CHAPTER III

UNDER THE SHADOW OF COMMON TRADITIONS AND ETHNOLOGY

The peoples of Manipur, particularly those who live in this land since ancient times, have a cultural sense of unity among them, it being reflected in their several cultural traditions. First, observation may be made of such a tradition of the Meitei people living in the central valley, expressed in geo-social terms. A folk song of this people illustrates the point: "manipur sans leimayol// chingna koine panshabe lam // haona koine panngekpa lam" (freely translated, it means, 'Manipur, the golden central land, surrounded on all directions by the hill ranges and guarded by the hill-dwellers').

Basically this song refers to the socio-geographical continuum between the hills and the plains of Manipur. Expressed thus in this geo-social term, the song records the inseparability of the hill peoples from the collective socio-territorial unity of Manipur.

To the Meitei, the hills and the peoples thereof are integral parts of their socio-territorial whole. This is reflected also in another cultural tradition of the people, viz., the people's mythical conception of their history right from the creation of their physical world and
formation of their society. In the creation myth of the Meitei, the created territory is represented as being composed of *konglong mapal* (*konglong* meaning "highland" and *mapal* meaning "nine"; the phrase thus meaning "Nine Highlands") and *leirol mapal* (meaning "Nine Lowlands"). The king of the mythical state ruled from the nodal place called Kangle (the palace site of the Meitei kings) adjoining the "highlands" and "lowlands". Each of those nine highland sub-worlds and those nine lowlands, was locally ruled by a chief. Those eighteen chiefs were all the subordinates of the central king. They formed his body of nobles. It would be interesting to note here that the chiefs of those nine "highlands" were considered superior to those of the "lowlands". It is indicative of the greater esteem attached to the high hills and settlements there. The highlands were the lands of the celestial beings whereas the lowlands of the god-like powers living in the bosom of the earth or on its surface. The hill peoples of Manipur till date cherish their traditional notion about the superiority of the hills to low level plains; even in the hills the higher tops are deemed to be the more prestigious spots of settlement than lower points.

Traditions trace the origin of the mythical heroes of the Meitei to high hills of the present Manipur like
Kobru in the northern hill range and Chinckhei in the eastern hill range, Thangjing hill in the western range and Houbiching in the southern hill range. And many of the cultural heroes of the Meitei are indicated to be of origin from various communities which are till today found living in hills or which were earlier settling in the hills. Thus, Nongda Leiren Pakhangba claimed by the Meitei to be their first historical king is indicated to be of Chothe tribal origin; Khamiangba, presiding deity of iron-ore and iron-smithy, of Haring tribal origin; Wangbaran, presiding deity of the south direction, of Kom origin (Khumallambam Yaima Singh, 1968) Traditions presuppose Thangjing Koirei Lei of Moirang, presiding deity of the south-western direction to be of Koireng tribal origin and Puleizomba, ancestor of the Angom clan of the Meitei, of Tangkhul origin etc.

All these points of the mythical-historical geography of the Meitei thus provide the suggestion that the Meitei community was formed initially with peoples from the hill communities of ancient times, who ventured out to settle at the central fertile valley to control the rich resources therein. It seems quite probable that the Meitei State was formed out of the process of interactions of warfars, between and among those early pockets of population coming down from the hills, resulting out of their rivalry to control the resourseful valley.
Many of the present-day hill communities of Manipur, on the other hand, have traditions pointing to their, taken separately, common origin with the Meiteis. Thus, as for the Mao Nagas N. Ashuli (1976:14-15) reports: "The origin of this people, from the historical point of view is neither from the east nor from the north of the present Nagaland. There are two schools of thought on the origin of the Nagas. One school tells us that the Naga came from the eastern region of the present State of Nagaland. It is said, after reaching Nagaland they went to Mekhel (a village in Mao area in the State of Manipur) and they stayed there for some time, and from this Mekhel village the Nagas and the Meiteis migrated to the places where they are to-day. The other school tells that in the beginning there was a woman called "Uzuli Hosuru" whose origin is not clearly stated in the legendary account. One day while she was sitting at the foot of a banyan tree the spirit of God came in the form of a cloud and overshadowed her. Thereafter she conceived and gave birth to three sons, namely ūkhe (tiger), ûra (god), and ëmei (man). The other descendents of "Uzuli Hosuru" was Chutowo (the father of the Meiteis), Alapha (the father of Kolamei or Mayang) and Kheiphio (the father of the Nagas). For quite a long time the Kolameis, the Meiteis and the Nagas lived together in
the village of Makhel. In course of time, the village of Makhel became so congested that they had to migrate to the places where they are today."

The Tangkhul traditions, too, on their own right declare common origin of the Tangkhul, the Meitei and the Kuki. One group of their traditions trace their origin from the valley of Manipur wherefrom they migrated to their present habitat on account of the heat and mosquitoes in the valley. It is through this tradition that a link is established between the Tangkhul and the other neighbouring Naga tribes with the Meitei and the Kuki. According to this tradition, the Nagas, Kukis and Meiteis descended from a common ancestor who had three sons who became the progenitors of these peoples. This tradition further assigns the primacy of descent to the Kukis, the next place being given to the Nagas, while the Meiteis are the descendants of the youngest of those primeval three brothers.

Among the Mao Nagas there is still another version of their origin connecting them with the Kukis and the Meiteis. The story is reported by T.C. Hodson (1911:11-12). It says: "Once upon a time there was a jumping match between the three sons of the common ancestor. The Kuki leapt from
the top of one range of hills to the crest of the next, while the Naga, nearly as good, cleared the intervening valley, but his foot slipped and touched the river. Hence the limit on his ablutions while the stronger Kuki to this day avoids all use of water. The Manipuris tumbled headlong, which explains his fondness for bathing. Another version of the same people is hereby drawn from T.C. Hodson (ibid., p. 12): "the father of them all was a Deity named Assu who had three sons, Hamo, Alapa, and Tuto. From Hamo are descended the Kukis and the Nagas, while the Gurkhas are sprung from the loins of Alapa and the sons of Tuto are the Manipuris."

The tradition of the Thadou Kuki on their affinity with the Meitei, as T.C. Hodson reports (ibid., pp. 12 and 13), goes like this: "The Khongzais and the Meiteis were then friends. One day they quarrelled about a cloth, and their mother took a dao and cut it in two pieces.... The Meitei ancestor got the larger share, and for that reason they now use more cloth in dressing themselves than the Kukis.... The Meitei began to cut heimang trees and, finding their footprints fresh, many people followed them. That is the reason why the Meiteis were so numerous. The Khongzais

3. Khongzai or khongzai is the name applied by the Meitei to the Thadou.
went to cut plantain trees and then ascended into the earth. These footprints looked rather old and therefore only few people followed. The Khuongzais are, therefore, few."

The Kabuis, too, according to one of their traditions reported by Colonel McCulloch (1859:14) claim close affinity with the Meiteis. McCulloch's report runs thus: "Srongroo tradition gives, as the place of their origin, the mountain towards the south of the valley named Thungching. They state themselves to be at present located on the sites of villages at one time occupied by the southern tribes who are, they say, the elder branch of the family of which they themselves are the middle and the Monipores the younger branch."

As for the Chirus, they share the popular legend of the three brothers who became in time the progenitors of the Kukis, Hagas and Meiteis. Their tradition further states that they migrated in comparatively recent times under pressure of the advance of tribes from the south to their present homes from sites in the south east of the valley beyond Haizang.

Similarly, the Khans also assert that they came from the south and that they are the descendants of one
of the two brothers and that from the younger are descended.
the Meitas.

COMMON ETHNOLOGY

Linguistic:

The above legendary traditions of the peoples of Manipur on their common origin could certainly be linked up with the ethnologically close affinity, particularly in respect of their linguistic affinity, between and among those peoples. The languages of all the peoples in and around Manipur are found to have more or less common place in the families of the Tibeto-Burman stock. As regards the internal similarities and differences of their languages Dr. Grierson (1903:379 & 451) wrote: "Between Angami Naga and the Bodo languages there is a group which I call Naga-Bodo group, bridging over the difference between the characteristic features of the two forms of speech, and similarly between Angami Naga and the Kuki languages there is another group which I call Naga-Kuki.... The Naga-Bodo group... consists of two main languages, viz., Hikir... and Kacha Naga.... Subordinate languages, closely akin to but not dialects, of Kacha Naga, are Kabui Naga and Khoirao Naga.... As might be expected the Bodo language with which they show the most
important points of kinship is the eastern one - Chutia; while Angami and Lhota are the two Naga tongues to which they are most closely allied." .... "The Naga-Kuki sub-group includes Sopvoma or Mao Naga, Mazam, Miyangkhung, Kwoirang or Liyang, Luhupa or Lampa language, viz., Tangkhul and Haring.... These three languages (Sopvoma, Tangkhul and Haring) exhibit a regular gradation in the change of speech. Sopvoma is most nearly connected with the western Naga languages, and Haring with the Kuki ones, while Tangkhul occupies an intermediate position." T.C. Hodgson (op. cit., pp.10-15) adds that "the Chiris speak a language which belongs to the old Kuki sub-group of the Kuki-Chin languages, in which its fellows are - Hangkhol, Bate, Hallam, Langrong .... Purum."....

From this detailed linguistic classifications of the peoples of Manipur it can be inferred that closely corresponding to the geographical location of this State of Manipur, the peoples thereof speak speeches intermediate between the western and north-western representatives of Tibeto-Burman speeches found as one moves from Assam towards the Himalayas and the Chin languages of the Chin hills of Burma. As for Meitei of the valley of Manipur, though the opinion that there are many points of resemblance between
this language and the languages of the Uodo group, to which Mr. Davis drew attention in 1891 (reproduced in Roland Shimmi, 1988:77) is acceptable, in view of the closer relationship between Meitei and the Kachin group. Meitei has been considered as the link between Kachin and the Kuki-Chin groups, classifying it as Meitei-Chin in closest relationship with Kuki-Chin. The languages of the Naga, Meitei or Meitei-Chin and Kuki-Chin, all belong to the Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman stock.

From Burma these people moved westward while the other peoples of this linguistic stock, such as the Kachins, the Burmese and the Lolas remained in Burma. In the opinion of some ethnologists there was probably a proto-Naga-Kuki stage from which the Naga branch and the Kuki-Chin branch and the Meitei-Chin branch got bifurcate.

Cultural similarities:

On the way of their migration from Burma towards the south and west some of the tribes, both Kuki and Naga, got linguistic and other cultural influences of each other. Thus the Anai legends tell that the ancestors of the Anais were among the primitive Nagas. As time went on they came in contact with the Lushai-Kuki clans who drove them from
the Lushai hills to Manipur, for the Anals claim that the memorial stones erected in groups on the burial grounds in the Lushai hills and in the south eastern part of Manipur are their ancient monuments left in the course of their migration. The Chin-Lushai-Kukis also are believed to have incorporated certain Naga groups in their population. The other Naga mark on the culture of the Anals is that like other Nagas they evert the curved and carved beams on the front part of their morungs. Another case of crossing of peoples is that of the Andro of Manipur; the Tangkhuls claim that a big Tangkhul village had merged in the population of the Andro. Crossed curved beam on the front side of the house, a characteristic cultural trait of the Naga is still found on the temple of the fire-god of the Andro people. These interesting ethnological points are highlighted by Roland Shimmi (op.cit., p.64).

Against such ethnic background of common origin or crossing of peoples or exchange of cultural traits and interactions in the long course of history, certain cultural uniformities can be observed among the several peoples of Manipur inspite of the many points of cultural differences between and amongst them. Thus, all the peoples of Manipur—the Naga group, the Kuki-Chin, the Meitei and the Chakpas
and other Loi peoples, though they had their own languages and dialects in the past and many of them still speaking their own mother tongues at home, use Meitei language of the Meitei people of the central valley as their **lingua franca**. The Chakpa Lois of Andro, Sekmai, Phayang, Leimaram, Thangjao and Koutuk used to speak their own language in their villages until very recently. At least till the Second World War this historical condition continued. Since then their languages and dialects had become obsolete; now only a few elders among them can remember their languages. They now speak Meitei as their mother tongue. Similar is the case with the Khurkhul Lois. As for the Nagas and the Kuki-Chins, particularly the former and the old Kuki group of the latter are bilingual; while they speak their respective mother tongues they also pick up Meitei, language of the Meiteis, the major group of the state since long. They use Meitei as a medium of communication between one community and another community. In Tangkhul land where the language of one village is different from that of another, the people thereof form a big distinct community except in respect of language. Some of the Nagas and old Kuki peoples who are bilingual, particularly the Kabuis (Kongmei Naga) living in the valley of Manipur, and the Chothes and the Homs living at the outskirt of the valley.
Speak Meitei so fluently that their Meitei is far better in terms of accent than the dialects of the Meitei spoken by the Loi villagers and other Meitei villagers who are of different ethnic origins (i.e., the villagers of Ngaikhong, Ningthoukhang, Heirok, Khangabok, Kumbi, Kakching, Waikhong, Nangu, Chairel, Nungu, Bugnu etc.), who also were until recently put under the Loi category of the larger Meitei populations of these the villagers of the first six villages are of western origin, still possessing physical features pointing to their affinities with western peoples like the Bishnupuria (the Khalis) and other archaic Bengali and Assamese populations found scattered in Cachar district of Assam, Tripura and Bangladesh.

Certainly, adoption of Meitei as the *lingua franca* by all the Nagas and Kuki-Chin peoples of Manipur is a matter of cultural adaptation to the historical necessity; it does not tell about their intrinsic cultural uniformity. For, as has been said, they have their own mother tongues; since the Meitei are more culturally advanced with a centralized state organisation since long historical time and the Meitei kings ruled over these tribal peoples particularly after the *Pax Britannica* of the British empire, these other peoples than the Meitei had, of course, to accept
Meitei as the state language. To be sure, Meitei was the state language in the British Manipur in which the native Meitei kings as the imperial agents directly ruled over these hill peoples. As an impact of the Meitei rule over them, these hill peoples organised their tribal political life under a common system introduced to them by those Meitei kings. Thus every tribal village was administered by a Ningthou (meaning "king") or Khullakpa, assisted by a few other officers as the local nominees of the Meitei kings. The word Ningthou or Khullakpa are Meitei words, the former meaning "king" and the latter "controller of the village." Besides the title of chiefship, the names of the other subordinate offices are all Meitei names.

What is more, the system of village administration itself is of Meitei origin. In his study of the Analis, Gangmumsei Kabui remarks that "It was not only in Anal country but also among the Tangkhuls, Haos, Kabuis that the Khullakpa and the subordinate office-bearers were introduced" (G. Kabui, 1985:30). Here a supplementary remark may be passed that same is the picture with almost all the tribes and Loi peoples of Manipur, except in the cases of a few recently arriving new Kukis. This political system was the extension of the same system under which the Meitei villages were administered. The political institution of
Wingthouship or Khulakpakship has since then been uniformly prevailing throughout Manipur. Between Wingthou and Khulakpas, the former carries with it slightly superior political status. Both are village heads, yet the title of Wingthou was given only to the select heads of those villages on the basis of their relationship of historic importance with the central Meitei kings. To the extent that these local village heads ruled their respective villages every village enjoyed local political autonomy. But, ultimately those Wingthous and Khulakpas were all responsible to the central Meitei kings. And the political culture associated with the village political system was a part-culture of the larger culture of the Meitei body politic. Those village chiefs paid annual tributes to the central Meitei kings, in this sense the local village political organisations were integral parts and parcels of the larger Meitei political system.

In regard to the position of the village headman whether Wingthou or Khulakpa uniformity of some kind may also be observed among all the peoples of Manipur. Ethnographers of the Kuki-Chin tribes and the Naga tribes of Manipur have reported on the difference between the political systems of these two sections of people. The village
chiefs of the Kuki-Chin peoples are described more autocratic and more powerful than the Naga chiefs. Bertram J. Carey and H.N. Tuck (1983:3) distinguish between the chieftainship of the two groups of people as: "The government of the Naga tribes is distinctively democratic. Their chieftainships do not necessarily pass from father to son, but are practically dependent on the will of the tribesmen, and the Naga chiefs are therefore without much individual power and their rule is based on the general approval of the clan. The Kuki chiefs, on the other hand, invariably inherit their position by the right of birth and take the initiative in all matters concerning the administration of their clansmen, by whom they are respected and feared."

The two authors further remark: "Of course even amongst the Kukis, it sometimes happens that a Chief fails to govern his clan with a firm hand or is so overbearing that he is deserted by his people, who fly to another village and to the protection of a more lenient ruler. The braves of a tribe, too, will not always forsake the excitement of the war-path at the command of a peace-loving Chief. It is true that the elders of the village called "Waihaums" in the north and "Boite" in the south and by the Lushai officers "Khabazi" and "Hamtri", surround the person of the Chief, but although they all discuss
questions together, they have no power to over-rule the
decision of the Chief himself. This differentiation
between the positions of a Naga chief and a Kuki-Chin
chief may be corroborated by J. Shakespeare's description
of the Lushai chief, which also applies to the New Kukis
of Manipur like the Thadou: "The chief was in theory at
least a despot" (J. Shakespeare 1910:44). The parallelism
of the positions of the chiefs of the Lushais and the
Thadous can be observed from Kheikhotinthang Kipgen's
report on his own community i.e., the Thadou which is as
follows: "The village administration of the Thadou is
based on hereditary chiefship. HUUBA is the chief who
is all-in-all in the affairs of the village" (K. Kipgen,
1982:74). And as regards the hereditary nature of chief-
ship among the Lushai, J. Shakespeare (op. cit., p.43) says:
"Among the Lushais, each village is a separate state, ruled
over by its own 'lal' or chief. Each son of a chief, as
he attained a marriageable age, was provided with a wife
at his father's expense, and given a certain number of
households from his father's village and sent forth to a
village of his own. Henceforth he ruled as an independent
chief, and his success or failure depended on his own
talents for ruling. He paid no tribute to his father,
but was expected to help him in his quarrels with neigh-
bouring chiefs; but when father lived long it was not
unusual to find their sons disowning even this amount of subordination. The youngest remained in his father's village and succeeded not only to the village, but also to all the property." Unlike the Thados and other New Kuki groups of Manipur as well as the Lushais, the Old Kuki peoples of the state of Manipur have no hereditary chiefs. J. Shakespear's observation (op.cit., p.148) aptly illustrates the point: "All these Old Kuki clans are organised far more democratically than the Lushais or Thados." To substantiate the point further he quotes Lieut. Stewart (1853) in his notes on Northern Cachar: "There is no regular system of government among the Old Kukis and they have no hereditary chiefs as among the New ones. A headman called the "ghalim" is appointed by themselves over each village but he is much more a priest than a potentate, and his temporal power is much limited. Internal administration among them always takes a provisional form. When any party considers himself aggrieved, he makes an appeal to the elders, or the most powerful house-holders in the village by inviting them to dinner and plying them with victuals and wine" (Lieut. Stewart reproduced in J. Shakespear, op.cit., p.148). The same position of chiefship is reported of the Anals by Uangrumei Kabui: "The chiefship or khullapkaphship among the Anals was
not strictly hereditary. There was nomination by the people, if not strictly elected, it had to be approved by the outgoing chief. Sometimes, the chiefship goes from the father to the son, it was hereditary but due to the efficiency and popularity of the son among the villagers” (Gangmumai Kabui, op.cit., p.31). This humbled-down position of an Old Kuki chief has affinity with that of a Naga chief. As regards the Kabui (Hongmei) Naga case, Heijjinglung Kamson’s observation may be referred to: “Strict rule of hereditary chiefship has not been observed among the Kabui, despite the fact that some importance is given to the founding clan” (M. Kamson 1976:5). By way of strengthening his findings Kamson quotes George Watt’s description of the Kabui village administration: “... a sort of miniature republic” (George Watt, 1837 reproduced in Kamson, op.cit., p.5).

It must have been observed in the above that the typical Naga polity is run by a chief at the top of the hierarchy but with limited power, he being finally responsible to the village elders where a Kuki chief is characteristically, at least in principle, an autocrat assailing over the opinions of his subordinate office-bearers in the administrative body. However, one condition complicates
the situations in both the cases. The separate religious office of Insamu (the name may be different in some cases) as the head of the religious world and its autonomous functioning sets limit to the absolute power of the head in the typical Kuki political system. It would mean confinement of the jurisdiction of power of the Kuki chief to the mundane, purely political and administrative spheres, leaving the religious authority to the religious head.

On the other hand, a typical Naga village headman, though limited his power is in the mundane affairs, is at the same time a religious head, too. A Naga chief is characteristically found in the role of a priest besides his roles in the secular administration. This difference between a Naga chief and a Kuki chief in matters of their control of religious affairs obviously turns upside down the above difference between their secular powers. It means to say that the secularly less powerful Naga ruler is more powerful in religious terms than the secularly more powerful Kuki counterpart; the former holds in his hand control of the religious administration and the said control is divested of the latter since it is held by a separate religious head. Both the chiefs are empowered in one domain, whether secular or non-secular, but, at the same time, limitation is imposed on their in
this or that sphere. If the power and authority by
either of them holds in one sphere or the other could
present his totalitarian position and his position of
being limited in this or that domain, the egalitarian
force of the society, both of them represent a political
system characterised by the joint working of both aristocratic and democratic elements in the same system. The
same juxtaposed state of affairs in a political system
is observed in the traditional political system of the
Keitei, too, in so far as it can be revealed by the
analysis of the position and power of a Keitei king
reflected in the myths of these people. According to
the mythical historical tradition of the people which
is very neatly analysed by Haobam Boro Babu Singh (1989:
139-148), the first king Nonide Laihen Pakhangba is
portrayed as an omnipotent personality in as much as
he is believed to be the incarnation of the Supreme
beings; but at the same time, he is subject to death
(in the mythical account he is assassinated by one
Khaba who is identified in some other context as the
son of the victim himself). The celestial origin of
the king is the raison d'etre of his position with
unlimited power and authority while his death at the
onslaught of his kin-enemy speaks about the mortality
of the king i.e., the limitation imposed on his unlimited power. All these contradictory points would be indicators of the dual structure of the traditional political system of the Meitei, it having the aristocratic elements at one pole and the egalitarian, democratic elements at the other. The act of regicide would represent the populist force. This kind of political structure most concretely works among the Purums, an Old Kuki tribe in the state of Manipur, among whom the village political organisation is, as Ch. Budhi Singh (1977) reports, run by two parallel bodies, viz., Hloukal and Loumi. Both the administrative bodies have seven members each; the names of all the corresponding offices are Meitei names. Hloukal is headed by Khulleka (village chief) while Hancha is the leader of the Loumi. All the other members of each body who are hierarchically arranged have the duty of assisting their respective leaders in several ways assigned to them. All the offices in both are not hereditary. In both, the next higher office is filled up by the holder of the next lower office when the bearer of the former goes out on account of death or retirement or forced removal. Thus recruitment starts from the lowest rung of the hierarchy in both the bodies and the higher offices are filled up, when vacant, on promotion
from the next lower offices. The more important feature of the political system of this community is the differences between the two component bodies and their different functions. Thus the seven members of the Hloukal body are the representatives of the seven clans of the Furum. The seven members of the Loumi body are selected on kinship considerations; they are the seven seniormost individuals of the village. Hierarchical differentiation between and among the offices of the Loumi is arranged according the ages of the bearers of the offices; thus the Hancha, head of this body is the seniormost among them. The Huljak or Khullakpa, leader of the Hloukal is there in charge of the over-all administration of the village. Headed by this leader, the Hloukal is the decision-making body of the village. All the administrative activities of this body need approval of the Loumi body with Hancha at the top. If the decision of the Huljak is not acceptable to the head of the Loumi in the interest of the village, it can be rejected outright or reviewed. The difference and relationship between the two administrative bodies of the Furum is thus that while the Hloukal is the legislative and at the same time an executive organ, the Loumi functions like the upper house of a modern democratic parliament.
The village chief's position and power is thus the most limited one but most democratic in the whole of Manipur. The kinship systems of this people, however, reflect much of hierarchical culture; wife-giving groups are superior to wife-taking groups.

It is now evident that the traditional political systems of the peoples of Manipur are neither of truly aristocratic type nor of democratic type. All are mixtures of both. Difference among them is one of degree in emphasising one or the other element.

A common pattern among the peoples of Manipur under study is also seen in the patrilineal principle of social organisation. There is a possibility, indeed, of a past historical stage when many of the Nagas tribes, the Meiteis and the Kuki tribes as well had some form of matrilineal culture. At present this form of social organisation i.e., matrilineal form is confined to the Khasis, the Garos and the Lallung of Assam. There is however, evidence of once widespread practice of matrilineal social customs among the early ancestors of the peoples of Manipur and around. Among the Meiteis even today some element of this culture can be observed working in the
kinship organisation of this people. Thus, the Meitsi marriage rule of *leinung-pendinnaba*, a rule practiced until recently among this people, prohibiting members of certain patrilineal kin-groups to intermarry on the ground that they are the descendants of a common ancestress, is veritably a matrilineal principle of social organisation. The Meitsi recognised five primeval ancestress, namely *Liklabiche, Leichik-chiklibi, Nganurol khutyo-chenchbi, Leinung-yuchakhe Ngangshabi* and *Chinphurol Leichik-nganbi*; and correspondingly there were five exogamous larger matrilineal kin-categories, each having under it a certain number of patrilineally exogamous kingroups but now belonging to different exogamous clans (vide Ch. Budhi Singh, 1965:106-110). If the practice of the ultimogeniture i.e., the rule of inheritance whereby the youngest child inherits the lion’s share of the family property could be taken as a very much softened form of one-time matrilineal system, then the ancient prevalence of this system can be ascribed to many Naga and Kuki tribes. For instance, the Tanykhul of Hungdung village, Sorabung and Jessami villages have traditions that in the past the youngest son inherited the largest share of the family property or succeeded the father (Y.L. Honald Shimmi, _op.cit._, p.26). As regards
the practice of this law in ancient Meitei society, the
phang-khong-koiwa myth (a myth of succession) of the
people aptly lends out the evidence. This is a myth of
succession dispute between two celestial brothers, Senamahi
(the elder) and Pakhangba (the younger) over the father's
throne, which is settled ultimately in favour of the
younger brother (vide Ch. Budhi Singh, 1979:63-75). It
may be noted here that the Meiteis now follow the primo-
geniture rule of inheritance and succession. This mytho-
logical evidence apart, among the Meiteis, as their royal
chronicle evidences, the ancient Meitei kings ascended
to the throne on ultimogeniture law of succession. The
practice was a historical fact as well.

Today, these elements of a one-time matrilineal
culture in these societies of Manipur are simply a matter
of traditions and, in the Meitei society in which the
tradition is well recorded in writing in their sacred
books of culture, these remain just as a historical
fossil. All the societies of Manipur, the Naga, the
Kuki and the Meitei are strictly bound by the patrilineal
rules.

Uneness of the Naga tribes, the Kuki tribes and
the Meiteis including the Lois can also be suggested in
respect of another social practice in the sphere of marriage and kinship organisation of these peoples. The practice in point relates to the tradition of cross-cousin marriage of the matrilateral type, i.e., marriage with one's mother's brother's daughter. The practice prevails till today as an ideal norm though not as a statistical norm in all the Naga and Kuki social organisations based in patrilineally exogamous kingroups, without any exception, and among the agamous Peite (vide Kamkhanthang, 1938) and Hmar societies. The Chakpa and Khuzkhul Lois, too, attach ideal value to this type of marriage rule. Among the Krius, an old Kuki tribe, this marriage practice still works almost as a prescriptive norm at least in the classificatory sense. As for the Meiteis this practice even as an ideal norm no longer exists though occasional, but rare, cases of such marriage have been reported in certain rural areas. But a tradition of the Meitei speaks eloquently about the prevalence of this in the form of ideal marriage in their society in the past. Terminologically mother's brother's daughter is not differentiated from father's sister's daughter as both these kinds are addressed with the same term, lnei (if senior to Ego) and inao-nupi (if junior to Ego), but they say
Mother's brother's daughter is of marriageable category to the ego though it is no longer now a practice, whereas father's sister's daughter is never put in such a category. They theoretically justify Mbr marriage along the structural principle that it amounts to the normal situation locally called manem matung inba (i.e., 'to follow father's sister', i.e., marriage of a girl to her father's sister's son; it is Mbr marriage from the side of the boy). On the other hand, the theoretical marriage of a boy with his father's sister's daughter is deemed to be equivalent to 'return of his father's sister', which is detrimental to the structural relationship of indirect exchange between his father's family and his father's sister's husband's family.

Among the Manipuri Muslims, too, Mbr marriage is preferred to Fsb, though the latter also is not prohibited as they share the general Muslim endogamic marriage culture. And as for the Chakpa Lois, the same Inseitai custom in this respect is followed. This common tradition or practice of Mbr marriage among all peoples of Manipur concomitantly suggests another common structural feature of the diverse kinship systems of these peoples, permission or choice or prescription (all may be in theory).
of marriage with mother's brother's daughter, but, on the other hand, prohibiting marriage with father's sister's daughter involves the structural arrangement of marriage alliance in what is called indirect or generalised exchange. According to this arrangement a wife-taking family can not give females to its wife-giving family which has to take its females from any other family than its immediate wife-taking family. That is why a man cannot marry his father's sister's daughter for, if such marriage takes place Ego's family (which is a wife-giving family in relation to the marriage of Ego's father's sister to her husband) is also a wife-taking group of its earlier wife-taking group in which case direct exchange is involved, which is, however, strictly prohibited by the principle of structural arrangement of these societies. The common kinship culture of these peoples avoids the confusion of the wife-taking family and the wife-giving family that arises when marriage with father's sister's daughter happens. This common culture is all-too-apparent in those kinship systems of Manipur based on patrilineally exogamous clans and lineages. It is a basic culture shared even by the agamous, neither exogamous nor endogamous, kinship systems of the Paite and Mnar peoples of this state.
before we proceed further, another interesting point of identicality may be noticed in the clan names of the Meitei and the Naga and the Kuki tribes. The identicality is not one of direct equation of nomenclatures of the clans of these peoples; it is rather a scheme of correspondence established by the Nagas and Kukis between their clans and the Meitei counterparts. Thus, for instance, the Purums, an old Kuki tribe identify their clan Karris with the Meitei clan Khuran, their clan Hakan with Khaba-Ngamba of the Meitei, Kheyang with Hengang or Ningthouje, Thao with Luwang and Keipa with Angom of the Meitei, respectively. Picture of the Tangkhul Nagas can be seen from T.C. Hodson's (op.cit., p.72) report: "Now among the Tangkhul we find the names Ningthouje, Kumul, and Luwang in every village; Khaba occurs twice; in one village only, Kunyui, we have clans bearing the names Angom and Angana...." All these found among the Tangkhul are the names of the Meitei. It is not that the Tangkhul Nagas do not have their own names of their clans. The point is that not only establishing a scheme of equation between their clans and some of the Meitei clans, but they sometime use Meitei names while referring to their clans in place of their own names of the clans. The kinship structure associated with basic
common culture of Manipur is found working most concr- etely and most practically among the Puxum people of the same state. Needless here to digress to the unique and unparalleled importance of the Puxum kinship system in the theoretical literature of anthropology dealing with the establishment of one of its leading theories, namely, 'alliance theory'. However, by way of illustrating the above point of structural similarity of the kinship system of the peoples of Manipur a few relevant features of the Puxum marriage and kinship system may be alluded to. They have seven clans, each having lineages, except one of these. These lineages are arranged into certain marriage alliance groups in such a way that one alliance group gives woman to only one definite alliance group, but take woman from another alliance group different from its wife-taking alliance group. In this way women are exchanged in an indirect way. This is called tri- partite marriage organisation. All the women of one alliance group are terminologically classed together; these women are the potential wives of the men of their wife-taking group. All the men of one wife-giving group are called Apu (grandfather) irrespective of their ages and generation by the members of their wife-taking group and the women of the wife-taking group are called tu
(grand children) by the members of their wife-giving group. In an alliance group the component kin-groups may belong to various clans. But while following the rule of prescribed marriage between a wife-giving group and its wife-taking group the clan exogamy is also strictly observed. All the prescribed marriages between a wife-taking group and a wife-giving group are in principle KBU marriages in the classificatory sense.

Still, sharing of common traditions can be traced in some of the artistic expressions of the peoples of Manipur. This category of traditions is not uniformly found among all these peoples, no doubt. This pattern of sharing is one showing common cultural identity in respect of certain traits and complexes between the Meiting at the centre of the culture area and the other individual peripheral communities. Thus the curved beams (locally expressed as Kai by both the Meiting and the Naga tribes like the Tangkhul, Hao, Wara etc.), an artistic motive, characteristic of the traditional Naga house (till today Naga houses are found decorated with this artistic designs) was the indispensable artistic provision at the front top of the royal houses and the palace gates of the Meiting kings. The curved beams are seen even now at the temple
buildings of the meitei traditional deities, called Umanglais. It represents the curved pair of horns of a buffalo, traditionally the most favourite animal of the Nagas. Pictures of buffalo horns are engraved on the wall planks of the typical Naga houses along with other figures like sex organs, hunted heads etc., all having fertility motives. Real buffalo horns are also fastened in rows to the front wall of a typical Naga house as an artistic design of decoration. These are the horns of buffaloes slain on the occasions of feasts of merits performed by the meritorious members, past and present, of the family of the house. The symbolic meaning of these horns found on the wall of the Naga house is obviously associated with the status and power of the family. The artistic piece of work i.e., Kai on the front roof of the Naga house therefore has the same symbolic meaning. Sharing of this Naga cultural symbolism by the Meitei, as it is shown in relief in the Kai of the palace gate, is thus clearly suggested. The reason is to be sought for in the ethnology and history of the peoples concerned, a matter which is out of place to indulge in here in the present study.

Another interesting cultural object that binds the mutual sentimental attachment of the Tangkhul Naga
and the Heitei is a kind of traditional Naga shawl called Leirum which has a simple but typical designs (red and black or blue stripes on the white background). It has been reported that this cloth was originally of the Tangkhul Naga. The name of this cloth occurs in the list of clothes made by the Tangkhul Naga shown by T.C. Hodson (op.cit., p.46). In the history of the Heitei this piece of cloth was first associated with the Angom clan, one of the later seven clans of the Heitei. The historical background that is worthwhile to mention here is that Heitei king Naethingkhong married an Angom princess on which occasion this cloth, Leirumphi figured in the list of articles given here as her marriage gifts from her parents. Marriage alliance between the Heitei royal families and the ruling house of the Angom community was a regular historical feature. Among the marriage gifts from the Angom royal family, Leirumphi was a compulsory item. This article was thus used as a symbol of the alliance between the two groups. Later on gift of Leirumphi on marriage from the bride's side became nationalised among the Heiteis. And the original historical association of this cloth with the Angom community had its historical root in the self-suggested Tangkhul origin of the Angom community. Traditions of both
the Meiteis and the Tangkhuls of Hungdung village point to the common historical origin of the ancestor of the Angom and that of the Hungdung Tangkhul. The location of the first settlement of the Angom clan in the valley, enshrined at a village called Lamrai, is at the foot of the Ukhrul hill range, the country of the Tangkhul (Hungdung is located just near the present Ukhrul town) would supplement the common origin of the Hungdung Tangkhul and the Angom clan of the Meitei.

A musical instrument called *rashem* by the old Kuki tribes like the Aimol and Chiru, and *gosem* by the Thadou, and at present used by these peoples has been identified by a few Meitei scholars to be the *khung* played on, among others, by the Meiteis in ancient times, particularly on the occasion of the coronation ceremony of the kings. Another musical instrument of the ancient Meiteis, called *tharaq*, also played on in the coronation procession of the kings, also would be the present-day musical instrument made of mithun horn used by many of the old Kuki peoples on their festive occasions.

The Meitei kings customarily used to maintain their traditions of brotherhood of the Angom community
of the Heiteis with the Tangkhuls. This tradition was probably inherited from the Angom by the ruling group of the Heitei called Ningthouja. According to the tradition, on coronation the ascending Heitei king sat on the coronation seat as a customary rule only after a symbolic coronation of the King of Angom clan. This respect paid to the Angom kings must have had been ultimately a respect shown by the Angom community to the Tangkhuls. As to why the Heitei kings adopted this customary practice needs probably a different historical explanation. Anyhow, this royal customary practice aptly evidences that during those historical times, it being founded on a common historical tradition, enhanced the cultural value of harmonising the social relationship of the peoples concerned.

The harmonious social and cultural relationship between the plain peoples and the Tangkhul Nagas was in the past also expressed in a state festival, called haajongba held every year in the Hera (around the month of October) at the state capital i.e., Imphal whereupon the Tangkhuls were coming down the valley with gifts of several kinds to participate in the festive function. Those participants from the hill were provided profused
foods and drinks. They were given full freedom of enjoyment on that occasion. The freedom enjoyed by the Tangkhuls on that occasion is briefly reported by T.C. Hodgson (op. cit. p.9) as: "...the curious custom which allowed the Tangkhuls to loot the women vendors at the "sena keithal of certain articles on the day of Nao-chongba, or the Naga sports.... The Manipuris got round the difficulty by ordering the women who sold the produce that custom made liable to this undesirable impost to stay away from the market on that occasion." Definitely this custom was a cultural medium of putting the Meiteis and the Tangkhuls in an atmosphere of living cheek-by-jowl.

The Meitei had a similar kind of cultural relationship with some of the Old Kuki peoples, too. The Tarao tribe, which is a very small population now was given a special socio-cultural privilege in that they were exempted from paying tributes to the Meitei kings on account of the royal assignment given to them of taking care of the worship of a female deity called Suknhuliema enshrined at the Tarao land. The kings gave annual ceremonial gifts of buffalo and other objects to the Tarao people for offer to that deity. There is also a traditional belief that the shurung (hole) at the royal palace of the Meitei (believed to be
the abode of Pakhangba, symbolic deity of a Meitei king, is connected with such a hole at Tawang land through an underground passage. This belief would decidedly suggest some kind of past historical affinity of at least a section of the ancient Meitei population with the Tawang. One can observe among the Tawang people a sense of strong emotional attachment to the Meiteis in consideration of such past historical and cultural traditions.

The following cultural traits of the Meitei would supplement to the above picture of the existence of certain common cultural traditions shared by both the Meitei people and their hill brethren. One such trait is the man's style of wearing loin cloth locally called Khwangli-leikhal. This style of dressing is observed till today being used by some of the older members of a few Naga tribes among whom it was reportedly the common style until the recent past. At the time of coronation it was

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4. In this style of dressing, a long cloth rolled lengthwise is tied around the waist in the form of a belt with the knot of the tie in the front. One of the two hanging free ends, carried while covering the secret part of the body in between the two thighs, over to the back to be tucked in the waist belt, whereas the other end, well-spread breadthwise, is hung down freely over the secret part.
ritually imperative for the Meitei kings to put on their loin-cloth in this style inside the outer gorgeous garments. What does this tradition of the Meitei kings mean? It obviously points at least to the historical fact of the common sharing of the tradition collectively by the Meiteis and many of the hill peoples, even if such opinion as of the Naga origin of the Meitei or at least the ruling section of the Meitei may be put under reservation until the complex matter of origin of the Meiteis can be reconstructed in a properly historical and scientific way.

If the past may be revoked, it can also be pointed out that both the Meiteis and the Naga-Kuki women uniformly put on short loin-clothes. The traditional female loin clothes of these peoples now preserved in a few museums of Manipur bear evidence of this past historical picture in point. In the uniform style of putting on that short loin cloth the portion of the legs below the knees was left bare. The present-day mode of wearing loin cloth with the lower end of the cloth extending up to the ankles observed among the females of all these communities is of recent introduction. The Hmar-em of the Hmar people, also used by the Paite and some other tribal peoples of the Kuki ethnic stock and Kanap of the Chakpa Lois and the Meiteis are the representative specimens of this type of female loin cloth.
Certain traditional artistic patterns on the clothes of some of the peoples of the region also show a kind of uniformity. The lengthwise stripped pattern on a female loin cloth, associated with the cultural motif of snake cult is observed not only in the case of the Meiteis but also in the cases of hill peoples like the Kabui (Kongmai), Naga, Aimol, Chiru, Chothe, Kom, Meir etc. The borders of such a cloth are embroidered in the case of the Meiteis whereas in the case of the other peoples referred to the borders are left blank unembroidered. However, the provision of multi-coloured length-wise strips throughout the body of the cloth is uniform among these peoples, it thereby pointing to their common cultural idea associated with snake cult.

A few clothe designs of the tribal origin, such as chumbang mayek, layeng phi (of Puzum people), chumthang mayek (of Tangkhul people) etc., have been adopted by the Meiteis since long in their art of weaving. Here, again, sharing of common tradition among these peoples is evidently observed.

The craft of making basketry artifacts offers another point where one finds an illustration of the incorporation of the Meiting material culture, in particular, by the Meiteis.
most of the basketry containers used in the Meitei ceremonial occasions, have been the contribution of the Haring people who are famous for their art of basketry works. The Meiteis depend also on the Khongjai people (a section of the Kuki) for certain other basketry sundries. The most remarkable basketry containers made by this people that the Meiteis used until recently as a valuable piece of furniture for keeping and preserving things in is the tabu, a kind of longitudinal basket, narrower at the base, having a lid at the top and two walls on the body—one inside and one outer. It occurs frequently in the folk stories of the Meiteis.

These are some of the important points of common traditions of the Meiteis and their hill brethren. The Meiteis also have certain cultural traditions in common with peoples of the state living in the central valley geographically close to them. Thus, the Laos, as has been said in the second chapter of this work dealing with the historical outline of the peoples of Manipur, had a different origin. Now, except in their continued tradition of taking rice—bear and meats like beef and pork, they are indistinguishable from the Meitei in many respects of the

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5. vide, supra, p. 29
cultural way of life. That their present speech is a
dialect of Meitei does not disqualify them to be treated
as a section of the larger Meitei socio-cultural system;
there are many other dialects spoken within the larger
Meitei community. An interesting tradition, among others,
that bears evidence of their commonness in the cultural sense
with the Meiteis is their worship of deities of the Meitei
traditional pantheon : Puleiromba (a culture hero deified
as the ancestor of the Angom clan of the Meiteis) at Andro
Loi village, Koubu and his son, Loya lakpa, cardinal
directional deities of the Meiteis at other Loi villages
like Sekmai, Phayang and Leimram. Put the way round, the
Meiteis worship the fire god, PANAM Ningthou of the Andro
Lois; this deity is included in the list of the traditional
deities of the Meiteis. Ichum Leirambi, the female deity
enshrined near the Loi village of Khurkhul and worshipped
by the people thereof as their village and community deity
is also one of the Umanglim (traditional deities) of the
Meiteis. All these deities enshrined at these Loi villages
are under the religious administration of the Randit and
Haiba Loisang of the Meiteis, that survives till to-day,
this department being located at the present palace of the
last Meitei king. The social organisation of these Loi
peoples along the Meitei system of kin-groups has also
been pointed out in the above.
In as much as the Muslim community of Manipur was, at the beginning stage of its formation, organised with the local Meitei women married under the sanction of the then Meitei Kings to those ancestral Muslim war captives, this community shows cultural affinity closely with the Meiteis throughout history save their Islamic religious faith, the occasional social practice of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage of classificatory category and the longri dhoti of their male folk. These peculiar cultural traits of this people did never function in history as the active factors toward the direction of conscious ethnic identification. For some of their remarkable contributions in the sphere of material culture which they carried over to Manipur, the leaders of this community were given proper place in the court of the Meitei Kings. Inspite of their segregation in matters of marriage (they remain an endogamous population throughout history), they keep their sense of attachment and feelings of brotherhood to the Meiteis, remembering the Meitei origin of their ancestresses.

The cases of Bishnupuris element and such other elements of peoples of western origin in the Meitei population hardly need any comment. These peoples have well-nigh completely been absorbed in the Meitei social and
cultural system, except the feeble point of observation of certain physical features among some individuals of the above origin, reminding their original affinity with the Assamese and Bengalis.