THE BACKGROUND:
NORTH-EAST INDIA
THE BACKGROUND: NORTH-EAST INDIA

North-east India comprises seven states – Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland, and Mizoram – and is popularly known as the “seven sisters.” It covers an area of approximately 253,000 sq. km, which constitutes almost eight percent of the total geographical area of India. The region shares international borders with Bangladesh, Burma, Tibet, China, and Bhutan. A small corridor, 18 miles wide, in the west connects it with the rest of India. The region is a repository of exquisite natural beauty and stands out for its unique ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity that finds no parallel with the rest of the country. The region is home to multitudinous ethnic groups, numbering more than fifty, with one-fourth of all the languages and dialects spoken in the country. Its peculiar topography – hills, rivers, swamps, dales, and jungles – and salubrious climate also demarcates it from the rest of mainland India.

North-east has two main types of physical relief – the plains and the hills. The concentration of population is high in the plains namely, the Brahmaputra Valley, the Surma Valley, the Manipur Valley, and the Tripura Plains. The hills are mostly the realm of the tribals. This work concentrates more or less on the plains, as it happens to be the main area of Muslim concentration. In fact, Muslims have a recent history in the hilly regions, especially in the states of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland. Even today, in these states their presence is of minuscule proportion.

During the British colonial rule, the region was described often as “north-eastern frontier of Bengal.” This term was used sometimes to denote a boundary line, or more generally to describe a tract of land. In the latter sense it embraces the whole of the hill ranges of north-east, and south of Assam valley, as well as the
western slopes of the great mountain system lying between Bengal and independent Burma (Myanmar) with its spurs and ridges.¹

**Pragjyotispur**

Reference of several parts of north-eastern India in many of the ancient Hindu literature indicates that since time immemorial the region was under the pale of Aryan culture. In the *Mahabharata, Ramayana, Puranas* and in Kalidasa’s *Raghuveamsa* reference is made to ancient Assam as Pragjyotispur² (a Sanskritised name meaning “City of Eastern Astrology”) or Kamarupa. Pragjyotispur as referred in these literatures probably comprised the country along both sides of the Brahmaputra from the Himalayas down to Tripura, which included Jalpaiguri, Koch Behar, Goalpara, Rangpur, Bogra, Mymensingh, Dacca, Tripura, parts of Pabna and eastern Nepal.³

Apart from these Hindu literatures, which are mythical in nature, the earliest reliable reference to Kamarupa is the statement about the region in Samudragupta’s Allahabad Pillar Inscriptions, recorded about A.D. 360 /370. The relevant portion of the *prababti* (Sanskrit: *prasasti*) text runs:

```
Samatata- Davaka- Kamarupa- Nepala
kastri puradi pratyanta nsiipativivrimala
Varjananayandheyaha Madra kabhira prarjana
Sanakanika Kaka Kharopani Ko divischa Sarve
Kasedanajna karana pranama goman
```

The text mentions that Kamarupa was then one of the frontier states outside the limits of the Gupta Empire, but paid tribute and owed a certain amount of obedience to it.⁴

---

² Pragjyotisa stood for both the city and the country.
⁴ The text and rendering quoted from Maheswar Neog, *Introduction to Assam*, p.18. Pragjyotisa, Kamarupa, and Assam were collectively known to the Burmese as Athan or Weithali, and to the Chinese as Weisali. The Tibetans
Kumar Bhaskara Varman, the then ruler of Kamarupa and a contemporary of Harsha Vardhana (A.D. 606-648), invited the renowned Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang who was studying the treatises and teachings of Buddhism at the Nalanda seminary, in Magadha. He visited Kamarupa in A.D. 640 and left a small account describing the region and its people. Kamarupa as described by the traveller included portions of Koch Behar and nearly the whole of modern Assam and Bhutan. More detailed information about Kamarupa and the genealogy of its rulers is recorded in Nidhanpur Copper plate inscription, recovered from Sylhet in 1912. It records a land-grant made by Bhaskara Varman. As per the inscription the dynasty of Narak, Bhagadatta and Vajradatta had ruled for 3,000 years. Their rule was followed by the Varman dynasty, to which Bhaskara Varman belonged.

The Varman dynasty, according to the copper plate inscriptions of Ratna Pal, was succeeded by the Sala Stamba dynasty. Its ruler became Hindu proselytes as soon as they become worthy of the notice of the local brahman priest. The same inscription furnishes us with the information that the Sala Stamba dynasty was succeeded by the Pralamba dynasty, which was founded by Pralamba around A.D. 800. Pralamba dynasty left three records – the Tezpur rock inscription and the Tezpur and Nowgong copper plate inscriptions. As per the first inscription, placed around A.D. 829-30, the reigning king Maharajadhiraj Sri Hajjara Varmadeva was a great devotee of Siva. He had his capital at Harupesvara, which probably corresponds to somewhere east of Gauhati, possibly at Tezpur. Name of some of the rulers of this

knew Assam as Aliloung. See Sharat Kumar Phukan, Toponymy of Assam, p. 188. For an analysis on eastern India in the archaic literatures, see Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, “Eastern India – its Delimitations,” IHC, Proceedings, 27th Session (1965), pp. 74-77.

5. T. Watters, On Yuan Chwang’s Travels in India, pp. 185-86.
7. Ibid., p. 30; Parmannand Gupta, Geography of Ancient Indian Inscriptions, p.27.
dynasty are given in the Tezpur plates, and they ruled probably for around 200 years.\textsuperscript{8}

It was around the year A.D. 1000 that Brahma Pal usurped the throne succeeding Tyag Singh, the last ruler of the Pralamba dynasty. Brahma Pal established the Pal dynasty. As per the copper plates found at Benares, the kings of Kamarupa, in latter period, became feudatory to the Bengal line of Pal kings, who had around the time driven away the Sen dynasty and regained their former position as the paramount power in north Bengal. The same inscription adds that the king of Kamarupa, Tishya Deb, had rebelled against his overlord, Kumar Pal and the latter sent an army at the head of a brahman minister, Vaidya Deb, who defeated and put Tishya Deb to death. Subsequently, Vaidya Deb was put on the throne of Kamarupa. He issued a land grant in A.D. 1114 from Hamsa Konchi [?]. He probably remained feudatory to the Pal kings, even though he assumed the pompous title Maharayadhiraj. It was around A.D. 1198 that Muhammad Bhaktiyar Khalji overthrew Lakshman Sena, the last scion of the Sen Kings. Around the same time the ruler of Kamarupa bore the title Kamesvar, and the Karatoya river was the western extremity of his realm.\textsuperscript{9}

By the end of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century a change came over the political destinies as well as the nomenclature of Kamarupa. Even though the boundary of ancient Kamarupa still remained intact, the name had been changed from Kamarupa to Kamata. The only Kamata ruler of which we have any detail account is of the Khen dynasty, whose last scion Nilambar was defeated by Husain Shah (A.D. 1491-1520) in A.D. 1498. Kamatapur on the left bank of the Dharla was their capital.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., pp. 30-31.
\textsuperscript{9} E. A. Gait, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 34-36.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 43.
The Muslim chroniclers sometimes write as if Kamarupa (its Persianised form was Kamrud or Kamru) and Kamata were one and the same country. But on other occasions they appear to regard them as distinct entities. For instance, in the coins and inscriptions of Husain Shah he is given the epithet, “conqueror of Kamru and Kamtah.” According to Maheswar Neog, in all probability, Kamata is a corrupt form of Kamada, which is a synonym for Kamakhya; otherwise also called Kamarupa. The boundaries of Kamarupa as described by Muslim chroniclers included all the regions between the northern frontiers of Muslim Bengal and the hills of Bhutan. Its southern boundary ends where the Lakhiyah river separates from the Brahmaputra, comprising the western portion of Assam together with the Bengal districts of Rangpur, Rangmati (now in Goalpara district) and Sylhet. The boundary between the Muslim Bengal and the kingdom of Kamarupa was the Karatoya river. It is said that Muhammad Bhaktiyar Khalji founded Rangpur during his expedition against Bengal in A.D. 1201-02.

Kamarupa was known to the Arab traders as Camroum and was renounced for its aloes. Hudud-al-Alam, a Persian treatise on the commercial entrepots of the world, compiled by an anonymous Arab geographer in A.D. 1574-75, mentions Kamarupa as Qamrun and describes it as a flourishing kingdom in the eastern part of India. The kingdom was famous for its rhinoceroses, sunbadha (emery), gold and fresh aloes which were exported to China and Central Asia. The work also mentions Sanf (probably Champa),

---

11 Maheswar Neog, op. cit., p. 51.
12 Tabaqat-i-Nasiri, p. 562; Riyaz-us-Salatin, p. 11.
13 Ain-i-Akbari, p. 48. The Persian and Arab maritime traders controlled the seas from the Red Sea to the Pacific Ocean in the east from the 9th to the 15th century. In the first two centuries of the period, the Persian traders, who held monopoly of the eastern trade had spread and settled down in trading colonies. One of their colonies was established at Bengal, which had trade with many parts of Burma, especially the coastal regions of Arakan, the Irrawady delta, Pegu and Tenasserim. See M. Saddiq Khan, “Muslim Intercourse in Burma,” Islamic Culture, pp. 416-17.
situated near the source of the river Manas, and Mandala in Kamrupa as important commercial centres.\textsuperscript{14}

The next significant change in the political history of Kamarupa took place in the early part of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century when a leader of the \textit{koch}\textsuperscript{15}— the most numerous tribe in the region — named Bishva Singh (A.D. 1515-40) established a powerful kingdom by the name Koch Behar on the ruins of the Kamarupa kingdom. Another profound political change that took place with regard to Kamarupa was the division of the kingdom into two halves — Koch Behar and Koch Hajo — during the reign of Nar Narayan (A.D. 1540-81), with Sankosh river as the boundary between the two.

To the east of the Karatoya river, by the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, a line of \textit{chutia}\textsuperscript{16} kings ruled the country east of the Subansiri and the Diasang, with the exception of a strip to the south and south–east, where several \textit{bodo} tribes held their dominance. Further west, on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, there was the Cachari kingdom, which probably extended at least halfway across the Nowgong district.\textsuperscript{17} Further south of the Cachari kingdom ruled the


\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Koches} were regarded as one of the oldest tribes of India, with an obscure origin. But they had linguistic affinities with \textit{mech} and \textit{cacharis}, and were concentrated in large number in the Kamrup and Rangpur. They were characterized by flat face, black and oblique eye, flat and short nose, prominent cheek bones, scanty beard and whisker, and shallow complexion. See E. T. Dalton, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 273.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Chutias} are an old and major race in Upper Assam. It was Ahom chief, Chutupha, who in A.D. 1350 overthrew their kingdom. Their population deported and forced to disperse in various parts of Assam. They are concentrated in large number in Sadiya and upper Assam and proselytised to Hinduism long before the advent of the Ahoms. Light olive complexion, flat face, and no sharp features were some of the distinctive traits of the \textit{chutias}. E. T. Dalton, \textit{Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal}, pp. 260-61. A fuller account of the \textit{chutias} is found in E. A. Gait, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 40-42; Deodhai Assam Buranji, pp. xxvi-xxviii.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Cacharis} were one of the numerous and widely spread of the tribes on the eastern frontier who preferred to live amongst low hills or on alluvial plains. They were mostly Hinduised, and a fine athletic race, of light olive complexion with scanty hair on their bodies. They were concentrated in the southern part of Brahmaputra Valley, known as Cachar tract, named after the tribe. See E.
Jaintia kings; their domain included the modern Jaintia hills, Jayantia Parganas of Sylhet and parts of Nowgong district of Assam. The Jaintia rulers belonged to the synteng tribe who inhabited the hill tracts. The Bengali Hindu and Muslim immigrants populated the plain region in the 19th century. To the west of the Cacharis and of the Chutiya on the north, were a number of petty chiefs called bhuiyas; remembered in the popular legends as the baro (twelve) bhuiyas. It is the Sanskrit equivalent of the Persian word zamindari, but it is not clear as to why the number ‘twelve’ is associated with them. Each of the bhuiya was independent of the others within their own domains. In the eastern part, further east of Kamarupa was the newly founded realm of the ahoms. Ghulam Hussain describes it as:

Between the north and the east of the country of Bengal, bordering on the tract of Kamrup, is the vilayat or province of Assam. In its middle, the river Brahmaputra flows from east to west. Its length from west to east – that is, from Gauhati to Sadiya – is about 200 kos, and its breadth from north, that is, from the rocky fastnesses of the tribes of Mari, Majmi, Daphla and Valanda, to the hills of the Nanga tribe, is approximately 7 to 8 days’ journey. Its southern mountains adjoin lengthwise the mountains of Khasia, Kachar and Goneser hills [Kashmir] and northern mountain skirts lengthwise the lofty ridges of Kamrup, and breadth wise its faces the mountains of the Valandah tribe. The tract in the north of the river Brahmaputra, from Gauhati to the abodes of Mari and Majmi tribes, is called Uttarakul; and the extent of the Dakhinkul is from the country of Naktirani to village Sadiah...21

---

18 The synteng or pnar and khasis of the Khasi hill have same physical type and speak the same language, i.e. Khasi. The language of this family is believed to have been spoken by the earliest Mongolian invaders of India and are thus believed to be the remnants of the first Mongolian overflow into India. They have no recorded history of their own. They entered and settled at the present hill in a remote period in batches known by different names. Some of the batches were the jouwai, nartia, amwi, raliana, changpung, sutnga, etc. Later on all the batches merged together as a single group under a centralized chieftain. See E. A. Gait, op. cit., pp. 259-60; K. S. Singh (ed.), People of India – Meghalaya, vol. XXXII, pp. 69-70.

19 For details, see E. A. Gait, op. cit., pp. 259-68.

20 For details, see ibid., pp. 37-38.

Regarding the legend of the origin of *ahoms* and their conquest of the Brahmaputra Valley the *Ahom Buranji* tells us that in the olden time the Lord of Thunder sent down Khunlung and Khunlai from heaven to the earth. They arrived at a place called Mungrimsonram. Taolulo, the eldest son of Khunlung, became the king of Mungrimsonram. Shukapha, one of the descendants of Taolulo, not willing to take over the throne, left the country and migrated westward.

Shukapha is said to have left Maulong in A.D. 1215 along with a group of followers, which included eight nobles, and 9000 men, women, and children. They wandered around the Patkai hills for thirteen years conducting occasional raids on Naga villages. In A.D. 1228, after subjugating the *nagas*, he left one of his nobles to rule the conquered territory. Then he proceeded towards Tipam. By A.D. 1236 the king reached Mungklangchekhru (Abhaypur), where he stayed for several years. In A.D. 1240, due to a deluge they had to abandon the place and descended to the plains of Brahmaputra, to Habung, where he sojourned for two years. In A.D. 1244 another heavy flood pushed them further down the Brahmaputra Valley till they reached the mouth of the Dikhu, then Ligirigaon. By A.D. 1246 they reached Simaluguri and by A.D. 1253 to Charaideo, where a city was built. They celebrated the occasion by sacrificing two horses to their gods, along with prayers. Sukhapa fought and subjugated the principalities of *moran* and *borahi* tribes, who then inhabited the neighbouring country. Soon he took up conciliatory measures by putting them on equal footing with the *ahoms* and encouraging matrimonial alliance, thereby merging the

---

22 The Brahmaputra Valley is an alluvial plain about 450 miles in length, with an average breadth of about 50 miles, shut in, like the Surma Valley, by hills on every sides, and receives in its course the drainage of the Himalayas on the north, and the Assam range on the south. The principle tributaries on the north bank are the Dibang, Dihang, Subansiri, Bhareti, Dhensiri, Barnadi, Manas. Brahmaputra river is known locally as Luit.

principalities into one. He died in A.D. 1268 and was succeeded by his son Saulapte. 24

Ahoms called Assam Mugdonsukham, literally meaning "the country full of golden gardens." During the British rule, the ahom population was confined to the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur in eastern (or upper) Assam. The word ahom according to P. Gogoi appears to be a phonetic variation of asam or asama which is a Sanskritized distortion of a-sam, a form of bodo origin. In recent times the Assamese have, however, preferred the Sanskritized form Asam to A-sam or Assam and have used it as the standard form of the name of their state. 25

Sylhet

The district of Sylhet was formerly a part of Assam that now falls in Bangladesh. The Redcliff Award of 1947 made the district of Sylhet excluding the major part of Karimganj sub-division, a part of Pakistan. Henceforth it was added to Chittagong sub-division of East Pakistan or the present Bangladesh. 26

Sylhet lies on the south-western frontier of eastern Bengal and Assam, and is bounded on the north by the Khasi and Jiantia hills, on the east by Cachar, on the south by the Lushai hills and the Tripura hills, and on the west by the eastern Bengal district of Mymensingh and Tripura.

Physiologically, Sylhet has an area of 4,785 sq. miles; and comprises the lower valley of the Barak (Surma) river, a rich alluvial tract about 70 miles wide, bounded on the north and south by

24 E. A. Gait, op. cit., pp. 77-79.
25 P. Gogoi, The Tai and the Tai Kingdoms, pp. 16-17.
26 Lt. Fisher took Sylhet informally on 30th January 1830 by a proclamation of Lord William Bentinck. It was annexed to the British territory and administered for a time by a Superintendent under a supervision of the Agent of the Governor-General when it was placed in the Dacca division of Bengal. In 1874, the territory came under the control of the Chief Commissioner of Assam.
mountains, and opening westward to the plains of eastern Bengal, intersected by numerous tortuous and slow-moving rivers scattered by natural lakes (haors).

The district was once divided into four petty kingdoms: Gor or Sylhet proper, Laur, and Jaintia, and the country south of the Kusiyara. Kusiyara was probably under the control of the king of Hill Tripura. While the Muslims conquered Gor and Laur, Jaintia remained unvanquished. Gor and Laur were included in Bengal when the British obtained the Diwani of the province in A.D. 1765.27

**Tripura**

Tripura, a land of hills and dales, has an area of about 10,447 sq. km. The hill ranges in the region run from north to south parallel to one another till they merge in the plains of Sylhet. The state, in the medieval period, was bordered in the north by the district of Sylhet, in the south by the districts of Noakhali and Chittagong, in the east by the territory of the lushai tribes, and in the west by the district of Noakhali. The state is inhabited by numerous tribes, namely tipperahs, jamaityas, nowatias, riangs, hallams, kukis, etc.

The ruling family of medieval Tripura belonged to the tipperah tribe, who were animist by religious persuasion, but in more ways than one they conformed to the beliefs and practices of the Hindus, especially the caste stratification. The jamaityas formed the main fighting caste.28 The rulers of Tripura claimed their descendant from the king Druhya, the third son of Yagati of the Lunar dynasty. King Druhya, banished to the eastern provinces by his father Yagati after the battle of Kurukshetra, came to the region now called Tripura and established his rule there. His son Tripura succeeded

him. Tripura was a tyrant ruler. Unable to resist his oppression, a large number of subjects fled to Hirambu (Cachar), but they returned after five years as devotees of Siva. By the grace of Siva a son, named Trilochan, was born to the widow of Tripura, who was crowned as the sovereign with the unanimous consent of the people.29

According to W. W. Hunter, the name Tripura was probably given to the land in honour of the temple at Udaipur, once considered:

...as the second tirtha, or sacred shrine, in this part of Bengal, it was dedicated either to Tripura-Dhana, the 'sun-god', or to Tripureshwasi, the mistress of the three worlds...the application was given by the Aryan-speaking immigrants, or by the adjacent Aryan settlers of lower Bengal.30

Another scholar, Kailash Chandra Singh, is of the opinion that Tripura is a corrupt form of tui-pra, which in Tripuri dialect means, “land adjoining water bodies” (tui – water; pra – near). It is likely that the land was named Tripura because of its proximity to water; for in olden days the boundaries of Tripura is believed to have extended up to the Bay of Bengal when its rulers held sway over the Garo hills and from there to the Arakan.31 British writers used Tippererah instead of Tripura, which probably is the anglicised variant of Tripura.

The early history of Tripura, particularly prior to the 15th century, is shrouded in myths and legends. It is only from the 15th century that an accurate and reliable history of the state could be established. Therefore, in the Rajmala (royal chronicle) the state’s history relates to two district periods – the mythical period and the historical period.

31 As quoted in S. N. Guha Thakurta, Tripura, p. 1.
Muslim chroniclers identified Tripura with Janhagar or Jhajnagar, which was not known to the people of the region. Jajnagar is a common name for *tirthas*, derived from the Sanskrit *yaj*, which means, “to worship.” But, if the word has any connection with the Muslim name of Jhajnagar then it is probably derived from the fact that the Mughal admiralty monopolized the revenue of this kingdom. For instance, one estate bears the name, *nawara* or “fleet estate” while two of the largest portions of Pargana Sarail were known for long to the natives as “estates of the fourteen and the eight ships” – the traditional denomination system of revenue payment made by the peasants to the state. Incidentally, Shaista Khan conquered Chittagong with the help of fleets gathered from Tripura. This might be another reason for referring Tripura as Jhajnagar. It was in commemoration of the successful campaign against Chittagong that the region was renamed Islamabad. 32

Since the late 13th century Muslim rulers of Bengal made numerous campaigns against Tripura, but it was subjugated only around A.D. 1733 by the *Nawab* of Bengal, Shujauddin Khan (A.D. 1727-39). The Mughals, however, did not occupy the whole of the kingdom; they contended themselves with the plain, which was renamed as Chakle Roshnabad. It came under the rent-roll of Bengal, and lay within the jurisdiction of the *Nawab*. The hilly tracts to the east remained under the possession of the kings of Tripura. 33 In A.D. 1765, when the East India Company obtained the *Diwani* of Bengal, Chakle Roshnabad (covering an area of 589 sq. miles), which had been on the rent-roll of Bengal, came under the British. It was later leased out to the ruler of Hill Tripura. In 1871,

---

33 Ibid., p. 359. It was known as *Swadhin* or independent Tipperah and later on as *Parvatta* or Hill Tipperah. It was only in 1920 that the name Hill Tipperah was changed to Tripura at the request of the king of Tripura to the British authorities. See Mahadev Chakravarti (ed.), *Administrative Report of Tripura State Since 1902*, vol. I, p. 20.
a British officer was first appointed to Hill Tripura as political agent, in order to protect the interests of the British and advise the kings. But there was no formal treaty between the rulers of Hill Tripura and the British government, except that the rulers paid succession-duty to the latter.\textsuperscript{34}

**Manipur**

Manipur, nestled in the north-eastern corner of India, has from antiquity maintained its identity as an independent entity till its annexation to the British Empire following its defeat in the Khongjom war in 1891. Its unique topography – series of hill ranges surrounding the valley – viable economy, concentration of population in the valley, and the remoteness of the region from the plains of Bengal, Assam, and Burma favoured the development of a compact and organized society isolated from adjoining areas.

It is bounded on the north by the hills (inhabited by the *nagas*) overlooking the Assam Valley, on the west by the district of Cachar, on the east by upper Burma and on the south by the Lushai hills. The valley was at one time the bed of a large lake and that the sheet of water called the Loktak lake is its remnant. Manipur Valley, an area of 1,800 sq. km, is enclosed by a range of hills and is inhabited by *meities*,\textsuperscript{35} Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, and others. Various tribes broadly grouped as *naga* and *kuki* populate the surrounding hills.

Manipur was known in the historical period by various names. It is referred to as *Meckley* in Renell’s memoirs and maps of India and *Cassay* in Symes’ *Narrative* and in the cartographic accounts of the period. It was known in Cachar as *Mogli*. Amongst

\textsuperscript{34} W. W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. VI, pp. 460-61.

\textsuperscript{35} According to R. B. Pemberton, they are believed to be the descendants of a Tartar colony, who migrated from the north-western of China during the 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} century. See R. B. Pemberton, *A Report on the North-Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 36.
the Shan and Burmese tribes the state was referred to as Ka-se or Ka-the. The name Manipur, according to a tradition, was derived from a jewel (or muni), which was formerly in the possession of the kings of the country. The country was at one time named Mahindrapore, but the king, Babrubahan, after the possession of the jewel, which formerly belonged to a Nag Raja, or serpent king, rechristened it as Manipur. The name for the Manipur Valley recognized by its own inhabitants was Meitie Laipak, or “the country of the meities.” However, the name was not familiar to the outsiders.

Manipur is mentioned in many of the archaic Sanskrit texts. The tantra literatures refer to the land of Manipur along with adjacent lands of Tripura, Jaintia and Cachar.

*Tripura Kaikina Chaina Tayanti Manicahndrika Kecchadi Megadi Devi asvani sapta Parvatah*

It is mentioned in the Mahabharata with reference to the Pandava hero Arjuna’s marriage with Chitrangada, daughter of the Manipur king, Chitrabhanu, during his self-imposed punishment of 12 years wandering in exile, in its Adi Parva. But there is much controversy about this Manipur mentioned in the Mahabharata.

---


38 Ibid., p. 28.


40 Badrabahana was believed to be born out of the wedlock, who later became the king of the Manipur. The royal families of Manipur and their subjects, after their conversion to Hinduism in the 17th century, claimed their decent from Badrabahana. The Assamese chronicle, *Badrubahan Guddha Puthi* gives an account of the battle fought between Arjuna and Badrabahana. The *puthi* begins with the entrance of the sacrificial horse in Manipur, followed by Arjuna. Badrabahana, who was then on the throne, captured the horse, but after learning from his mother that Arjuna was his father he went to meet Arjuna. Arjuna forgetting his relation with Chitrangada failed to recognize Badrabahana. This enraged Badrabahana so much that he challenged Arjuna.
Such accounts are mere legends to be relied upon. But the fact cannot be ignored that the state existed as an independent kingdom from a very early date. According to the traditional history, seven tribes, namely ningthouja, khuman, luang, angom, moirang, khabananba, and chenglei, who came from different directions, originally populated the valley of Manipur. Phakhangba, the leader of the ningthouja clan, subdued the other tribes and subsequently formed the Meitei kingdom in and around A.D. 33. For a battle. Later, Badrabahana reminded his father how he married Chitrangada during his earlier visit to Manipur. The event is also recorded in another Assamese Puthi titled, Mahabharat-Aswamedha Parva. Translated abstract of the Puthis are given in H. Goswami, Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts, 1930, pp. 11-12, 99-100.

41 For details, see Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 1; R. Brown, op. cit., p. 59; T. C. Hodson, The Meithies, p. 73.