet rice cultivation availability of water is most important as it basically supplies all necessary nutrients required for healthy growth. In Manipur, rainfall being abundant small scale irrigation facilities could be organised by the peasant community at the village level.

To a large extent the nature of wet rice cultivation is dependent upon varying ecological condition depended mainly upon its elevation and in the capacity to retain moisture. For this purpose the field was first levelled and low ridges or Louri were raised in a criss-cross pattern to retain water in the fields and the excess water being drained out whenever necessary. These ridges were generally not higher than a feet. This technique suited the alluvial plains of Manipur and wet rice cultivation was mostly carried out in this alluvial plain. Not less than
nineteen varieties of rice are grown in Manipur which are divided into early (Anganphou) and late crops. The early crop ripens in about three months and are ready for cutting in September. Sajikhong, Tumai, Kabaw Phou and Phourel Anganba are the favourite variety of early crops. The great bulk of rice which is grown in the valley is of late variety which ripens in about six months and is ready for reaping in November, the most popular and of finest quality among them are Phourel, Luining and Yenthik. However, by the close of the nineteenth century a large quantity of the early variety has been sown. It is possible that peasants are more attracted towards cultivation of the early variety as it took less amount of time and labour comparing with the later variety. The successful operation of agricultural activity was depended upon the construction of river embankments. The rainfall in normal years was so abundant that the danger of cultivation arose from floods rather than the lack of water. To prevent the annual flooding of rivers high embankments were constructed on state initiative besides periodic dredging activities were taken up. These embankments served alike bunds and high roads of the region.

The overall impact of the introduction of wet rice cultivation resulted in increased productivity which helped to sustain the growing state apparatus and the rising population. Though population of the country was greatly reduced during the last Burmese occupation of Manipur (1819–1826) as many of the valley dwellers left the country and took refuge in the neighbouring areas such as Cachar, Sylhet and
Dhaka for safety, there was definite signs of a growing population as evidenced by the establishment of new villages. The population of Manipur as it stands in 1881 were 2,21,070 out of which 1,35,782 comprised valley population\textsuperscript{15} and it increased to 2,84,465, in 1901.\textsuperscript{16}

Industry and Manufacture :

It is axiomatic that the level of technological development is an indicator of development of material culture and civilisation of a country. From the earliest times down the seventeenth century, there was a slow but steady development of technology in Manipur as already proved by archaeological findings and historical evidences. As cited elsewhere the prehistoric man in Manipur used both stone and bone tools. But the development of pottery which was coterminous with technological development was found to have flourished since early times. The material remains of Napachik are a testimony of it. Other archaeological sites at Sekta, Khamran, Khangabok, Irengbam, and Phunan etc proves the antiquity of pottery in Manipur. It has been suggested that some of the potteries found at the Napachik site have affinities with the potteries of ancient north China. The Chakpas who were dispersed in different parts of Manipur valley are described as the earliest pottery makers of Manipur.\textsuperscript{17} Some of the Chakpa villages viz, Andro, Phayeng, Chairel etc are still engaged in pottery making and produces good quality potteries which could be used for cooking, preserving and storing foods. In the hill areas, the Tangkhul and Paomei tribesman knew and
practised the art of pottery making since the early times. Potteries were widely used throughout the centuries in the kingdom. The Muslim immigrants during the reign of Khagembra introduced improved technology of pottery making by using wheels besides making different types of vessels. The Muslim family engaged in pottery making was given local surname known as Phusam (pottery making family) by the king and giving in marriage a local woman.

In comparison with pottery making metallurgy appears to be not so developed in early Manipur. There are historical references to iron, copper bronze, silver, gold and tin. According to popular tradition king Khuyoi Tompok was regarded as a technological innovator. During his reign iron was found at Kakching, gold at Kongba Meirembi and copper at Sibong. The myths associated with local deity Khamlangba of Kakching gives an interesting account of discovery of iron in the area. Widespread use of bell-metal gong for religious and cultural activities leads us to suggest that bronze metallurgy was developed within Manipur itself or perhaps, it might have been brought to Manipur by way of trade from upper Burma and Thailand. Use of iron implements in agriculture, weaponry (swords, spears, daos and other tools) was clearly proved by the development of blacksmithy in the kingdom. The accounts of Poireiton refers to the use of iron implements for the first time in the history of Manipur. Accounts of the coronation of Naethingkhong mentions iron made weapons and metals like tin silver and gold. The introduction of guns, gun making and use of gun
powder in Manipur is of later origin. The Meiteis learnt the art of gun making from the Muslim war captives in the seventeenth century during the reign of king Khagemba.

The creative impulse of the people of Manipur specially of womenfolk was best represented in the handloom and handicraft products. Though metal technology was not highly developed in the kingdom, in the field of handicraft Manipur could claim a proud heritage. It was in the field of weaving and related works like dyeing, printing, embroidery and applique art, Manipur excelled among all her neighbours. Queen Laisna, wife of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba was believed to have innovated several designs of clothes based on the pattern of python, Phanek Phibal, Samchin, and border of shawls. These designs are called Namthang-khulak, Khamen-chatpa and Ningkham which were used by the royal family and nobility. The mulberry silk-worm locally known as Leimatil was discovered by Nongmainu Ahongbi, wife of Khuyoi Tom pok. There was a village known as Leimaram which specialised in production of high quality silk. Handicrafts, including weaving and dyeing had greatly developed in eleventh and twelfth centuries. It appears that every family was engaged in this trade. It might have compelled king Loiyumba to issue his famous decree known as Loiyumba Shilyen to assign weavers’ families to produce particular types of clothes, the case being same in dyers’ families too. Thirty families were assigned to weave different designs of clothes. It is very interesting to know that in the twelfth century A.D. Manipuri weavers developed such
a rich varieties of weaving patterns which were patented with the state. As many as thirty-two different designs of cloth were found. The dyers families were assigned to produced different colours based on the colours of flowers. Eight families were assigned to dye specific colours. *Loiyumba Shilyen* has projected picture of a well organised economy of Manipur. The wet rice agrarian economy was supplemented by the growing handloom and handicrafts industry. It was in such a situation that the state had to intervene and regulate the organisation of these industries. The people, who primarily were peasants had now became artisans.

Thus from the above discussions it is apparent that weaving that prevailed in Manipur 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 fly shuttle known as *Pangandem* (perhaps fly shuttle might have been introduced in the kingdom by the Muslim immigrants).

With the success of wet rice cultivation and the surplus that followed, industrial activity witnessed slow and gradual changes to meet the basic requirements of the state for metals and scarce goods. Because of its specific importance the extraction of precious metals like iron boat building for transport and defence, handloom and handicrafts and all manufacturing activities received particular interest from the Meitei state. As in agriculture, the above industries were dependent on the labour of the *Lallois*. 
Salt being a scarce commodity, the Meitei state made systematic arrangements to procure the precious article. Salt was mainly obtained from the brine wells situated in the valley, principal salt wells are situated at the villages of Ningel, Chandrakhong, Sikhong and Waikhong. The whole of the salt wells is considered property of the king and are worked for his benefit. The men employed in production of salt are remunerated for their labour, and a certain amount of salt is set aside for their benefit. The king collected as revenue thirty percent of the produced and remaining seventy percent is distributed among the salt manufacturers. Though there are seasonal variations in production but at an average about 150 maunds of salt (estimate of 1867–68) are produced per month from these wells which almost met the requirements of the state. A small quantity is occasionally imported in times of scarcity from Burma and Cachar. The Ningel inscription of king Garibniwaz forbades people of other areas committing offences in the area, if any, are liable to be inflicted heavy punishment clearly shows the importance attached to the protection and preservation of salt wells. Salt produced from these wells are of high quality and free from smell. The villagers employed in salt production are from the Loi community and their Lallup duty is for six months in a year i.e., three months of more labour than that of the Meiteis. However, their longer period of engagement in Lallup is well remunerated by the state.

In a region where water afforded a ready and universal mode of transport, boat building was a popular industry under state supervi-
sion. The industry was sustained by the easy availability of timbers and free labour of the Lallup. They made excellent boats large and small. The *Hiyanglooi Hanjaba* and *Hisaba Hanjaba* oversaw the whole operation of construction and maintenance of boats.\textsuperscript{25} The boat building technique was simple. The locally available boats were hollowed out until only an outer skin about an inch and quarter thick remained. The inhabitants of Hiroi–Lamgang village (a Loi village), in the south of the valley not far from Sugnu made boats for the Raja.\textsuperscript{26} Widespread use of boat is evidenced by the annual boat race competition known as *Hiyang Tannaba* which are regularly held in the September every year. About seventy rowers occupied one boat in this competition.\textsuperscript{27}

The economy of Manipur being basically agrarian, industry did not emerge as a popular occupation of the people. The limited industry that developed on state initiative was based on the easy availability of natural resources and to meet certain basic needs of metals and scarce products. Being a land of rivers and streams which intersects the valley like a network, boat making developed. The salt industry was an important one for the very reason that home reserve was meagre. Amongst the few manufactures produced silk was considered important, it also constituted an important article of export. Silk weaving was an ancient art and hence its manufacturing was a continuation of the popular tradition. A relatively stagnant technology and rather rudimentary implements were characteristic feature of production. No scientific or technological change formed part of the eighteenth and
nineteenth century historical experience. Technology in general was backward. The uneven development of technology over a range of crafts resulted from a semi-tribal economic base, a small quantum of surplus in circulation and a relative scarcity of basic metals like iron in the country.

**Micro – economies of Peasant Production – An overview:**

The Lallois whose labour service sustained the Meitei state apparatus was also peasants and direct producers. While not on active state service the Lallois carried on their subsistence activity mainly by cultivation. Alongside the cultivation of wet rice in the state allotted plots, they were also involved in petty production mainly for domestic consumption.

On the sides of the hills and undulating grounds which was not easily reducible to a plain level, or in deeply flooded plains, swamps and marshes, the peasants cultivated a wide variety of vegetables and *Anganphou* which includers *Sajikhong, Tumai, Kabaw Phou* and *Phouren Anganba* which ripens in three months and is ready for cutting in September. This was followed by the cultivation of later varieties of paddy. The later crops being transplanted one, the grains after being sown in nursery beds for about two months, the seedling were transplanted in June or July to carefully manured beds, which had been ploughed as much as four or five times till the soil was reduced to a fine puddle of clay. The transplantation of the seedlings to the field was mainly done by women. The harvest was reaped by December.
Each *pari* of land yielded as much as one hundred sixty to two hundred baskets. The annual average yield per *pari* is about one hundred and fifty baskets and each basket contains about sixty pounds.²⁹ The transplantation technique by reducing the period of rice plants spent in the irrigated fields enabled the peasant to go for double cropping. As such after the winter rice had been reaped, mustard seed and other vegetables were grown.

The dry field cultivation of the peasants included pulses, potatoe, brinjals, pumkins, onion, pepper, tobacco of good quality and white sugarcane which has medicinal property. English vegetables, peas, and English cabbage, cauliflowers, and beans etc. were also cultivated in the nineteenth century.³⁰ A small quantity of opium were also grown by the Muslims.

The most important crop grown for manufacture was cotton. The cotton plant was generally cultivated in the periphery of Manipur valley and its adjoining hills, but more specifically by the hill tribes. Small quantities of Indigo, Bixa and Alba etc., used for dyeing were also cultivated by the peasants in the vicinity of their villages and homesteads.³¹

In addition, a rich variety of garden crops such as tobacco, opium, several kinds of plantain, vegetables and a few varieties of spices were grown by the peasants. The richness and variety of the crops grown indicated not only the fertility of the soil but also a secure and cultivated life enjoyed by the peasants. A number of fruits such as man-
goes, plantains, pineapples, apples, peaches, bramble, wild raspberry, jack and guava, etc. were grown in the valley and the hills. Ginger, indian corn and pan leaves are widely grown in the hills of Manipur.

Besides the agricultural and horticultural crops noted above, the region being richly endowed with forest products, the basic requirements of the peasants for shelter, fuel etc. were met without much effort. The forest provided valuable timbers chiefly adapted for constructing houses, furniture, boats etc. The bamboo which grew abundantly was utilised by the peasants for their houses, furniture, implements of agriculture etc. such crafts constituted subsidiary occupation of the peasants.

Division of Labour:

Though king Loiyumba in his edict of 1110 A.D. had initiated distribution of economic occupation among various Yumnaks (families), the close unity between agriculture and handicrafts was reflected in the distribution of labour. Most of the peasants need for crafts and artisan services being satisfied within the household there was no strict division of labour. Except for some Loi villages and few Meitei families who were assigned specific occupation like pottery making, sword making, there was no sharp division of labour between agriculture and industry. Every peasant or rather every household built its own hut, grew its own vegetables and tobacco, scoop out its own canoe and weaved its own mats. In most cases the crafts constituted a subsidiary occupation of the peasant and his family.
Thus blessed with a favourable geography and environment the Manipuri peasants could sustain and reproduce themselves without much labour and hardship. The micro-economies of the peasants was largely of a subsistence nature. The peasants produced upto the extent where their household needs could be met and self exploitation was minimal. Some references have been made about the indolence of Manipuri peasants and their frequent involvement in festivities round the year. But in the fertile valley of Manipur, forcing a living did not require much labour and prolonged physical exertion. Besides, the lack of incentives for surplus production which was linked to the mode of appropriation and the restrictive nature of state service did not encourage peasant activity. In the absence of incentives, peasants enterprises for enhancing productivity of crops by adopting new techniques was lacking. There was practically no rotation of crops apart from the system under which the winter rice was followed by pulse or oil seeds. As wooden plough with a iron tipped share, wooden rakes, a rough wooden harrow, sickles, knives, winnowing fan, a large mat and baskets comprised a peasants tools even by the end of nineteenth century.32

Mode of Appropriation:

By the eighteenth century the Meitei state had evolved an elaborate and systematic machinery for purposes of appropriation. As we have noticed already it took the form of labour services and collections
partly in cash or kind. But generally appropriation took in the form of
labour services which the peasant Lallosi offered to the state in various
capacities. The cash revenue collection of the state from all sources
including the Kabaw valley compensation which the British goverment
paid to Manipur since 1834 according to an estimate of 1873 is about
twenty five to thirty thousand rupees annually.\textsuperscript{33} The Meitei kings em-
ployed a large number of Lallosi in his farms, garden, fisheries, facto-
ries and to man and construct his boats.

Collection in kind were mainly realised from the land grands to
officials in lieu of salary, tributes from the hill chiefs and brime wells.
Revenue in kind was also collected from the Loi villages. Sufficient
data are not available for revenue collected from import and export of
goods. According to information furnished by the State administration
to the British officials in Manipur, the cash revenue realised from im-
port and export of goods for the year 1868–69 stood at rupees 1,975,7
annas 9 paise and rupees 3,533,1 annas 9 paise respectively. Revenue
collected from export of silk to Burma accounted for a mere rupees
one hundred only.\textsuperscript{34} The Manipuri officials' estimate of revenue col-
lection from export and import trade came around rupees twelve thou-
sand per annum.\textsuperscript{35} Some sort of tributes though on limited scale were
also appropriated from the tribes. The hill tribes such as the Kabui,
Mao, Maram, Tangkhul, Anal, Maring, Khongjai, etc. came annualy to
the Meitei court bringing with them a number of articles such as
cotton, ginger, pepper and elephant tusks etc. failing which retributive
actions were carried out. The exaction from the hill tribe was limited being exacted mainly for vindication of Meitei suzerainty. The idea was not so much to collect revenue as to bring and keep the indigenous hill tribes under complete or some sort of allegiance to the Meitei king. Annual congregation of tribal chiefs under Manipur kingdom was regularly held at the palace since 1700 A.D. during the reign of Charairongba (1697–1709) which later on came to be known as Mera Haochongba festival. About the festival it is reported that, “This festival in October lasts only for one day; it is a gathering of the hill tribes under the Manipur government, and is a curious sight on account of the great number of different tribes assembled, with their curious dress and weapons, differing from each other in feature and language, but all unanimous in one particular, to get drunk as speedily and remain so long, as possible. The hillmen indulge in feats of strength before the Raja, such as carrying heavy weights, etc. They also indulge in war dance and sham fights. The sports of the day conclude with a feast, at which they are regaled with the flesh of the cows, buffaloes, dogs, cats, etc., which may have died in the valley. The flesh is dried and preserved for this feat.36 Organising such events by the king helped in bringing about integration among the hill and valley people and also the safety and security of the kingdom.

The above discussions suggests that the extent of appropriation by the Meitei state was not extensive as compared to the strength of the population and resources. Though the Meitei rulers attempted
to cover all the probable source of revenue available within the region, the royal receipts were comparatively small owing to the cumbersome nature of the system and loose control over the receipts. Though the number of revenue receipts was increased to meet the growing need of resources, specially after Manipur–Burma conflicts, yet the amount collected was far less of the potential resources of the Meitei state. Allegations are made about the revenue officials involved in corrupt practices while collecting revenue and in measurement of land allotted to the peasants. There are instances of punishment meted out to officials for taking bribes.\textsuperscript{37} As already noted a fair amount of agricultural land remains tax free. in fact the very nature of the dominant mode of production which took the form of labour services and collections in kind restricted the possibility of affecting significant increases in revenue collection for the state.

Trade and Commerce:

The mode of appropriation by the state in the form of labour service not only determined the level of production and the development of a marketing network, also eventually determined the level of trade and commercial activity within and outside the state. Because of the limitations imposed by the mode of appropriation, the range of trading activities at various levels was greatly limited. The available evidence suggests that the state not only gave in kind but also received mostly in kind and service. Surplus, therefore, largely took the
form of labour rent for direct appropriation by the ruling class. Besides most of the basic requirements of the peasant and his family for food, clothing etc., were satisfied within the household. However, self sufficiency in its totality appears to be a myth. A minimal surplus production was necessitated by the scarcity of essential items within the state. Theoretically, production of surplus would be necessary to acquire artisan and craftsmen services. But in case of Manipur, the division of labour on caste specific profession was yet to emerge. Hence, though the peasants did exchange their products, a substantial surplus production on their part was not necessary. Moreover, the artisans and craftsmen still retained their link with agriculture. Since surplus production was minimal a marketing network and trade that developed were essentially rudimentary in structure. At local markets exchanges were made of scarce products. Private trade not only did not appear in any substantial form, it was also not as it appears encouraged by the state. Not that private trade was totally absent. But considering the magnitude of the trade which in fact itself, was meagre, it appears that private trade was very limited and highly susceptible to the vagaries of the political situation of the day. Besides, most of the traders never cut off their link with agriculture which considered their primary occupation.

A special of marketing network within the country was the existence of local markets (Keithel) where most of the exchanges took place. Exchanges was mainly intra-local on petty scale and at a ped
dling level within the limitations of a basically barter and cowrie economy. Important marketing centres were at Sana Keithel, Kha Keithel, Moirang Keithel, Khuman Keithel, Phalbung Keithel, Chairen Keithel, Nambol Keithel, Konglang Keithel, Andro Keithel and Phayeng Keithel. The markets contiguous to the hill areas were generally frequented by the neighbouring hill tribes. In these markets where regular trade was carried on between the plain and hill tribes, a variety of goods mostly perishable were exchanged. Particularly during the winter seasons a large number of hill people frequented the main markets. Most of the items sold or exchanged in the markets are dry fish, rice, vegetables, pan, supari, clothes, ornaments for the hillmen and sweatmeats. One very interesting features of these markets of Manipur was it being exclusively run by women. About three thousand women assembled in the afternoon bazar. Men with the exception of foreigners, were not allowed to enter the market place; all the buying and selling was conducted by women. The most important and essential item which the hillmen collected/buy from these markets is salt. They brought cotton, ginger, pepper, baskets and wax etc. for exchange or sold off for cash. Trade with the hill tribes was conducted on a small scale. Exchange was carried out mainly for use value or consumption. Exchange for the most part was on a personal level and the goods usually bartered. Though the markets were established by the state since a long period it appears that the state did not exercise much control over them.
Though sketchy references have been made in the royal chronicle of the long distance trade routes between Manipur and neighbouring kingdoms, like Tripura, Kachar, Assam and Burma a fair picture could not be drawn about the nature and quantum of trade carried out between Manipur and these countries for want of sufficient data. However, some important items of trade as suggested by the chronicle included among others elephants and horses. It appears that elephant trade was exclusively a royal monopoly. Manipur silk which was of fine quality was in great demand by the Burmese. However, by the eighteenth and nineteenth century Manipur’s trade and commercial relation with the neighbours were at its lowest ebb as frequent wars broke out between Manipur and her neighbours especially with Burma. In 1873 a sum of ruppes one hundred only was levied as tax by the state as export duty of silk from Manipur to Burma.\(^8\)
Notes and References:


2. The first reference to paddy cultivation in Manipur is made in Loutaro(MS.), Ningthou Maputhoib(MS.) and Soubol Yairel Chanu (MS.). M. Chandra Singh (ed.), p. texts like Soubol Lairembali Loutaro(MS.), Ningthou Maputhoib(MS.) and Soubol Yairel Chanu (MS.).


4. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle and Tutenglon, an archaic text (N. Manoyaaima, ed.) refers to dredging of Imphal river by Meitei King Taotthingmang (264-364 A.D.) along with his brother Yoimingba.


7. Ibid.

8. Ibid, pp. 5–6.


11. McCulloch, Brown (p. 83.) Dun and at a later stage by Hodson p. 31.
15. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, (Delhi, 1981 rept.) p. 15.
17. Chakpa Khunthok Khunda (MS).
22. R. Brown, op. cit., pp. 9–10,
27. Ibid., p. 52.
29. Ibid., p. 86.
30. Ibid., p. 84.
32. R. Brown, op. cit., p. 87.
33. Ibid., p. 88.
34. Ibid.
35. E. W. Dun, op. cit., p. 66.
37. R. Brown op. cit., p. 86.
39. Ibid. p. 88.